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Political Participation of International Students on the Dutch Municipal Level in Leeuwarden: Barriers and Chances

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Abstract

The main focus of this paper lies in finding the barriers of why international students are not participating in local politics and what role the local government can play in the relationship in the case of Leeuwarden. In a second study, this research examined whether the wethouders, thus the aldermen, are aware of the political participation of international students.

The methodology followed a Participation Action Research, which aims to produce a meaningful outcome and insight in the political participation of international students. This has been researched through a future workshop. The role of the municipality has been assessed with two interviews with members of the Leeuwarden city council, the aldermen.

The main result of this research is that international students are generally interested in participating in local politics, but do face challenges in doing so. First, the participants are unaware of their possibilities, thus have a knowledge gap in their and the municipality's responsibilities, and are not having the structure to participate. Additionally, the students are facing time constraints that hinders their participation. The municipality is aware of their role that they have limited responsibility in increasing the political participation of that group but however is also facing a knowledge gap about the rights and possibilities of the international students.

This thesis contributes to the literature on political participation of International Student Mobility by centering the future workshop as a suitable method to not only potentially trigger political participation but to also determine challenges of international students in Leeuwarden.

Keywords: International Student Mobility, Political Participation, Local Participation, Participation Action Research, Future Workshop

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‘Student mobility is never a neutral act – something that “just happens”. Rather, it is filled with social, cultural and political meaning. Therefore, [it] is a worthy subject of study’ (Brooks & Waters, 2011, p. 130).

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1. Introduction

131.000 international students were enrolled in Dutch Higher Educational Institutions in the academic year 2024/25 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2025). 2,605 international students were enrolled in higher education, meaning Research Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences, in the Province of Friesland in the study year of 2023/24, with the majority enrolled in the city of Leeuwarden. This accounts for 11.8% of the international student population in Leeuwarden (Nuffic, 2024).

The number of international students has been restricted over the past years. The Dutch government aims to reduce the influx of international students in higher education and is implementing the law "*Wet Internationalisering in Balans*" (WIB). This law is intended to limit the use of the English language in teaching at Higher Educational Institutions (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024). Even though more restrictions are in place, more international students are staying in the Netherlands after their studies (Nuffic, 2025). Nevertheless, international students do experience discrimination and difficulties when being international students in the Netherlands (Fang & Van Liempt, 2020).

International students are by the definition of migration as a special case. Because of the time-bound migration and the relatively close distance to the home country, international students are classified as International Student Mobility and thus not receive full migration status (Alves & King, 2022, p. 180).

International Student Mobility is also a reflection of how democracy is developing in a country. With an increase in xenophobia and nationalism, the universities are contested in their role and may be used as a tool in carrying out such policies. However, international students that have had the experience to study abroad tend to have more trust in others and also have more skills in participating politically (Mihut, 2024). Political factors are influencing student mobility. When international students feel that they have the chance of becoming fully recognised as a citizen in the municipality and may acquire the same level of active citizenship, the likelihood of staying increases (Fidler et al., 2022). International Student Mobility is barely researched in regards to their political participation in their host country, nevertheless, the political

participation of migrants has been discovered. Therefore, this thesis integrates International Student Mobility into the definition of migrants when researching their political participation.

Political participation is the act of taking part in and influencing political and societal matters (Uhlaner, 2015). To be active and participate in the society, is for migrants bound to more barriers and harder to achieve. However, for migrants who have a higher education, it is easier to be an active citizen and thus also to be politically active (Adamson, 2006). Therefore, international students ought to have a higher level of participation as they have better resources in being educated and educating themselves (Huddleston, 2017). Such as migrants, international students are encountering similar problems, like having a language barrier and having a lack of knowledge about the political system to which they are migrating to. Education can help to counteract such knowledge gaps and to encourage the migrants to have confidence in their political participation (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2021, p. 104).

Migrants from other EU Member States who registered at a municipality in the Netherlands have the right to vote in municipal and local elections and to be politically active on a local level. The European Directive (Directive 1994/80) is binding the municipalities to include other European citizens in the elections of the municipality and therefore also in the political processes. Therefore, the international students are enjoying this right as the majority is coming from other EU Member States to the Netherlands (Nuffic, 2024). Even though international students do have the right and the opportunity to partake in local politics, they are not participating (Schwaiger, 2022). Thus, the opinions of international students are not properly expressed (Van Elven, 2021). Educational tools can help increase the political participation among migrants, and thus education can be an important part in assisting the integration of migrants into the local community (Atger, 2009, p.5).

Having the right to vote and being 11% of the student population of Leeuwarden and encountering an increase in the political sphere that is restricting their education, as it is prevalent with the WIB. It raises the question of what the barriers are for political participation of international students and how to increase the political participation of that group.

The possible tools for researching and enhancing political participation among international students are the future workshop from Jungk & Müllert (1981). This workshop can have the effect that the participants who are usually not active in political participation can feel empowered through participation in such a workshop. The future workshop is part of the

Participation Action Research, which emphasises the political participation of their study group and thus not only involves researchers' participation but also produces insights into socially relevant problems (Giugni et al., 2022).. Therefore, the first question being posed in this paper is:

RQ1: To what extent is the future workshop an appropriate way of indicating the barriers of political participation and be encouraged to be an active citizen and to politically participate for international students?

The local institutions do have the chance to encourage political participation and have the chance to organise initiatives for more political participation among their citizens (Jäntti & Kurkela, 2021). In a second study, two members of the municipality council, the aldermen, have been interviewed with the objective of in the second study:

RQ2: To what extent is the municipality aware of the political participation of international students and what are the solutions to increase their integration?

This thesis presents a suitable approach to researching the political participation of international students in the city of Leeuwarden. Through its interactive approach, the Participation Action Research, the participants are able to actively take part in the investigation of their own position in the municipality (Giugni et al., 2022). The future workshop is encouraging the participants to reflect on their community and to think about solutions in the municipality (Voß & Freeman, 2016; Jungk & Müllert, 1981). This discussion can have the influence of feeling empowered to participate in democratic settings. The design of the future workshop, aims to motivate citizens who, before the workshop, were discouraged about participating in a democratic setting, to give that enthusiasm back and ideally to enhance political participation and the trust in it (Jungk & Müllert, 1981). The mind maps that have been created during the workshop are hence giving a valuable insight into the lives of the international students and summarise the research findings constructively and clearly. The analysis of the workshop offers a meaningful insight into not only the problems and challenges of international students but also studies the dynamics of the participation and what might have been barriers to political participation. The short interviews that have been conducted with the aldermen, so the

members of the municipal council, gave further insight into the barriers to increasing the political participation of international students from the viewpoint of the municipality. Together, these two studies are delivering a comprehensive picture of the barriers and opportunities of political participation of international students in the city of Leeuwarden.

2.1. International Student Mobility in the Netherlands: Theories and Policies

Studying abroad is a decision to migrate. Thus, to first understand why studying in another country is being taken, a migration decision needs to be understood. The decision to migrate is determined by the migration drivers: the structural elements that influence the agency of an individual influences the decision to more or less likely to migrate. By taking a migration decision, the underlying theme of having a better opportunity when migrating is one of the conditions which is understood as an opportunity gap (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022).

When students are migrating to another country to study, this group is in a niche group in the definition of migrants. Even though the student is migrating, formally, the status of a fully recognized migrant is not granted. Visas and Mobility is bound to obtaining a degree and thus the student is also classified under the terms of obtaining and pursuing education and after often returning to the home country. Their mobility is therefore conditional on the degree. When the student is staying after graduation, the migration status switches and the student is now acknowledged under a migrant status. Thus, instead of speaking of student migration, the term student mobility is referred to those who choose to pursue education at a higher level internationally (Alves & King, 2022, p.180). The distance does play a crucial role when determining between a mobility and migration act. Such mobility is vacant inside of Europe due to the right of free movement, while migrating is describing a longer period with a longer distance (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2004). The drivers for international students are mainly motivated by an investment in their resources and to gain better skills in comparison to what they would have gained in their home country. Thus, the motivation for student mobility is to have more opportunities outside their home country. Student mobility is driven by the motivation of gaining more experience and travelling (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022), which is, nevertheless, an expensive experience (Van Mol & Wauters, 2011). Therefore,

international mobile students are choosing host countries that are relatively close to not only their own culture but also offer proximity to their home country and do have a higher cultural and economic background. (Alves & King, 2022, p. 182; Bahna, 2017). The higher socio-economic background suggests that the group might be more likely to be engaged in politics (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017). Therefore, in regard to political participation, it can be assumed that the group of international students do have the means and the intellect to participate in the local politics of their host country, however they are not doing so (Mihut, 2024).

In the academic year 2024/25, 131,000 international students were enrolled in Higher Educational Institutes in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2025). Most international students who are coming to the Netherlands are starting a Bachelor Program at a Research University (CBS, 2023). When choosing a Bachelor Program, the city does play an important role in decision-making. International students tend to choose cities where a community of other international students is already present. The accessibility of the city is very important. The more expensive the place is, the fewer lower-income students tend to study in those cities. Also, when an already established community of international students exists, the chance of networking and creating support structures becomes stronger (Weber et al., 2023).

The city of Leeuwarden does fulfill these conditions of being a relatively small city with about 2,600 international students (Nuffic, 2024). The rents in Leeuwarden are relatively low, with 406€, in comparison to other cities in the Netherlands such as The Hague with 693€ (Kamernet, 2024). Thus, reasons that might be popular for international students to come to Leeuwarden.

International students do face many challenges when it comes to living in the Netherlands. Feelings of being discriminated against and not being able to receive the same support as their Dutch counterparts are the most prominent disadvantages perceived. And the feeling of being connected and having the ability to adapt to Dutch culture and society do correlate with the feeling of being satisfied with the study (Nuffic, 2022). Thus, the reasons to stay in the Netherlands after graduation do also correspond to finding a job, and/or building a social network within the country (Funk et al., 2013). On the other hand, international students decide to leave after graduation because of not finding proper housing, not being able to find a job or not having the necessary language skills to make it in the country (Nuffic, 2023). Thus, being integrated into the community in the host country does influence the academic success of

international students. The language barrier does drive international students towards targeted events and then increases the gap of no-contact between Dutch and international students (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2012). Thus, being active and a recognized member of the society is important for their likelihood of staying in the Netherlands (Nuffic, 2022).

Nevertheless, the increasing number of international students in the Netherlands is not perceived as very favourable for the Dutch students. A narrative that has been followed by the Dutch government is that the international students do intensify many crises that are occurring, such as too few study places, too little housing, and an alienation from the Dutch language in the academic sector. As a consequence, the Dutch government passed in the year 2024 a bill that limits English as an academic language in Higher Education which aims at reducing the influx of international students. Moreover, the bill ought to motivate students in learning the Dutch language and thus increase their likelihood to stay in the country after graduation (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024). The bill was positively perceived by the Universities in the country as the influx of international students is perceived as too much and thus the law regulates the influx towards a more handleable amount of students as well (Universiteiten van Nederland, 2024). Therefore, the international students are facing a restricting policy that ought to limit their influx (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024). However, considering that international students are reliant on the community and already existing communities are a factor for coming to a certain city, this can be thus a limiting factor for the communities when fewer international students are coming to the Netherlands. However, international students might be more considerate of not remaining or coming to the Netherlands to study (Ştefan & Van Der Wal, 2024). When international students are facing a policy that defines them as a burden to the country, it becomes unlikely that international students receive any support from the government. But when international students do not get the chance to be listened to and politically regarded, their contribution to their host country remains limited (Deuchar, 2022). A protectionist position of the national government, that is trying to defend these national resources may increase this feeling of not having a right to participate and be fully integrated in the society. Thereby, international students are put in the position of the outsider, the one who would be invading the national education system. That results in the situation that international students are having trouble integrating and claiming their basic rights as citizens (Marginson, 2012).

Therefore, it is important that international students do have the opportunity to partake in politics to strengthen their own positionality. This assumption can thus align with Kende et al. (2024) who states that if more migrants partake in politics, the more diverse and inclusive the political scope becomes. Meaning, that it might lead to international students staying in the Netherlands. Something that is prevalent in alumni that are leaving: 17% of the international students that leave after graduation indicate that a feeling of not feeling welcomed in the society was influencing their decision (Nuffic, 2023). So, that an inclusion of international students might lead to a more diverse political discourse and hence to a more diverse community which eventually results in more international students staying in the Netherlands.

The political participation of international students is ambivalent: Mihut (2024) argues that even though the international students are having a higher trust in the community, they are less likely to pursue any measures corresponding to political participation. Contrary to their domestic peers, which were more involved in political participation. This showcases that international students are encountering a development that is important to foster political participation. Nevertheless, the execution of political participation seems to underlie barriers that hinder international students.

2.2. Political Participation among International Students and Migrants

The research in the field of political participation of students has yet to be discovered. Therefore, in the following part, the political participation and active citizenship will be retrieved from the example of migrants that have local or no voting rights in their host country. The situation is comparable to student mobility, even though it has to be taken into account that international students are mostly remaining for the duration of their study and might have another perspective on participating in the local community. Nevertheless, international students are facing a different policy response than other migrant types, such as working migrants or refugees. (Alves & King, 2022, p. 180).

The mobility of citizens is increasing and more migrants are mobile. Through this mobility, new challenges emerge, such as the inclusion of migrants and mobile citizens into other states where no to none voting rights are granted. Even though these voting rights are mostly

granted at the local level, the importance of including migrants is increasing through the increased influx. Thus, the migrants are also gaining a right to be represented and thus also receive a right to participate in politics (Ferris et al., 2019).

Political participation is defined as the act to be willing to influence public societal politics (Uhlaner, 2015). Active citizenship is characterized by being active within a community and supports that community with taking part in activities. That community can be very diverse and include all sorts of different activities. The promotion of active citizenship is important due to increasing diversity in European countries which challenges the national democratic scope, leading that the countries implement stricter national policies against migrants. Thus, policies that challenge the migrant population (Kersh et al., 2021).

The socio-economic status influences the stand on political participation, the higher that status, the more likely the political participation is (Adamson, 2006). Education is the most important factor in influencing political participation. Meaning that not only being educated in general, but also having knowledge about the system in which the political participation is embedded in, is influencing the likelihood of political participation. This also includes the barrier of the language and also not having the access to be politically informed and thus not active (Ferris et al., 2019).

Huddleston (2017) describe in a report about migrant's political participation in OSCE countries that political participation of migrants are facing more obstacles than the natives when it comes to political participation. The step until migrants are becoming active citizens is more bound to a social network that actively approaches them, rather than becoming politically active. Once migrants are active in parties and other activities, they tend to attract other migrants and set the agenda accordingly. National and local policies are very important in the political participation of migrants. Because politics is practised in the home country and the national citizens are active, the more likely the migrants are to be engaged as well and therefore the experience of being involved. Thus for creating a sphere of support, the migrant might be more likely to partake in politics. However, only a specific type of migrants tend to be engaged that is fulfilling certain characteristics, as being proficient in the official language of the host country is one of the prerequisites of citizen participation. Additionally, the duration of the stay in the foreign country is a factor; the longer the migrant resides in the host country, the political participation is becoming to a similar level of the national citizens. This process can be explained

by the higher likelihood of naturalization and having acquired a higher level of integration and the certainty of staying long-term in a country (Huddleston, 2017).

The level of education can play a role in finding a way to participate and to thus also integrate. Moreover, the capacity to adapt to the local customs of the host country is significant to integrate into the political system. That requires, for example, speaking the language and being able to be socially mobile as that requires a certain intellect. Thus, Educational Institutions can play a significant role in teaching about democracies and, therefore also in encouraging migrants to be active citizens. So, being educated about the customs of the host country can encourage interest in local politics (Atger & Studies, 2009).

European citizens that are mobile from other countries in the European Union can have trouble accommodating to the political system in another country from the European Union of which they are not familiar with (Kelbel et al., 2024, p.2). The political participation of other EU-citizens is being influenced by their socialisation from their home country but also by the country of residence. Meaning that when they have been actively involved in voting in their home country, the more likely they are to be in the country of residence. Thus, the political participation of migrants and mobility is influenced by the culture of their home-country (Kelbel et al., 2024).

Vulnerable groups are more likely to not participate in politics. This is due to the fact that these marginalized groups may not have the knowledge to participate and integrate in the political system. Therefore, education on political participation can have a positive effect on political participation of those groups (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2021, p. 104). For migrants, being educated about democratic citizenship in the host country is crucial in improving political participation. But also already having been educated in their host country on the political system does have the effect of being more critical of their political system that they are living in (Atger, 2009).

Having migrants participate does have positive implications for the host country as it reduces misconceptions against marginalised groups and leads to a more diverse political sphere. However, in the Netherlands, it can also be perceived as threatening when immigrants tend to aim for power in politics when it comes to the most marginalised migrant groups from outside of Europe (Kende et al., 2024). Populistic policymaking also triggers this perspective (Sant, 2021,

p.96), as having been perceived with international students in the Netherlands (Marginson, 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this research have been consulted together with the supervisor, Dr Josefine Geiger, on the basis of the ethical checklist provided by the Ethics Committee at Campus Fryslân/University of Groningen. In both studies, the participants were required to sign an informed consent form that was approved by the supervisor that informed the participants about the research and their rights throughout the research. During study 1 and study 2, the participants were informed about the purpose and goal of the study and were informed that their participation was voluntary and could have been withdrawn at any point of the research (see Appendix 8.1 and 8.2). The identities of the participants were made anonymous in the thesis.

3.2. Study 1

3.2.1. Aim of the Study

Study 1 forms the main part of the research and therefore retrieves the main data to answer the RQ1 of how to encourage the political participation of international students on the municipal level through participating in two phases of the future workshop.

3.2.2. Participation Action Research

This study follows a Participation Action Research (PAR). This approach sets an emphasis on the participants and actively includes them in the research process. By including the participants in discussions and other forms of participation, the participants have the opportunity to contribute to the research. Additionally, it allows the participant to be authentic while taking part in research. So, the participants do turn into subjects of the research. As PAR enables a natural setting for discussion, it is, hence, very suitable for studying political participation.

(Giugni et al., 2022). PAR is due to its political and approachable scope very closely related to having the characteristics of an intervention and produces solutions to the interventions, which are formulated by the participants themselves (Fisher, 2004).

The philosophy of future workshops is to bring people together and encourage discussions about future scenarios and envision how to implement these worked-out scenarios (Jungk & Müllert, 1981). In PAR, this method is used to research participatory action in bringing social change (Alminde & Warming, 2019). The future workshop by Jungk & Müllert (1981) stimulates the participation of the participants and actively incorporates them into the research process. Thereby, it encourages the participants to take action and be actively involved in finding solutions to the problems discussed. Due to its interactive nature, the future workshop deliberately involves minority groups and encourages them to be active and lays the foundation that citizens ought to be actively involved but do need assistance in doing so (Jungk & Müllert, 1981; Voß & Freeman, 2016).

3.2.3. Participants and Recruitment

In order to join the workshop, the participant needed to be enrolled in a Higher Educational Institute and not have the Dutch citizenship and do need to have their residence and also live in the city of Leeuwarden. In Leeuwarden, these schools are NHL Stenden, Van Hall Larenstein, Aeres and the Campus Fryslân from the University of Groningen (Leeuwarden in Cijfers, 2024). The recruitment process was designed through networking, and thus, the participants were approached directly or via WhatsApp Groups (Hennink et al., 2020). When the potential participants were interested in joining the workshop, the participants were given a link to sign up or the researcher did sign them up through the registration link. The participants were then invited to participate and received two emails that reminded them of their participation.

3.2.4. Procedure

The suggested time frame for the future workshop was adjusted and tailored to the participants and the problem that was discussed. To ensure the accessibility (Nachmias, 1977) of the workshop, the design of the study has been planned for two hours. The future workshop was organised in 2 phases, the critique and the fantasy phase.

The participants were asked before the workshop to think about their own experiences that they might bring up in the workshop in advance by mail before the actual workshop began. The workshop started with the critique phase: In this phase, the problem of low interaction with municipal politics was presented. In these phases, it was important that the participants were informed about what to expect from the research, which entails that the participants were being briefed about the research, and a setting must be created in which the participants could contribute the best (Lawson et al., 2015). In the critique phase, the participants were given the opportunity to critique and add their own experiences on the topic presented, which has been the life experiences and involvement in the city of Leeuwarden. After being introduced to the topic, the participants were able to discuss the topic and moreover share their experiences they had made when living in Leeuwarden. This discussion was designed in a brainstorming phase, which has been captured in the form of mind maps with the categories “good” and “bad”. This critique phase lasted for 45 minutes and was followed by a ten-minute break.

In the fantasy phase (Jungk & Müllert, 1981, p. 12), the participants have been thinking of their preferred solution which was decided by voting. The topic finding and agreeing on a solution took more time than anticipated and thus the workshop went over time. So focussing on one subject, was taking two elections. In this fantasy phase, the participants were deliberately not presented with different political tools. The detailed procedure with timestamps is enclosed in the Appendix 8.8.

3.2.5. Mind Maps

In both the critique and fantasy phases, the participants have been given the task to create a mind map during the discussion. That ensured that the participants have been kept busy and the thought process of the workshop has been captured (Burgess‐Allen & Owen‐Smith, 2010). This method offers the possibility to detect concepts, codes and categories. Mind-maps have been used not only to create tasks for the participants, in which they can interact and communicate with each other, but also to transcribe and create additional data (Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012). These mind-maps also create an output of the thought process and possible solutions that have been produced during the workshop and also illustrate the participants' thought process (Burgess‐Allen & Owen‐Smith, 2010; Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012). During the workshop, three mind-maps have been produced: one on the experience of what is appreciated by the

international students, both created in the critique phase, one on the problems that the students encountered and one that proposes solutions to the sorted problems, created in the fantasy phase (Jungk & Müllert, 1981). These mind-maps have been analysed by coding and categorising the mind-maps (Burgess‐Allen & Owen‐Smith, 2010). Mind Maps can be mixed with other methods of qualitative research, such as participant observation (Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012). Therefore this method has been chosen to accompany the future workshop and the participant observation.

3.2.6. Survey

The participants have been ending the workshop by actively assessing the chances and impacts of the workshop. In the future workshop, this is being given collectively (Jungk & Müllert, 1981). But to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, this phase has been transferred to a survey, which is submitted digitally and asks about the perception of their own participation before and after the workshop (Voß & Freeman, 2016; Giugni et al., 2022). The survey has been answered anonymously and was posing in total ten questions about at what educational level they are enrolled in, if they have been active citizens before moving to Leeuwarden and the liking of the workshop and if the workshop could have encouraged them in participating more in politics (see Appendix 8.6)

3.2.7. Participant Observation

A participant observation has been conducted to regard the behaviour and interactions of and between the participants. The researcher has been present throughout the entire workshop and moderated, meanwhile being accompanied by one assistant who was meant to assist the discussion and also to observe the participants. Nevertheless, the researcher has played the main moderating role and observed and steered the discussion. The fieldnotes arising from the participant observation will serve as another part of the findings of the study (Bernard & Gravlee, 2014).

3.3. Study 2

3.3.1. Aim of the study

Study 2 was aiming to give further insight into the ambition of the participation of international students in the municipality of Leeuwarden perceived by the aldermen in the city council.

3.3.2. Participants

The participants of the study 2 are the ‘wethouders’, aldermen of the municipality. To the interview, the ones who are appointed for education and migration have been invited to the interview (Beitin, 2012; Nederlandse Grondwet, n.d.). Aldermen are responsible for their own area of interest and therein are moderating between the major interest groups and stakeholders, but also between the citizens of the municipality, addressing issues related to their expertise field (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024).

3.3.3. Interview

In PAR, interviews can also be combined with future workshops, which would then be a follow-up event to stimulate solution finding and also give more inspiration. In terms of the action research, the participants also serve the purpose of increasing potential democratic participation. Thus, participating can also contribute to change (Nielsen & Lyhne, 2015). The interviews that have been held were semi-structured interviews with four questions prepared (see Appendix 8.7.)

The interviews have been held in an individual setting wherein questions have been asked by the researcher (Wang & Yan, 2012). The interview questions have been retrieved from the results of the workshop that was conducted in Study 1, and therefore form a continuation of the Research Question in finding a solution on if the future workshop can be a tool to encourage political participation of international students at the municipal level (Saldana, 2021).

3.3.4. Procedure

The interviews were being conducted a month after the workshop took place. During the workshop, the participants were encouraged to address any critiques that arose while living in the city of Leeuwarden. After the workshop, questions were posed of what the municipality is willing to change and encourage. That dynamic has been summarised, and in total, 4 questions were formulated. After that the aldermen took part in a 20 minute long semi-structured interview that was later transcribed and coded in the same categories as the mind maps. The coding was done with the online tool atlas.ti.

3.3.5. Data Analysis

The analysis of the workshop produced three outputs: Mind-maps, a survey and a participant observation. The data has been categorised into their problems, the appreciations, and solutions and then summarised according to an eventual arising strategy to solve the problems that were proposed by the participants (Saldana, 2021). The different outputs have been analysed individually and then summarised on the basis of the categories from the mindmaps that have been indicated. The results were then summarised and the important aspects were highlighted in the thesis.

4. Results Study 1 and Study 2

4.1. Aim of the research

The research found out if political participation on the municipal level can be encouraged through participating in the future workshop. The research delivered insight into the life, perception of the city, and level of knowledge about the municipality, and the level of integration. The interviews, which have been conducted in study 2, have delivered further insight into the political participation of international students in regards to the municipality and emphasise further knowledge gaps.

4.2. Discrimination

In study 1, some of the participants were experiencing discrimination in the infrastructure and in the social interactions with the police, healthcare, education, and jobs. However, there was a difference perceived between the participants that were coming from cultures closer to the Dutch culture and those who were coming from culturally different countries than the Dutch culture. One participant who was very vocal about the racism having experienced in the city as stated in the survey: "*Housing issues, language, job opportunity, racism and police efficiency, GP"* However, the participant was not the only one who was experiencing racism in the city and that experience could have been shared.

4.3. Infrastructure and Municipality

The participants from study 1 described many different situations in which they have been discriminated against, eg, the police or the healthcare system. Specifically, the participants felt that because they could not speak Dutch, the police would be more cautious against the international students and would receive harder restrictions due to their international background. One participant, was describing the police in Leeuwarden as having a racist undertone and did not feel protected from racist attacks and not being taken seriously when reporting those incidents. The participants mentioned that the events that are being organised by the city would be nice and visited by the participants.

In Study 2, the aldermen 1 and 2 are also mentioning that infrastructure and understanding a new system can be challenging when arriving in Leeuwarden. The possible discrimination is not being perceived. However, the challenge of not speaking the language is being mentioned by the aldermen 2. But the municipality does not perceive the integration of international students as one of their duties.

4.4. Social Interaction

In study 1, life in Leeuwarden was generally perceived as good, and the city was enjoyed due to its size and cleanliness. In terms of social interactions, the participants were satisfied with the number of interactions that can be held in English, and there is generally a low language barrier in the city. That might stem from the prescription that the participants have perceived

lively international student communities. In study 2, the same has been described by the aldermen.

However, when it comes to the interaction between the local Dutch community and the international students, the language barrier becomes a reason for not finding a deep connection with the city. For instance, the participants described that there would be less willingness of local sports clubs to speak English to the students, and it was harder for international students to find a job with customer contact, and they have even been fired from a job because of going home for Christmas. That feeling has been expressed in the survey at the end of the research on the question of what should be different in Leeuwarden: "*Mindset of people. I mean be more acceptive of other cultures and languages."* That barrier leads to the feeling of being excluded from the Dutch community and leads to having guilty feelings when the Dutch students have to speak English because of the international students. The participants did see this in a feeling of a vicious circle because the lack of being confronted with the language just fortified the language barrier, which led to the other problems that have been outlined.

The social interactions have been also mentioned by the participants of study 2. The aldermen are emphasizing the liveliness of the international student community and the amount of events that the group is organising for themselves but are also aware that the language might be a barrier. The aldermen 1 is also describing that the city is increasingly focussing to organise events that are later communicated in English.

4.5. Knowledge Gap

Both study groups were showing that little is known about the political participation of international students in the municipality. In the second half of the workshop, conducted in the study 1, the participants were not aware about what the municipality offers to assist them with the problems that they might encounter with the current case of renting a room in Leeuwarden. In this phase, the participants were in need of additional information about the municipality in order to fulfill the task of solving their own situation of discrimination in the housing market. This knowledge gap was accompanied by little trust in the municipality and more trust was given to the Higher Educational Institutions to address their problems too. In the second half of the workshop, the fantasy phase, thus where the participants were expected to solve one problem that

has been discussed, it was needed that the participants were given more moderation of what the possibilities were.

The study 2 also indicated major knowledge gaps about the international student community. When being asked about how the international students can be reached in the upcoming municipal elections, both aldermen were not aware of the right to vote of that community.

4.6. Responsibility and Motivation

Both studies showed that there is a discrepancy between who is responsible for a) addressing any problems at the municipal level and b) who is responsible for setting up any structures that might increase political participation. The students were genuinely keen about having more workshops that have been organized, as the future workshop for this research but mentioned that the structures needed to be given in order to successfully start such a workshop. The motivation to organise such a workshop themselves would not be stark.

In study 2, the aldermen were emphasizing that it is not entirely the responsibility of the municipality to increase the political participation of international students. aldermen 2 is focussing hereby on the problematic that the municipality does need to include every citizen in their policy making and cannot focus on one particular group. aldermen 1, is seeing the responsibility of integration of the international students at university level rather than at the municipal level. The motivation from the participants to start such a workshop has been relatively low, because of their lack of knowledge, time and feeling of motivating others to join as well. A feeling that was also seen in the survey at the end of the workshop on the question if the workshop can be encouraging: *"Yes, now I see that there is motivation in others as well, so I would definitely like to be a part of it, and work on the problems."* and *"Yes but I still don't know how, I got motivated to join a group which is active but alone I would prob not do anything"*

4.7. Workshop

In the survey, the participants indicated on a scale from 1 to 5 on how they liked the workshop. Three participants were rating the workshop with a five, five participants with a four and one participant with a 2. Six out of the nine participants stated that the workshop encouraged

them to be more active in Leeuwarden. Two participants were made aware that other international students are facing similar problems in the city. One participant did not feel encouraged through the workshop.

During the workshop, the participants were very keen in discussing their anecdotes of what they had encountered in Leeuwarden. The mindmap with bad experiences has been worked on relatively enthusiastically compared to the mind map of the positive experiences. Even though the second phase was in need of more moderation, the participants were enjoying the workshop and perceiving it as an effective opportunity to educate the international students about their possibilities in being more politically active.

5. Discussion

This research aimed at study 1 was to find out if the future workshop is an appropriate tool of indicating the barriers of political participation and to encourage the international students to be an active citizen and to participate. Study 2 researched if the barriers are being perceived by the aldermen of the municipality and what can be done to enhance the political participation of the international student in the municipality according to the aldermen.

The future workshop was a suitable method for researching the barriers, the challenges and the chances of international students in their political participation. Through the discussion, the participant observation and the mind maps created by the participants enabled them to connect over the discussion, and could exchange experiences which further created a collective feeling of encountering similar problems. Moreover, the common problems could have been indicated and can be put into perspective and thus also be communicated to the public.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The research of study 1 was based on the future workshops by Jungk & Müllert (1981) with the aim of including the citizens in the decision making process and to enhance the feeling of self-efficacy in democracy. Therefore, the future workshop that has been conducted in this research is in line with already existing research that aims to increase the participation of a marginalised group (Alminde & Warming, 2019; Gerhards & Spellerberg, 2011). The initial structure of the future workshop traditionally consists of four phases: the critique phase, the

fantasy phase, the implementation phase and the review phase. But in order to make the workshop accessible in time, the workshop did only focus on the critique and the fantasy phase. That adjustment can be assessed that the effectiveness of the future workshop would have been restricted instead of these phases.

The future workshop had the goal of producing a meaningful outcome that can be communicated to the municipality to eventually achieve change. That is in line with PAR that the research outcomes which were being produced are able to not only trigger further research but also enable a societal change by a meaningful insight that is created by the research itself.

The overall combination of the methods of the future workshop, the mind maps and the survey in the end was, in general, an effective combination. This had several advantages: The participants had a task that encouraged them to brainstorm. That organised the discussion and gave the possibility to revisit the already discussed topics in the fantasy phase. Additionally, the mind maps were a good possibility for analysing the critique phase for research purposes (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012). With the mind maps, the participants were transcribing themselves. That enabled an easy and quick analysis of the subjects that have been discussed, which was then translated into the categories that were most important to the participants in the critique phase and captured the overall perception and relation to the topic by the participants (Wheeldon, 2010). That has also been seen in the mind maps during the workshop: Instead of being open ended, the mind maps were indicating a topic about the bad, the good and the possible solutions of the position and problems of international students in Leeuwarden. Giving this thematic structure showed that the participants of the workshop were topic heavy and passionate about sharing the bad encounters and anecdotes in Leeuwarden but were having more constraints in finding connection over the good anecdotes and also were having trouble in finding solutions. Also through exclamation marks and other drawings, some of the emotions have been displayed on the mind maps itself (see Appendix 8.3.and 8.4.). This shows that the combination of these methods is effective in indicating barriers and challenges of political participation of international students at the municipal level.

Even though it is a suitable method, information or momentums of the discussion that were crucial of the research were not displayed in the mind maps. Therefore, information might have been lost through the use of mind maps or comments that were not falling in the indicated categories could have been not captured (Burgess‐Allen & Owen‐Smith, 2010).

The survey was generally effective but not well-positioned in the workshop. The workshop was already very intense; this might have led to a lack of concentration to answer the questions with precision and dedication. Therefore, for any future implementations, the survey could have been split up into some questions being answered before and others after the workshop, with a pause after the completion of the future workshop.

This research followed the aim of a Participation Action Research Approach. This approach offers a unique opportunity to conduct research that is embedded in change making and also to construct a community building aspect (Vera Institute of Justice, 2016). This theory has been contested with this research approach. The future workshop was a suitable way to research the social phenomenon of international student mobility combined with political participation.

5.2. Practical Implications

This thesis was to find the barriers to political participation of international students at the municipal level. Therefore, this research indicated many practical implications for policy-makers, international students and Higher Educational Institutions.

5.2.1. Barriers that hinder political participation

The barriers to political participation are that international students are mainly acquiring the ethical right to be educated and thus are not encouraged to partake in local political affairs. Thus, even though the rights are granted, it is not sufficiently advocated; the international students are responsible for their situation and also do have the ability to be advocates of change and to express a political opinion. This means that the relationship between the internationals and the host country should not merely lie on the pure attainment of education, but also the host country should be able to receive any advantages when hosting and offering the right to education. Nevertheless, international students do have to actively voice their right to participate and to be governed and not to be neglected by the host countries' politics (Yang, 2019).

Participation is an interactive act and migrants and thus international students are encountering various barriers when wanting to participate. Their political participation is most likely to be stagnating when the citizens are having a satisfactory or no relationship with their local government. Meaning that those who are already marginalized are not likely to participate

on a local level. Nevertheless, political participation can also be hindered by other factors: Time constraints and the feeling of not knowing enough to actually participate constructively. Also, the feeling of being an outsider can hinder political participation (Jäntti & Kurkela, 2021). These various barriers have been proven in this research; these are hindering factors to political participation among international students. This is expressed in the following in the response of one participant expressed in the survey on the question if the participant would address their issues after having participated in the workshop: "*I would not... im almost done with my studies and doubt i [sic] will come back [to the Netherlands], plus, i [sic] don't have like... the time to do somehtign [sic] about these big problems."*

Also the time constraints have been perceived by the potential and actual participants. Therefore, the workshop had to be shortened at a minimum of two hours and six out of fifteen participants cancelled their participation due to sickness and time constraints.

During the fantasy phase, little trust of the participant to the municipality was shown because there might be little interaction points with the municipality. Also, during the acquisition process of participants, one potential participant declined because of the feeling that there would be nothing valuable to contribute in the discussion due to the lack of knowledge about the municipality. The feeling of being an outsider might play a major role in the barriers of political participation among international students. As this research showed, the students were not very interactive with the city and could mostly connect to the bigger events that were happening and advertised through the city. But when it came to actual social interaction, the international students preferred to stay among themselves. But also the feeling that the municipality might not care or would not be aware has been expressed in the survey by one participant on the question if the participant would have considered voicing their problems before the workshop: *"No. Because I don't know where I can speak out loud to expose the problem amd I think I'm too small to make big changes. The issue makes me feel municipality didn't pay attention to protect minority group in Leeuwarden".* Aspects that Jäntti and Kurkela (2021) are describing as barriers to political participation on the municipal level.

5.2.2. Problems perceived by Students in the workshop

During the future workshop, the students expressed that many structural problems, such as financial discrepancies and infrastructural problems, would be one of the most pressing

problems. The students refer to the financial discrepancies that international students have to fulfil higher conditionalities compared to Dutch students when wanting to receive “basisbeurs”. The condition in order to receive the basic financial support from the Dutch government is that non-Dutch students have to work a minimum of 8 hours per week next to their full-time study (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, n.d.). However, the students also expressed that it was hard finding a job next to the study that either brings value to their study or may support their language learning because the international students are often not allowed to work with customers because of their language barrier.

The background that the international students are working next to the study can be explained through the assumption that students that are working next to their study are most likely to also remain in the Netherlands and are working after their study in a job. Therefore, these students are more likely to also re-contribute to the welfare system. Thus, having a job was perceived as one very important factor of learning the language and being able to integrate in the society and be connected with the community. Factors that will likely motivate the students of staying (Nuffic, 2023).

One major problem, the participants described in the workshop and also worked on in the fantasy phase, was the housing market. The participants described finding it hard to find a suitable accommodation and establishing themselves on the housing market in Leeuwarden and assumed that it would be more difficult in the metropole region Randstad. Being Dutch or Dutch speaking was perceived as an advantage in finding suitable accommodation. Also the renting prices would be very expensive and rules to the rent subsidy, meaning that the subsidy is not available to shared housing was also seen as unjust because most of the international students would live in shared accommodation. In combination with not receiving any financial support from the Dutch governments, meanwhile their Dutch counterparts do, was seen as unjust.

It is a recurring theme that international students are being discriminated against in the housing market in the Netherlands. Because they are not able to look at the location in person, are reliant on companies renting accommodation for students or the private house market that is organised through platforms or social media groups. In the private housing market, the international students are facing racism and discrimination that has also been described by the participants of the workshop. “No internationals” is often displayed in advertisements for rooms and the international students are often left with precarious renting contracts that might not allow

them to register, which in consequence hinders the international students in receiving a Burgerservicenummer (BSN). Without having access to the BSN, the international students are not able to apply for a subsidy, get health insurance and thus are not able to work. Meaning, not being able to integrate in the society (Fang & Van Liempt, 2020). The discrimination among international students was also prevalent. Those students who were coming from Western-European countries were facing less obstacles than students with a Non-Western European identity, making it harder for them to find accommodation (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2012).

It is important to note that during the interviews of the study 2, the participants were describing the housing situation but were not aware of the discrimination of the international students which is also happening in Leeuwarden. Aldermen 2, is mentioning that municipalities cannot build any additional housing for international students and thus find it hard to solve the housing crisis for the international students alone. Since housing was the main subject of the workshop, it can be seen that the communication between the international students and the municipalities is not sufficient. The research has indicated that discrimination and the position of the participants on that topic. Therefore, the future workshop can serve as a tool for communication of discrimination of a marginalized group.

5.2.3. Responsibility

One of the bigger challenges that were prevalent after conducting this research was the question of who is responsible for international students' political participation.

The question of responsibility is surely not easily answered as many actors, meaning the municipality, the students and the Higher Education Institutions, are involved and the actual solution lies in cooperation with all of them.

Traditionally, the responsibility of being an active citizen is embedded in the citizenship itself. The notion of political participation is therefore entangled with also being a citizen. Thus, migrants naturally have more barriers to overcome when wanting to participate because they are not citizens by law (Newman & Tonkens, 2011, p.14). In order to be an active citizen, it is also entailed to criticise and to reflect on society and the officials. But in the fantasy phase of the future workshop of this research, it was prevalent that the participants and thus international students did not know where to contact the municipality and other officials or were not

considering it as an option. Thus more information and more involvement can be reached through more education. Therefore, the responsibility of being an active citizen is one of being educated and knowledgeable about the system, but also of having the right to participate (Meehan, 2010). However, also having the experience of participating and being a part of a discussion with solution finding is a valuable experience that the future workshop and thus also this research offers. The future workshop aims at reviving democratic participation through the workshop and makes democracy livable and approachable (Jungk & Müllert, 1981). The workshop was also having an encouraging tendency as the survey data shows. Thus the workshop might have contributed to the experiences of participating in political settings. The future workshop can therefore contribute to the mobilization of migrants and thus also for international students and facilitates the formation of a community which is important for stimulating political participation (Ferris et al., 2019).

In the case of international students, who are in a majority come from the EEA- countries (Nuffic, 2024), they already have the right to participate on the municipal level (Directive 1994/80). Meaning that on the municipal level, the international student community is, for the most part, entitled to be as active citizens in their voting as the Dutch citizens.

The political participation and for those who are responsible for encouraging it, is defined in the "Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning (WMO)", thus the social support act. Therein, the act is putting the citizens and the residents at the centre of responsibility and that they are able to help each other in being active citizens (Tonkens, 2011, p.45). Even though active participation is not directly defined by the law, the municipality is nevertheless responsible for enabling a free discourse and being a part within the community (Tonkens, 2011, p.54). That means that the entire responsibility is twofold: On the one hand, the international community ought to have the will and the need to participate, and the municipality has to ensure that the participation is enabled if wanted to. The WMO is encouraging volunteer work to fill in the gaps that the government leaves blank. Therefore, the government is actively promoting volunteer work to fill that space (Tonkens, 2011, p.58).

The understanding of citizenship does explain that the wethouders that have been interviewed were not very knowledgeable about possible solutions for increasing the political participation among international students, as it is not their main task to facilitate their participation. However, the international students did not know when to and how to participate,

as the results show. Therefore, it can be concluded that the municipality has the responsibility to empower its citizens to become more active citizens. Especially, because the current understanding of being an active citizen is crucial for the Dutch society and government, the citizens should be encouraged by the government to be involved (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2014). Thus, the citizens, when they are coming from marginalized groups, can be empowered by the municipality, for example, by social workers or other professionals (Van De Wetering, 2023). This has also been mentioned by the aldermen 2, who is proposing of supporting the international students to partake in volunteer work within the municipality as it could have an impact on their participation and integration in the municipality.

5.2.4. Communication

The question of responsibility is tightly bound to the fact that international students do not know their rights, and that the municipality does not know about their role of encouraging active citizenship and political participation among international students. As already mentioned in the literature review, migrants experience more confidence in political participation when they are being educated about it. Therefore, the communication between the municipality and international students in the city needs to be enhanced. This research showed that both groups, the international students and the wethouders of the municipality did not know about each other, offerings and services (on the municipality) or problems (of the international students). That raises the question of how to improve the communication between these two parties.

Active citizenship is often connected with the assumption that there is a lack of knowledge by the community, thus here the participants of the workshop, on how to be active and engaging in a community. Education is one of the key drivers for active citizenship and thus political participation as skills and knowledge might be lacking or even missing (Kersh et al., 2021, p. 3). Thus, the conducted future workshop can serve as a tool to not only connect the international community but also to educate them in their skills of becoming an active citizen and be more politically active.

5.2.5. Solutions

A feeling of being connected to the community and voluntary activities and being involved triggers political and democratic participation. Also other factors such as being

educated are likely to increase the political engagement in a community. And students particularly are more likely to be politically involved as this group usually can devote more time to be active (Guagnano & Santini, 2020).

This research showed that it is important to be connected and feel welcomed in a community when wanting to be active and partake in local politics. The students of the workshop were not particularly invested in the city and were more active in their own community. Thus, a program that can encourage the integration of the international students may be beneficial for the political participation of the students in the city. This example shows that the city can organise such events in cooperation with Higher Educational Institutions and that local governments do have the intuition to be involved in such projects. Therefore, having programs that encourage citizen participation in a local community also offers to gain more trust from the citizens to the community (Jäntti & Kurkela, 2021).

In one of the aldermen interviews, the interviewee did propose the solution of a buddy system that ought to connect local students and international students in the city. The aldermen did not perceive that the municipality is solely responsible for the organization of such a program. However, examples from other cities show that such a program can be organised with local organizations, in cooperation with the municipality and the Higher Educational Institutions. Such an example is given by the city of Turku. The friendship program is organised by the city of Turku together with the Educational Higher Institutes of the city. The aim of the program is to connect the incoming international students with the citizens of the city that reside there for longer and to form a community and potentially make the students stay after their graduation (Study in Turku, 2025).

Jäntti and Kurkela (2021) show that in their research the tools for political participation ought to be diverse and the citizens should be well informed about the possibilities and tools for participating and also to contribute to the political discourse. That aspect has also been prevalent during the workshop when the participants have been asked to solve the problems that were discussed in the first discussion round. Therefore, the workshop that has been conducted can serve as the first step, to educate the students and serve as an encouragement for further steps or a project that is conducted or held in cooperation with the municipality and the Higher Educational Institutions. This can be effective because such a future workshop is good at determining the problems and retrieving the stories of the participants but also may make the

participants feel empowered to further work on any problems that might arise during the workshop. The municipality of Leeuwarden can therefore take a step with the example of the Finnish “friendship program” and can organise something alike.

However, the municipality offers to support citizens in starting an initiative, either financially and also by expertise. The “mienskip” grant offers citizens the possibility of receiving financial support for an initiative that is being planned. That information about this possibility is also being offered in English (Gemeente Leeuwarden, 2025). Additionally, if citizens are interested in starting an initiative, they can receive additional help and support with Amaryllis, a platform that supports initiatives and voluntary work to strengthen the community. Such a support can also take place for a longer period of time (Amaryllis Leeuwarden, n.d.). Therefore, such a future workshop could also be implemented with their assistance.

One solution is improving the communication between the international students and the municipality. In the relationship between migrants/international students mobility, there are two relationships in the information and in the communication. Communication between migrants and the local governments are complex and include many stakeholders, ranging from migrants, over local service providers, the media towards even the non-migrants population. The local context herein is important as it is significant to know the community itself to design any possible communication strategies (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2021). The acquisition of the participants is a suitable example of this communication: The participants have been invited and directly approached and that could mobilize the people to participate. Through the networking, a diverse range of participants that represented the general origin of international students in the Netherlands were present with a particular focus on one Chinese, one Norwegian and one American student, with the rest being from the European Union lead to meaningful representation and strengthened the research outcome in its representation (Nuffic, 2024).

5.2.6. Limitations

This study had faced challenges to conduct research with. First, the researcher is an international student in the Netherlands itself. Even though academic neutrality is ensured, a certain bias might have influenced the research. Additionally, the participant acquisition was executed through networking, which might have led to the participants being generally interested

in participating and wanting to be involved. Therefore, participants that were not interested in political subjects likely did not join.

The workshop had to deal with additional challenges. The adjustments made to design the workshop more accessible and thus less burdening to join, might have led to an incomplete picture of the workshop. The participants were partaking in two out of the four phases of the future workshop. That circumstance might have led to the participants not feeling empowered enough to see any further implication of the results. The participants were not asked to prepare anything besides reflecting about their own experiences in the city. Thus, if the participants might have prepared and were knowledgeable about the different possibilities of political participation, the fantasy phase might have been more engaging.

A limitation of the participants in the research of study 1 was the indicated knowledge gap. That can also be a flaw to the future workshop itself as it does not mention any significant briefing or educating the participants before the workshop (Jungk & Müllert, 1981, pp. 73-81). However, as already indicated in the literature review that educating about the possibilities can be a facilitator for political participation (Atger & Studies, 2009). Thus, it can be considered that the general participation in the fantasy phase could have been more productive and constructive if the participants had been educated about the system and the possibilities to become involved in the municipality.

The political participation of mobility students is a broad topic which cannot be covered in its entirety in the period of 20 weeks. Therefore, the biggest limitation is the time constraint put on this thesis.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the research aimed to find out if the future workshop is an appropriate tool to encourage and stimulate political participation of international students in Leeuwarden. Additionally, the research examined the role of the municipality to stimulate political participation among non-national citizens. The literature review indicated that international students and migrants are able to participate and that their participation can be advantageous for the local democracies. To research such a participation, the thesis followed a Participation Action Research approach and through the method of a future workshop, a survey and interviews. These

methods have been proven to generate the expected results of barriers and the future workshop as a potential method to increase participation.

Generally, the workshop and the survey afterwards delivered very meaningful results in starting points on where to increase participation and support international students and how and where the community is seeing barriers itself but also confirms the already existing literature on marginalised citizens and migrants and barriers to participation. Therefore, it is favourable for a city to conduct such workshops combined with a survey as it showcases the realistic situation of the international students in the municipality.

The results show that international students have an interest in participating but however do face barriers, such as language and lack of knowledge or lack of time. Additionally, the problems that have been perceived by the international student were of a structural nature and can mostly not be solved at the municipality level.

On the other hand, the municipality however welcomes the international students in the city but does not see its responsibility in increasing the participation of international students in the municipality. A possible explanation can be that the municipalities are reliant on voluntary work and that the municipality cannot focus on one specific target group for their policies. But an example from the municipality of Turku, Finland shows that such ideas, as the aldermen 1 presented, are possible to organise together with the municipality.

This research offered therefore an insight into the perception of international students in the city of Leeuwarden and what is holding them back in being politically active and the barriers that hinders the municipality from being engaged in increasing the political participation of international students.

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8. Appendix

8.1. Consent Form of the participants of the future workshop

Participation Consent Form

Project: Political Participation of International Students in the city of Leeuwarden

Global Responsibility and Leadership

Campus Fryslân

University of Groningen

Gesa Roßkamp (s5327229)

Supervisor: Dr Josefine Geiger

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This letter explains the purpose of the study and how it will be conducted. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. If anything is unclear, feel free to ask questions using the contact details provided at the end of this letter.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

This study examines the political participation of immigrants, specifically focusing on international students. Participants will discuss challenges they have encountered in the municipality and explore potential solutions from their perspective as migrants. After the workshop, the students are required to fill out a questionnaire about the workshop.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

Participants will take part in a **two-hour workshop**, which includes a discussion and a survey and a break during the discussion. The goal of this workshop is to find out how international students can partake better in municipality politics and what possible solutions can be done.

IS PARTICIPATION VOLUNTARY?

Participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time before or during the workshop without any consequences.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN PARTICIPATING?

The workshop focuses on life in **Leeuwarden** and the daily experiences of international students. Some sensitive topics may arise during discussions. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, please indicate this. You are free to withdraw at any moment.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING?

There are no immediate personal benefits for participants. However, the results of the discussion may be forwarded to municipal officials, potentially influencing policy decisions, after the participants do give their approval.

HOW WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE RECORDED, STORED, AND PROTECTED?

The discussion results will be stored securely for up to **five years**, until **March 20, 2030**. During this period, only the researcher, **Gesa Roßkamp**, and the supervisor, Dr **Josefine Geiger**, will have access to the data. If you wish to have your data deleted at any time, until the 6th of June 2025.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The results will be analyzed at the group level as part of a **Bachelor's thesis** and used for academic research. Upon participant approval, the findings may also be shared with the **municipality council**. The research will produce two outcomes, first the survey filled out and an action plan. Both of the outcomes will be anonymous and thus cannot be traced back to the participants.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research follows the ethical guidelines by the Campus Fryslan and University College Groningen Ethics committee for student projects. The researchers will uphold relevant ethical standards.

By signing below, I confirm that I have read the consent form and understand the conditions of participation:

● I have read the information sheet and was able to ask any additional question to the researcher.

● I understand I may ask questions about the study at any time.

● I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

● I understand that at any time I can refuse to answer any question without any consequences.

● I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

Confidentiality and Data Use

● I understand that none of my individual information will be disclosed to anyone outside the study team and my name will not be published.

● I understand that the information provided will be used only for this research and publications directly related to this research project.

● I understand that data (consent forms, recordings, interview transcripts) will be retained on the Y-drive of the University of Groningen server for 5 years, in correspondence with the university GDPR legislation.

Future involvement

● I wish to receive a copy of the scientific output of the project.

● I consent to be re-contacted to participate in future studies.

Having read and understood all the above, I agree to participate in the research study:

yes/no

Date, Location	Signature

For further information, please contact:

- **Gesa Roßkamp** – g.rosskamp@student.rug.nl
- **Dr Josefine Geiger** – j.l.geiger@rug.nl

8.2. Consent Form for the interviews with aldermen

Participation Consent Form

Project: Political Participation of International Students in the city of Leeuwarden

Global Responsibility and Leadership

Campus Fryslân

University of Groningen

Gesa Roßkamp (s5327229)

Supervisor: Dr Josefine Geiger

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This letter explains the purpose of the study and how it will be conducted. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. If anything is unclear, feel free to ask questions using the contact details provided at the end of this letter.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

This study examines the political participation of immigrants, specifically focusing on international students. Participants will discuss challenges they have encountered in the municipality and explore potential solutions from their perspective as migrants. After the workshop, the students are required to fill out a questionnaire about the workshop.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

Participants are taking part in a 20-minute interview. The goal of this workshop is to find out how international students can better participate in municipal politics and what possible solutions can be done.

IS PARTICIPATION VOLUNTARY?

Participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time before or during the workshop without any consequences.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN PARTICIPATING?

The interview focuses on how international students can better participate in the municipality of Leeuwarden. Some sensitive topics may arise during discussions. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, please indicate this. You are free to withdraw at any moment.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING?

There are no immediate personal benefits for participants.

HOW WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE RECORDED, STORED, AND PROTECTED?

The interview results will be stored securely for up to **five years**, until **March 20, 2030**. During this period, only the researcher, **Gesa Roßkamp**, and the supervisor, Dr **Josefine Geiger**, will have access to the data. If you wish to have your data deleted at any time, until the 6th of June 2025.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The interview will be analyzed as part of a **Bachelor's thesis** and used for academic research. The outcomes will be anonymous and thus cannot be traced back to the participants.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research follows the ethical guidelines by the Campus Fryslan and University College Groningen Ethics committee for student projects. The researchers will uphold relevant ethical standards.

By signing below, I confirm that I have read the consent form and understand the conditions of participation:

● I have read the information sheet and was able to ask any additional question to the researcher.

● I understand I may ask questions about the study at any time.

● I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

● I understand that at any time I can refuse to answer any question without any consequences.

● I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

Confidentiality and Data Use

● I understand that none of my individual information will be disclosed to anyone outside the study team and my name will not be published.

● I understand that the information provided will be used only for this research and publications directly related to this research project.

● I understand that data (consent forms, recordings, interview transcripts) will be retained on the Y-drive of the University of Groningen server for 5 years, in correspondence with the university GDPR legislation.

Future involvement

- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the scientific output of the project.
- ☐ I consent to be re-contacted to participate in future studies.

Having read and understood all the above, I agree to participate in the research study:

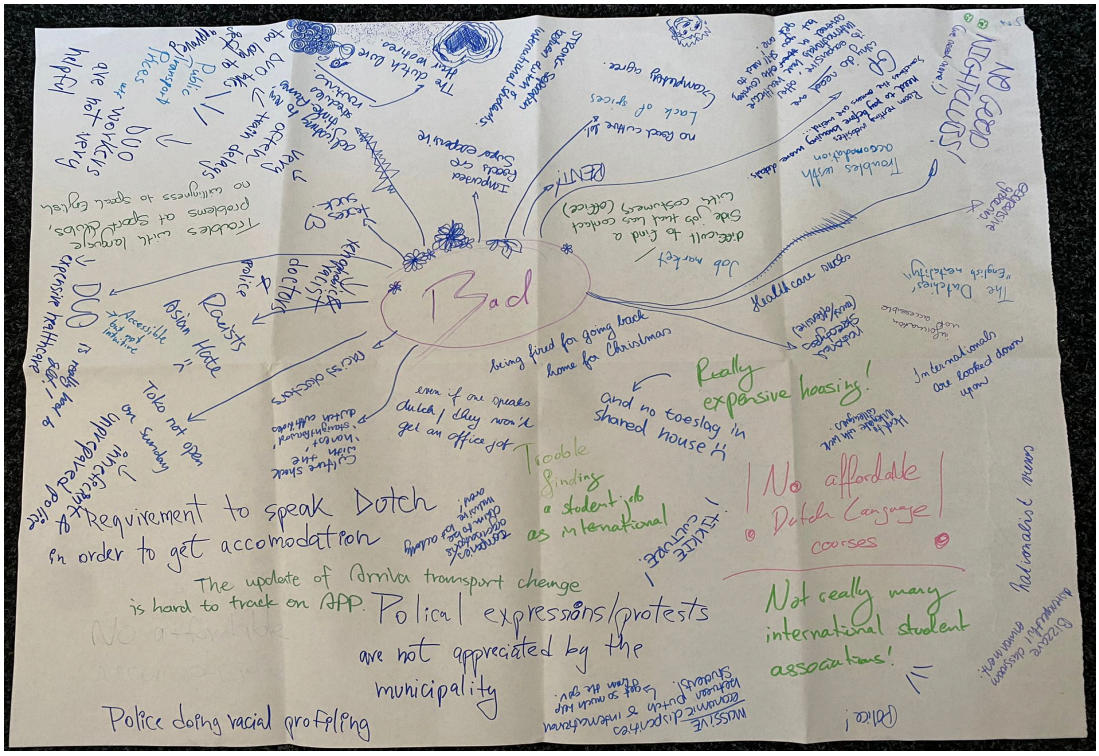
yes/no

Date, Location	Signature

For further information, please contact:

- **Gesa Roßkamp** – g.rosskamp@student.rug.nl
- **Dr Josefine Geiger** – j.l.geiger@rug.nl

8.3. Mind Map Critique Phase - Bad


Bad
Requirement to speak Dutch in order to get accomodation
Police doing racial profiling
Really expensive housing!
No affordable Dutch Language courses
Not really many international student associations!
The update of Arriva transport change is hard to track on App.
Polical expressions/protests are not appreciated by the municipality
Trouble finding a student job as international
Job market
Health care system
Rasists
Racism
Discrimination
Being fined for going back home for Christmas
And no toeslag in shared house!!
Trouble with language, no willingness to speak English
Trouble with bureaucracy
Not welcoming
Unfriendly
Closed doors
Police
Do not open on Sunday
Unfriendly police
Trouble with Dutch culture
Trouble with Dutch culture
Trouble with Dutch culture

8.5. Mind Map Fantasy Phase - Solutions

8.6. Questions Survey - End of the Workshop

1. What type of education are you pursuing?
    - ☐ Bachelor
    - ☐ Master
    - ☐ Exchange Student

2. Have you been active in any association before you came to Leeuwarden? That can entail a party, an organization or other types of engagement.
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

3. If you answered yes. In what have you been involved and what experience did you have there?

_____
_____
_____

4. How was the experience moving to Leeuwarden?

_____
_____
_____

5. What should be different in Leeuwarden?

_____
_____
_____

6. Thinking about before the workshop: Would you have considered voicing your problems? Please outline why.

_____
_____
_____

7. How did you like the workshop? - Grade from a scale from 1 to 5.

☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

8. Now think about after the workshop: Would you consider adressing your issues? Please outline why.

_____
_____
_____

9. Please outline if the workshop did encourage you in being more active in Leeuwarden? How?

_____
_____
_____

10. Please outline if what has been discussed can make a change in Leeuwarden.

_____
_____
_____

8.7. Interview Questions Study 2: Aldermen - In Dutch

1. Wat zijn mogelijke problemen van internationale studenten?
    a. Contact met de gemeente?
2. Hoe zou je de participatie en inclusie van internationale studenten verbeteren?
    a. Op welke manieren kunnen internationale studenten participeren?
    b. Hoe kun je ze dan ook bereiken?
    c. Internationale/Europese studenten mogen meedoen bij de gemeenteverkiezing. Hoe zou je deze groep bereiken?
3. Welke uitdagingen kun je bedenken in de integratie van internationale studenten?

8.8. Procedure workshop

Time slot	**Phase**	**What**	**Task for the participants**
15:00 - 15:10	0	Walk-in and greeting	Make sure they are quickly finding their seat Introduction of the participants
15:10-15:15	1	Outlining the problematic of the international students	Listening and filling out consent form
15:15-15:45	2	Adding their own experience to the problem	The outcome of this phase should be that the student does think about their status quo. Meaning that they add their experiences. **Outcome: Participants are aware of their situation**
15:45-15:55		Break	Be on time back!
15:55-16:40	3	Solving the problem with an action plan	The participants should start thinking on how to solve their problems that they encountered in Leeuwarden. Important is here that the students do emphasize the how and not the what. Because the heart of the research is that how they can participate better. **Outcome: Action Plan and Goal**
16:40-16:45	4	Filling out the survey	Scan the QR code and fill out the survey. **Outcome: Filled out survey**