

# **The Dutch Youth Act: the relationship between its policy design and the goal achievement in the local context**

by

**Leanne Baptist**

S2284448

l.baptist@student.utwente.nl

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Supervisors:

Dr Veronica Junjan, University of Twente

Dr Pieter-Jan Klok, University of Twente

# Abstract

The Dutch Youth Act was decentralised in 2015, whereby the responsibility was shifted from the national government to the municipalities. The new Youth Act established goals concerning more focus on prevention and the self-reliance of the youngster and their social environment, strengthening the educational climate, customising youth care, an integrated approach with one financial system and freedom of action for professionals.

After more than five years of implementing the new Youth Act, the established results have not improved youth care. However, whilst evaluations concerning the Youth Act identify the issues related to the changes in the Youth act, it is unclear why these issues occur. Therefore, to better understand why the Youth Act does not lead to expected improvements, this study aims to study the relationship between the policy design in municipalities based on the Youth Act Goals and the achievement of these goals by answering the following question: To what extent are the goals of the Youth Act achieved through the local youth care policies in selected municipalities of the Netherlands between 2015 and 2019?

The relationship is studied by evaluating the policy design through a content analysis of 54 municipal policy documents of 2015 and goal achievement through data concerning youth care use in the same municipalities of 2015 and 2019. The results of both analyses are used to examine the relationship. The results showed the variables concerning policy design are specified by at least mentioning them in a majority of the municipalities, whereas for goal achievement two out of three related variables showed a positive trend. However, the expected relationship between the variables of policy design and their related variables concerning goal achievement were only partially visible for two expected relationships, whereas the other four relationships were not visible.

These results suggest that the expected relationship between the policy design and goal achievement is not reflected in the results. Thus, the achievement of the goals cannot be explained by the policy design of the municipalities.

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# 1 Introduction

After the evaluation of the Youth Act in 2009, it became clear that a change was needed regarding the youth care system; besides various positive elements within the system, the negative elements were of such a nature that a radical change was necessary for improving the youth care system (Friele et al., 2018). Improvements regarding the youth care system from the national governments have always concerned with the same statements and wishes over the years, such as listening to clients, strengthening preventive youth policy and supporting the local level (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, 2021). This point of view also reflects the change of the Youth Act in 2015. In 2015 a Youth Act was established, whereby the youth care system is decentralised. The decentralisation shifted the responsibility for youth care from the national government to the municipalities (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). The new Youth Act aimed to transform the service provision in which it should connect more with the daily life of the youth and their parents, with more focus on prevention and should be organised simpler and cheaper. Municipalities are now administratively and financially responsible for all youth care (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013; Welling, 2018). The national government (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013) has set the following goals in the Youth Act, its policies and programs deriving from it:

- focus on prevention and the self-reliance of the youngster and their social environment;
- de-medicalise and normalise by strengthening the educational climate of the youngsters, such as families, schools, and other facilities;
- providing support suitable to the situation, to reduce the need for expensive special support;
- an integrated approach according to the principle "one family, one plan, one director", by changing the different budgets into one financial system, which ensures more cooperation between organisations and networks; and
- more opportunities for professionals to customise the support to the youngster's needs by reducing regulatory pressure and more use of the young person's social environment (freedom of action).

However, the decentralisation of youth care has led to many problems, according to The Healthcare and Youth Inspectorate and the Justice and Security Inspectorate (Dutch: De inspectie Gezondheidszorg en Jeugd en de inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid). After more than five years of implementing the new Youth Act, young people who need help the most still do not get the help they need and deserve. The new Youth Act promised better care, more suitable to the situation and the needs of the young people, and for a lower price. Also, it intends to make more use of the self-reliance of young people and their environment, but according to Kromhout, van Echtelt, and Feijten (2020), this all was wishful thinking (Ligtvoet, 2020).

According to Welling (2018), the transformation of youth care has not yet been realised. Access has been reorganised, but many clients do not know where to find the support they need and budgets run out by mid-year. The youth is central in policy documents, but their perspective is not yet leading in the (organisation of) service provision (Welling, 2018). Thus, the Youth Act does not result in the desired outcomes. In addition, Friele et al. (2018) conclude that several essential aspects do not yet result in the expected change. They state that it is still difficult for young people to access care, and there is still no reduction in the use of specialised youth care. Furthermore, the cooperation between youth care providers and the whole social domain has yet to be reached. Moreover, according to Kromhout et al. (2020), the decentralisation has not led to early provision of youth care, mainly due to the waiting lists for specific care. They also state, just as Friele et al., that there is no shift from specialised youth care to more light youth care and the use of light youth care does not reduce costs. Unlike Friele et al., Kromhout et al. (2020) conclude that appealing to one's self-reliance creates various problems. A more caring society is not easy to achieve, especially when the government is not actively addressing it. Both evaluations identify the issues concerning youth care related to the changes in the Youth act, however, it is unclear why this is the case. Policies may fail because the policy is not implemented as designed,

but the policy may be implemented and executed as designed but did not result in the desired outcome (Patton, Sawicki, & Clark, 2012). To better understand why the Youth Act does not lead to improvement, this study focuses on the argument that the design of the policies may explain the achieving or not achieving of the goals, which leads to the following research question:

**To what extent are the goals of the Youth Act achieved through the local youth care policies in selected municipalities of the Netherlands between 2015 and 2019?**

In order to answer the research question, a distinction is made using sub-questions. With the first question:

1. *What are the core objectives of the Youth Act?* The context of the study is described. This question helps understand how the Youth Act changes the youth care system and its reasoning. In addition, the analysis of the goals sets conditions for the rest of the analysis and the operationalisation of policy design and goal achievement.

Subsequently, the policy design regarding activities to the Youth Act goals is analysed with the following question:

2. *To what extent are the goals of the Youth Act specified in the selected municipal policies?* This describes the premise of the context on which this study is based.

Next, changes in youth care use are identified to observe and analyse trends with the following question:

3. *How did the use of youth care change in the selected municipalities between 2015 and 2019?*

Lastly, based on the previous questions, the relationship between the policy design and goal achievement is explained to answer the question:

4. *To what extent can the specific goals in the municipal policies explain the variation in the achievement of the Youth Act goals in the selected municipalities?*

The evaluation studies of Friele et al. (2018) and Kromhout et al. (2020) regarding the Youth Act focused on analysing its goals and its effect in practice. However, these studies conclude what components of the Youth Act are not working, but little is said about why these components are not working. In addition, because the Youth Act is extensive and complex, and these studies examine the Youth Act as a whole, little specific feedback is given (Friele et al., 2018; Kromhout et al., 2020). Therefore, the proposed research covers a research gap in which the focus is more on a single part of the Youth Act with more detailed information concerning its ability to make the Youth Act work or not. In addition, the theory-practice challenge is expected in policy research. However, various variables are stated within this research that may influence the policy outcomes, but there is no theoretical consensus concerning these variables. In addition, little information is given to practitioners that may help improve the policy design. Thus, the link between policy intent and policy action is evident; however, the knowledge necessary to explain and predict the gap is lacking (O'toole Jr, 2004). This study fills this gap. This shows the scientific relevance of this study. Moreover, the Youth Act is in place to ensure that all young people can grow up healthy and safe with all opportunities possible (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, n.d.), which shows the social relevance of this study. Therefore, studying this part of the Youth Act and its functioning helps improve the youth care system and thus the purpose of the Youth Act.

This paper first elaborates on the theoretical concepts in chapter two, concluding with the conceptual framework. Next, the framework is operationalised, and the data collection and analysis methods are explained in chapter three. Then, chapter four presents the results of the data analysis, and finally, chapter five concludes this paper by answering the research question.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This research aims to study if and how the policy design of the Youth Act goals in local policies explains the outcomes regarding these goals. In this chapter, existing literature introduces and discusses the theoretical concepts of this study and provides a better understanding of these concepts. Thus, first, literature is represented to better understand the policy process's theoretical approach. Next, the concepts of policy formulation and decision-making, policy implementation and goal achievement are explained. Finally, this chapter concludes with the conceptual framework and hypotheses used for the latter of this study.

### 2.1 *The Policy Process*

Studying public policy is complex and difficult to frame into specific theory (Peters & Pierre, 2006). Despite its difficulties and limitations, the policy cycle is a frequently used framework to organise and systematise public policy research, similar to the cognitive steps of the rational model of decision making. The first stage is agenda-setting, which entails recognising a social problem and is put on the agenda to consider public action (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). In a society, there are numerous issues that citizens consider important to bring to the attention of the government, however, only a small proportion is taken into consideration by the government (Wu, Ramesh, Howlett, & Fritzen, 2017). The agenda-setting process concerns structuring strategies that may help solve the problem and instruments that help shape the development of a policy and the other stages of the process. This results in the policy formulation stage, in which these strategies and instruments are transformed into government programs. The government describes the policy's objectives in this program and considers different action alternatives. The final adoption, which entails the formal stage in which a policy is taken, is the decision-making stage. When the program is straightforward, it will be implemented. The responsible institutions and organisations are carrying out the program as they interpret how it should be. This stage is critical since political and administrative action is interpreted and implemented, often not aligned with the intentions. The last step entails evaluation and termination. In this stage, the intended outcomes of policies are compared with the actual situation. This could lead to a termination of the policy or its redesign based on the problem perception and agenda-setting. However, evaluation is not only associated with the final stage of the cycle but also forms a separate discipline that focuses on the intended results and unintended consequences of policies. Evaluation is not restricted to a particular stage of the policy cycle but can be applied to the whole policy-making process (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). In what order the stages occur and to what extent they are connected varies in every case (Wu et al., 2017).

This policy cycle framework focuses on generic features of the policy process instead of specific actors or institutions, highlighting the policy domain's significance. (Peters & Pierre, 2006). However, the policy cycle is seldom studied as a whole but often focused on a particular stage of the policy process because the academic debates are most often related to particular stages of the policy process instead of the whole cycle. In addition, the framework enhanced the development of different disciplines, separating research communities that follow particular kinds of questions, analytical perspectives and methods (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). Thus, "the policy cycle framework has guided policy analysis to generic themes of policy-making and has offered a device to structure empirical material" (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 45).

By studying the different stages of the process, one can understand why policy looks the way it does. Decisions and actions shape actors' decisions in a particular stage at previous stages (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). Weiss (1972) shows this concept with her framework, showing the relationship between theory, implementation and performance of a policy or program. Weiss (1972) argues that when analysing the program outcome, it is only relevant when it is known that the program is well implemented. In addition,

when the implementation is sufficient, yet the program's desired results are not achieved, Weiss (1972) states that the program conceptualisation and design cannot generate the desired outcomes. Thus, each type of question concerning a specific policy cycle phase depends on the latter phase's meaning and decisions (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004).

Due to differences in each stage concerning academic debates and research, empirical studies often focus on one or a couple of stages from the policy cycle instead of the policy cycle as a whole. The literature shows that each stage is influenced by the previous and following stages. Therefore, the following literature focuses on different parts of the policy cycle.

## ***2.2 Policy Formulation and Decision-Making***

When deciding where to go, the agenda-setting stage, the following stage highlights how to get there, hence the formulation and decision-making stage (Hill, 2013). In the policy formulation stage, policymakers match policy goals and means (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2017), resulting in various alternatives to resolve the social problem (Sidney, 2007). Then, in the decision-making stage, the government decides which policy alternatives are expected to address the social problem and put it into action (Sidney, 2007; Wu et al., 2017).

In the formulation stage, when necessary, first, characteristics of the problem are identified since the issue can be subjective to time and context (Sidney, 2007; Turnpenny, Jordan, Benson, & Rayner, 2015). However, this could also be seen as an extension of the agenda-setting stage. After identifying the key characteristics, the nature and extent of these problems are identified to develop suitable solutions. Next, the objectives are specified and classified based on the collected information, assessing the specific policy options and recommendations for the policy design. The last step concerns the design regarding the determined objectives with various means to implement them (Turnpenny et al., 2015). The policy formulation and design process will lead to the decision-making of a set of policy instruments and components in the policy design (Howlett, 2019). The policy design consists of the policy objectives, the policy tools used to achieve these goals, and other relevant information for achieving the goals, such as target groups, agents, and implementation structure (Howlett, 2019; Sidney, 2007).

In this study, decentralisation is used as a means to achieve the objectives and solve the social problem, hence the input for the policy formulation and decision-making stage. Therefore, the following part goes into more detail concerning the theory behind decentralisation.

### ***2.2.1 Decentralisation***

Decentralisation is an ideological principle (Rondinelli, Nellis, & Cheema, 1984), used to improve service delivery performance that provides services that fit the local needs, often a response to government failure to deliver public goods and services (Kim, 2008). The concept of decentralisation does not have a general definition but fluctuates with the situation. Most generally, decentralisation entails the transition of political power and responsibility from the central level to the sub-national level of the government (De Vries, 2000; Ekpo, 2005; Kim, 2008; OECD, 2019). Four different analytical frameworks can be recognised for further defining decentralisation, the public administration approach, the local fiscal choice approach, the social capital approach, and the principal-agent approach (Mosca, 2006). This research focuses on the public administration approach.

The public administration approach divides decentralisation into different types, namely political, fiscal, market and administrative decentralisation. Political decentralisation aims for more influence on formulating and implementing policies for society representatives, often regional or local governments. In addition, fiscal decentralisation aims for the same goals as political decentralisation but focuses on financial responsibility for national, regional and/or local government. Administrative decentralisation allocates authority, responsibility, and financial resources to regional and/or local governments to better

public services (UNDP, 2007). Administrative decentralisation is divided into three forms: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution (Litvack & Seddon, 1999). Deconcentration concerns the redistribution of administrative responsibilities within the central government, whereas delegation is the redistribution to organisations that are not under the direct control of the central government. In addition, devolution concerns a redistribution of functions and authority from the central government to units of governments outside the direct control of the central government (Cheema & Rondinelli, 1983). Furthermore, market decentralisation is the most extensive form of decentralisation, with a total allocation of service delivery to a more competitive and privatisation system (UNDP, 2007). Market decentralisation may concern privatisation or deregulation. Privatisation can range from performing functions entirely independently by private organisations to a partnership between government and private organisations in a free market operation. Deregulation entails extending the market by reducing legal constraints on private organisations or allowing more competition between private organisations concerning service provision (Litvack & Seddon, 1999).

Choosing and implementing decentralisation within a government derives from assumptions and theoretical justifications (Robinson, 2007). These assumptions all lead to the general assumption regarding decentralisation: decentralisation may improve the effectiveness of public service delivery. Implementing these assumptions results in a practical system (Robinson, 2007; Rondinelli et al., 1984). The various settings in which decentralisation may be implemented can explain the variation in assumptions and theoretical justifications. The following assumptions frequently occur in the literature on decentralisation:

- **Decentralisation may improve the efficiency of the public service delivery**  
Decentralisation seems a financially attractive choice for the national government because decentralisation can shift the financial burden to a sub-national level. This can be explained by the fact that decentralisation reduces diseconomies of scale (De Vries, 2000; Mosca, 2006; Robinson, 2007).
- **Decentralisation may improve the government's responsiveness to the local needs**  
Sub-national level government should be more able to respond to the citizens' needs and preferences (Robinson, 2007). Due to this responsiveness, the service delivery corresponds better to the local conditions, is better adapted and is targeted to the local needs (Mosca, 2006), resulting in context-sensitive interventions (OECD, 2019). Furthermore, when the sub-national level government can allocate resources, they are able to tailor services to the places where it is necessary (Robinson, 2007).
- **Decentralisation may increase the participation of the citizens in the government**  
Sub-national level governments should be more open to feedback from service users and promote citizen participation (Kuhlmann & Wayenberg, 2016; OECD, 2019; Robinson, 2007).
- **Decentralisation may increase the accountability of public officials**  
Decentralisation promotes accountability of officials since citizens have more influence over and better access to the sub-national level government, which helps the citizens to hold them accountable (Ekpo, 2005; Kuhlmann & Wayenberg, 2016). In addition, decentralisation shifts the accountability chain from a top-down to a bottom-up relationship, which gives the citizens more power and the public officials more accountability (OECD, 2019).



- **Decentralisation may reduce the administrative burden concerning the public service delivery**

Since the sub-national level government is known to be responsible for the service delivery, the expectations are that indifferences regarding administration will be reduced for time and effectiveness. The administrative abilities and the ability to overcome red tape should be more significant on a sub-national level (De Vries, 2000).

However, studies show that decentralisation cannot be a means to improve the efficiency of service delivery (Mosca, 2006). Implementing decentralisation will not automatically lead to improvements in service provision, and the technical capacities of local governments may be inadequate, which can worsen the service provision (Robinson, 2007). In addition, task reallocation due to decentralisation does not explain performance differences between regions but rather the implementation of the reforms, the influence of the political situation, the variety of services and their qualities and the characteristics of the policy on the implementation (Ebinger & Richter, 2016; Kuhlmann & Wayenberg, 2016). Ghuman and Singh (2013) state that “the impact of decentralisation on public service delivery depends on the design of the decentralisation policy, problems confronted during implementation and adjustments made in the decentralisation model for accommodating the dissenting segments of stakeholders including employees and participatory governance.”

This study's context shows a policy formulated on a national level and executed on a local level. In this regard, literature shows that policies formulated at the national level can be associated with inconsistencies at a subnational level, which can be described as 'local universality'. Local universality describes tailoring policies to the local context and enacted within practices (Hudson, Hunter, & Peckham, 2019). However, a policy formulated by the national government is described to a certain standardisation to control the actions to a certain extent and make these actions comparable across time and space.

Policy formulation and decision-making describe how to improve the issues identified in the agenda-setting stage. The policy formulation concerns an overview of possible solutions to the social problem, applicable in different contexts, which leads to a policy design in which the most suitable solution is applied. Decentralisation is a principle used in the policy formulation and decision-making stage to guide the policy design. A decentralisation is implemented within a government to improve the effectiveness of the service provision and the frequently occurring assumptions shown in the literature. However, each type of decentralisation and subtype is performed differently; there are differences in intensity and the organisations and individuals involved. In addition, decentralisation is not a solitary goal but must be accommodated with the right resources for its implementation in practice, which is discussed further in the following paragraph.

### ***2.3 Policy Implementation***

Within the policy process, the content of the policy and its impact on the social problem may be substantially affected by the implementation stage (Hill & Hupe, 2002). A policy needs to be put into action to achieve its objectives, thus the implementation (Schofield, 2001). The implementation stage of the policy process represents the transformation of the policy idea or expectation into actions aimed at resolving the social problem (DeGroff & Cargo, 2009). Studying the implementation of a policy shows how the policy is put into effect and may show why the outcomes were or were not achieved. In addition, implementation studies help to connect politics and administration (DeGroff & Cargo, 2009; Schofield, 2001).

The studies regarding policy implementation show no evident method to study policy implementation but several approaches, concepts and methods (Rossi et al., 2004). The history of theory building regarding policy implementation shows that before this theory building, the process between policy formation and policy outcome was characterised as irrelevant, especially concerning the evaluation of policies (Hill & Hupe, 2002). The theory-building process can be divided into three phases. Studies in the first phase were characterised by a hierarchical, top-down understanding of governance. The outcomes were often pessimistic due to several case studies that show implementation failure (Pülzl & Treib, 2007). The top-down approach studies how officials and target groups implement the policy concerning the goals embodied in the definitive decision (Brynard, 2005). Apart from the pessimism, the first phase achieved a general awareness among the community and the broader public regarding the importance of implementation. The second phase focused on theory building with various theoretical frameworks and hypotheses. This phase also indicated the top-down and bottom-up debate (Pülzl & Treib, 2007). Whereas the bottom-up approach sees the decision-makers as the main actors in the policy process, the bottom-up approach emphasises the service deliverers and target group (Brynard, 2005). The last phase of implementation research tried to close the gap between the two approaches by combining elements of both approaches and other theoretical models. In addition, the third phase was more focused on the scientific part of implementation research in comparison to the other two phases, focusing on specifying hypotheses, operationalisations and empirical observations and relinquishing the normative aspects of the controversy of the top-down and bottom-up approaches (Pülzl & Treib, 2007).

Although the literature shows several ways to implement a policy concept, the process remains complex (Rossi et al., 2004). The process from policy to action and implementation coincide with various political, social, economic, organisational, and attitudinal factors that influence the implementation process (Khan, 2016; Schofield, 2001). Thus, implementing a policy is highly dependent on the local context; an intervention may be successful in one location, but it does not guarantee success elsewhere (Hudson et al., 2019). This may result in a difference in how the program is intended and actually implemented (Rossi et al., 2004). Therefore, when studying implementation, it is not only describing the implementation as such but also whether the implementation can be assessed as satisfied.

However, implementing a policy on a local level becomes more complicated when there are no clear objectives. It is unclear how to achieve the objectives, and there are no clear resources to fund them (Sausman, Oborn, & Barrett, 2016). As stated, not only does the policy's completeness matter to the implementation process, but also the context in which the policy is implemented, which results in multiple possible causes and potential solutions that vary in place and time according to the local context (Hudson et al., 2019).

Implementation studies show that there is no obvious way of implementation; rather, it depends on the context in which the implementation takes place. The phases of implementation studies show that combining the top-down, bottom-up and other theoretical approaches is possible to create the best way to study implementation. In addition, the literature also shows that the implementation process seems straightforward; however, it is highly influenced by the local context in which the implementation takes place. Therefore, studying implementation concerns the level of satisfaction rather than the intention of the implementation. This means that studying implementation requires specific criteria that examine the satisfaction of the implementation. State the requirements of satisfaction; it must be clear what is expected from the implementation.

## ***2.4 Goal Achievement of a Policy***

Policy evaluation concerns two components: policy and evaluation. A policy is an effort to achieve certain goals with certain means and certain time choices, and evaluation involves the assessment of a certain situation based on a set of criteria. Thus, policy evaluation can assess a policy's perceived content, processes, or effects based on certain criteria (Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1991).

With policy evaluation, the main focus concerns the extent to which the policy has led to the observed change, which can be explained by the degree of goal achievement, effectiveness or efficiency (Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1995). The degree of goal achievement refers to the degree to which specific goals are achieved. Moreover, effectiveness concerns the relationship between (a specific part of) the policy and the goal achievement. The difference is that goal achievement focuses on the achievement of the policy goals, whilst effectiveness focuses on to what extent a policy contributes to achieving that specific goal (Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1991). In addition, with efficiency, one studies the relationship between (a specific part of) the policy and particular costs and benefits (Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1995).

When studying the extent to which a policy has been the cause of specific changes, it presupposes a causal relationship between the policy and its consequences. When studying causality, the relationship must be based on a theory that assumes the causal relationship (Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1991). However, the policy itself is also implicitly or explicitly based on assumptions of a causal relationship. These assumptions are also referred to as the policy theory. Thus, in addition to scientific theories, policy theory from policy practice can also be used for evaluation. The policy theory is based on assumptions mentioned in written or oral arguments for a particular policy. It concerns assumptions regarding relations between phenomena. The relationship to which the assumptions in a policy theory relate to three possible relationships. Final relations refer to a relationship between goals and means, causal relations concern relations between causes and effects, and normative relations regard relations between principles and norms or between existing and expected situations (Bressers & Hoogerwerf, 1995).

For policy evaluation, first, the degree to which the intended goals have been achieved is studied. Second, the evaluation examines whether the observed effects are (causally) related to the policy or related programs (Vedung, 1997; Wollmann, 2007). In this case, first, the goals are identified, their actual meaning and possible rank order are established, and the goals are translated into measurable objectives. Then it is determined whether the goals have been realised in practice and whether the policy has led to the realisation of the goals (Vedung, 1997).

In addition, the decentralisation and implementation of a policy influence the approach to goal achievement. A centralised or decentralised policy affects the specific conditions to address a problem and the specific impacts. A centralised policy, such as a public pension policy, has a clear structure for policy instruments. The potential beneficiaries will receive a clearly defined provision from a centralised delivery system. However, for a decentralised policy, which is often the case for social services, there is a specific policy objective linked to an individual. This individual's involvement is key to problem-solving and achieving the policy objective (Heinelt, 2007). The policy implementation, especially the top-down and bottom-up dilemmas, differ in their perception of goal achievement. The top-down approach states a linear relationship between the policy goals and their implementation, which means that implementation regards establishing procedures to execute the policy accurately and adequately to achieve the goals. However, the bottom-up approach state that political outcomes did not always relate to the policy objectives, hence a questionable causal link between the policy objectives and implementation. Instead of focusing on implementing the policy objective, this approach argues for studying the actual causes that influence action order then only the policy objectives. Instead of sticking to the objectives set at the central level, the bottom-up approach argues for flexibility at the local level to adapt to the local needs (Pülzl & Treib, 2007).

Goal achievement of a policy is part of policy evaluation and concerns the degree to which specific goals are achieved, which presupposes a causal relationship between the policy and the observed changes. The assumption of this causal relationship can be based on scientific theories and/or policy theory. The relationship between the goal and its consequences can represent different relationships. The literature regarding policy implementation already shows the combination of the top-down and bottom-up approaches, which is applicable for goal achievement. Policy goals are defined from a top-down approach, but their consequences depend on the local context, which argues for a bottom-up approach. By analysing the goal achievement, it is sensible to consider the policy's intentions, hence the policy theory, and the influence of the local context.

## ***2.5 Conceptual Framework***

The policy cycle is a framework to organise and systemise public policy research; however not often used as a whole but instead focus on one or a couple of stages. This study focuses on the relationship between policy formulation and goal achievement in the policy evaluation stage.

The policy formulation is based on the theory concerning decentralisation. The decentralisation of the Youth Act can be identified as an administrative decentralisation, in which authorities, responsibilities and financial resources for public services are redistributed between different levels of government. Furthermore, this decentralisation can be further specified as a devolution since the local governments became executors of social policy in this context. The theory concerning decentralisation shows that the assumptions argue for a positive relationship between decentralisation as a reform and improving public service delivery. However, simultaneously, the theory also shows that decentralisation in and of itself does not guarantee this positive relationship but is influenced by time and context, as mentioned in the policy formulation literature.

The context of this study shows that the national government of the Netherlands tried to enhance the combination of a top-down and bottom-up approach. Therefore, whilst they still have the primary authority in hand and prescribed the objectives of the Youth Act, the municipalities have the freedom to interpret the objectives as they see fit to the citizens of their municipality, hence a local universality. Looking at the policy cycle, this means that the national government performs the agenda-setting stage. However, national and local governments perform the policy formulation and decision-making stage: the national government prescribes broad policy objectives and outcomes, whereas the local governments specify these objectives into activities to achieve the objectives specified on the local characteristics. This shows that the idea of a 'one size fits all' approach has been abandoned, however, the objectives stated by the national government still drive the youth care system.

Policy evaluation is measured by policy goal achievement. In terms of measuring, goal achievement is whether a goal is achieved locally. However, the policy design of local governments may affect the achievement of policy goals. Therefore, the study additionally studies whether the policy design affects the achievement of the goals in the local context. Thus, this study focuses on the relationship between goals and means, in which the mean is the policy design of the local governments. In order to study the local policy design and goal achievement, the policy theory concerning the national policy is used.

Figure one shows the conceptual framework of the specification of the policy design and the achievement of the policy goals. Policy design is specified by the first three policy goals of the Youth Act, which concerns activities regarding prevention, the self-reliance of the youngster and their family, strengthening the educational climate and more customised youth care. Each of these goals is in place to improve youth care. Thus, the achievement of the policy goals is specified by outputs that ought to be achieved by the policy goals, hence instruments or activities. Furthermore, the variables of policy design relate to one or more of the variables concerning goal achievement. Therefore, it is assumed that

a higher specificity of a variable in the policy design positively affects the achievement of related variables regarding that goal.

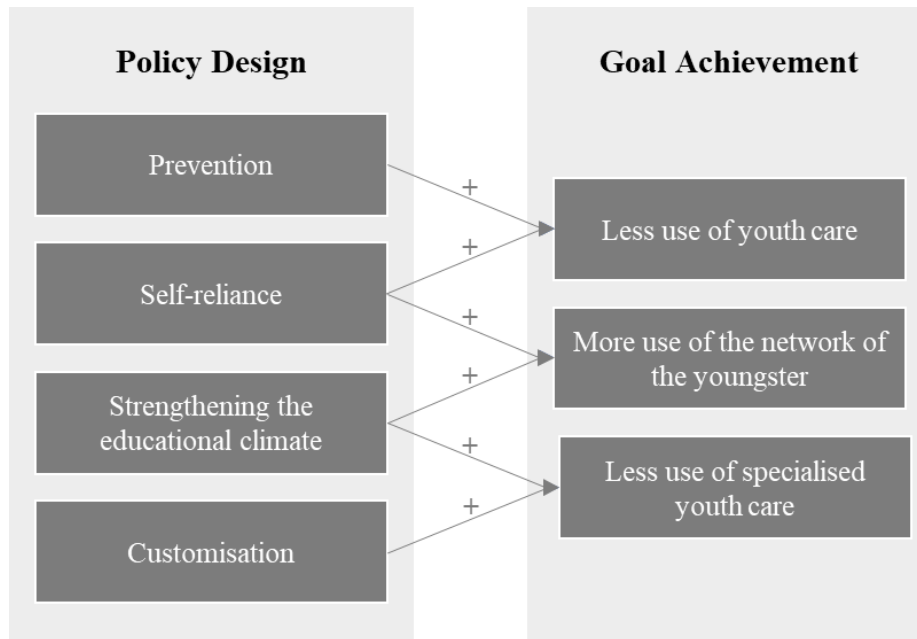


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## 2.6 Expectations

As figure one indicates, this study focuses on the relationship between the goals and their achievement. The expectations of this study, therefore, also concern the policy goals. The first three goals are the focus of this study: prevention, self-reliance of the youngster and their social environment, strengthening the educational climate and customisation of youth care. In addition, these goals aim to decrease the use of youth care, increase the use of the youngster's network for youth care, and decrease the use of specialised youth care. First of all, there are some expectations regarding the policy design, which focus on the influence of the location and size of the municipality. Secondly, goal achievement can be explained by the policy theory's expectations related to the change in youth care use. Lastly, the relationship between both concepts can be explained by the expectations of the influence of a variable from policy design on a variable from goal achievement. These expectations refer to the level of specificity of activities concerning the policy goals in the municipal policies and their effect on achieving the goals.

### 2.6.1 Expectations Regarding Policy Design

The policy theory describes that municipalities must provide a quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient youth care system. The quantitative part of the youth care system may be influenced by the size and location of the municipality. Therefore, the following expectations concern the influence of the location and size of the municipality on the specificity of the variables concerning the policy design.

- E1 Municipalities located in urban regions have a higher specificity rate for the variables regarding policy design than municipalities located in rural regions.
- E2 Large municipalities have a higher specificity rate for the variables regarding policy design than small and medium-sized municipalities.

- E3 Medium-sized municipalities have a higher specificity rate for the variables regarding policy design than small municipalities.

### *2.6.2 Expectations Regarding Goal Achievement*

Policy theory outlines expectations concerning the change in youth care use based on the goals. The introduction of the policy goals is expected to change certain types of youth care use, hence the following expectations.

- E4 The proportion of young people receiving youth care in comparison to all young people in the municipality is decreased between 2015 and 2019
- E5 The proportion of young people receiving youth care taking place in their network in comparison to the total light youth care is increased between 2015 and 2019
- E6 The proportion of young people receiving specialised youth care in comparison to light youth care is decreased between 2015 and 2019

### *2.6.3 Expectations Regarding the Relationship Between Policy Design and Goal Achievement*

The policy theory describes policy goals that should lead to specific outcomes in the use of youth care. Therefore, a relationship can be visualised between the variables of the policy design and the change in youth care use, hence the achievement of the policy goals. The following expectations describe the relationship between the variables of the policy design and goal achievement.

- E7 In municipalities with a higher specificity of prevention in their policy design, the use of youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity.
- E8 In municipalities with a higher specificity of self-reliance in their policy design, the use of youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity.
- E9 In municipalities with a higher specificity of self-reliance policy design, youth care is performed more in the network of the youngster than in municipalities with a lower specificity.
- E10 In municipalities with a higher specificity of strengthening the educational climate in their policy design, youth care is performed more in the network of the youngster than in municipalities with a lower specificity.
- E11 In municipalities with a higher specificity of strengthening the educational climate in their policy design, the use of specialised youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity.
- E12 In municipalities with a higher specificity of customisation in their policy design, the use of specialised youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity.

## 3 Methods

The following chapter describes the methodology of this study. First, the choices of research design are elaborated. Next, the sample selection is explained, and the variables are conceptualised and operationalised. The chapter finishes with an explanation of how the data is collected and analysed in order to answer the research question.

### 3.1 *Research Design*

This study is interested in the relationship between the policy design and goal achievement regarding the Youth Act goals. A quantitative study was conducted to determine whether and to what extent this relationship occurred. The design is an evaluation study that evaluates a social reform's impact. Evaluation research is more of a purpose than a specific method; thus, many methods can be used for it (Babbie, 2016). Several steps are taken to analyse theoretical constructs to answer the research question. First, the policy theory concerning the Youth Act is established; secondly, the policy design and goal achievement of the Youth Act goals are analysed separately to test the relationship between the policy design and goal achievement in the last step.

The study focused on the period from 2015 to 2019. In 2014 the legislative proposal of the Youth Act was approved and came into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013). Therefore, 2015 is the starting point of the new youth care system. To properly carry out a policy evaluation, it is usually advised to evaluate a policy after ten years to determine its effectiveness (Rossi et al., 2004). However, since the amendment of the Youth Act only took place in 2015, the choice was made for the intermediate step of five years. In addition, the reason for not including 2020 in this research is due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this pandemic, 2020 is not representative of the use of youth care, which could influence the results of this study. Therefore, this study focuses on 2019 to conclude the evaluation regarding the Youth Act.

The units of analysis of this study are the Dutch municipalities since they became the main responsible body of the government for the design, implementation and execution of the Youth Act. In order to state the extent of the relationship between the policy design and goal achievement of the Youth Act Goals, both aspects were analysed separately, respectively sub-questions two and three, to conduct the proper information to analyse the relationship, sub-question four. The policy design of the Youth Act Goals is studied through a content analysis of the municipal policy documents, whereby the specificity of the variables are rated, and the goal achievement is determined by a before-and-after comparison between 2015 and 2019 concerning youth care use in the municipality.

### 3.2 *Sample*

The units of analysis of this study are the Dutch municipalities. Between 2015 and 2019, there have been some changes in the division of municipalities. There were 393 municipalities in 2015, however, there were only 355 in 2019. When a municipality changes, the conditions they must consider concerning youth care also change. Therefore, the municipalities that change between 2015 and 2019 are excluded, which results in 335 municipalities remaining for the analysis. In order to have a sample that is as representative as possible for the Netherlands, the municipalities are divided into groups by size and province. The municipalities categorised by size are shown in Table 1, whereas the biggest municipalities (municipalities with more than 150.000 inhabitants) are excluded due to complex dynamics within these municipalities. In addition, The Netherlands is divided into many small municipalities; therefore, the categories for the smaller municipalities have a smaller range than the larger ones.

Table 1. Division of municipalities by size

Categories	Population	Municipalities
<b>Small municipalities</b>	Less than 25.000 inhabitants	129
<b>Medium municipalities</b>	Between 25.000 and 50.000 inhabitants	132
<b>Large municipalities</b>	Between 50.000 and 150.000 inhabitants	57
<b>Excluded municipalities</b>	More than 150.000 inhabitants	16

Friele et al. (2018) selected their sample of municipalities for policy evaluation based on their size, the availability of care facilities, the distribution across the Netherlands and the number of risk factors in the municipalities for a proportional distribution with a total of nine municipalities. For this study, the large municipalities are excluded due to their complexity. Furthermore, factors other than the number of inhabitants are not included in the sample selection since these might explain variation in results.

Policy documents of the municipalities were used to determine the specificity rate of the variables concerning policy design. Several criteria determined the inclusion of municipalities within the content analysis. Reasons for excluding the municipality based on their policy documents were:

- The municipality had only adopted an ordinance and policy rules, not a specific policy document.
- The policy was conducted together with other municipalities, with the consequence that the policy is not only adapted to the needs of a specific municipality.
- The municipality has made the policy together with other laws, such as the Social Support Act and the social domain, whereby no distinction was made between the laws, with the consequence that the information of the Youth Act could not be separated from the others.
- The correct documents were not found, there was no response in time, or the municipality did not want to cooperate for other reasons.

With these exclusions, 89 municipalities are left, of which 32 are small municipalities, 30 medium, and 27 large municipalities. In order to have a sample that is as representative as possible for the Netherlands, two municipalities per province have been added per category. However, not every province has two valid municipal policy documents, which resulted in fifteen small, sixteen medium and eighteen large municipalities. Therefore, the small and medium-sized categories have been supplemented to eighteen. The provinces in which there are not yet six (two of each category) municipalities included in the sample are chosen for the sample, which resulted in an extra medium municipality for Drenthe and an extra small municipality for Noord-Holland and Utrecht. Subsequently, the small and medium categories both needed the addition of one municipality. The population are the largest in Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland (CBS, 2021). Therefore, the categories have been supplemented with one municipality from each province. Appendix A shows the distribution of the samples in each province. In addition, for policy design one of the hypotheses refers to the municipality's location. Location is divided by rural and urban regions, in which urban regions are the provinces of Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland, Utrecht and the lower part of Flevoland, and the rural regions are the remained provinces.

### 3.3 Conceptualisation and Operationalisation

The conceptualisation of policy design and goal achievement was based on the Youth Act's policy theory. The focus of this study is on the first three Youth Act goals, which are:

- prevention and more reliance on the responsibility and possibilities (self-reliance) of youngsters and their parents, with the cooperation of their social environment;
- de-medicalise, unburden and normalise support by strengthening the educational climate of the social environment of youngsters, such as families, schools, and other facilities; and



- providing youth care more suitable and customised to the situation earlier reduces the need for expensive specialised youth care.

Each goal results in the variables measured for policy design and goal achievement. For policy design, each goal can be translated into a variable to what extent the goals are specified in the municipal policies. This results in the following variables:

- Prevention
- Self-reliance
- Educational Climate
- Customisation

Each variable follows a standardisation of the policy goals to determine the specificity in the policy design, whereas level zero means that the variable is not explicitly mentioned in the policy document, level one implies that the variable is mentioned in the policy document, however, there are no activities described to implement the variable and level two means that in the policy document municipalities describe how to implement the variable with activities. Based on the content analysis, the specificity of each goal within a policy is determined. The analysis shows how specified municipal policy is regarding the Youth Act goals.

Each goal regarding youth care use can be translated into outputs to which the goals lead, hence goal achievement. These outputs result in the following variables for goal achievement:

- Total youth care use
  - The proportion of young people receiving youth care in comparison to all young people in the municipality is decreased between 2015 and 2019
- Youth care performed in the network of the youngster
  - The proportion of young people receiving youth care performed in their network in comparison to the total light youth care is increased between 2015 and 2019
- Specialised youth care
  - The proportion of young people receiving specialised youth care in comparison to light youth care is decreased between 2015 and 2019

Goal achievement is measured through data from 2015 and 2019 concerning youth care use within a municipality. The data concerning youth care use is retrieved from Statistics Netherlands. Each policy goal is represented with a change measured through this data. First, the total amount of youth care is measured using the classification 'total youth care' (Dutch: totaal jeugdzorg in natura). This classification excludes a specific financial resource provided through the Social Insurance Bank. This is chosen because this financial resource is also excluded in the classification of the other policy goals. Next, the amount of youth care performed in the network of the youngster is measured through the classification 'Youth help in the youngsters' network' (Dutch: jeugdhulp in het netwerk van de jongere), and for the total light youth care, the classification of 'Total youth care without accommodation' is used (Dutch: totaal jeugdhulp zonder verblijf). Lastly, the specialised youth care is measured by adding 'total youth care with residence', 'total youth protection' and 'total youth rehabilitation' (Dutch: totaal jeugdhulp met verblijf, totaal jeugdbescherming en totaal jeugdreclassering). Each measurement is compared between 2015 and 2019. In addition, some measurements are compared to other measurements: the youth care performed in the network of the youngster is a subcategory of light youth care. Analysing the change between these two measurements shows whether the youth care performed in the network of the youngster has changed differently from the total amount of light youth care. In addition, comparing the total amount of specialised youth care to the total amount of light youth care shows whether one or the other has changed differently in comparison to the other. With these measurements, it can be stated whether the policy goals are achieved.

### ***3.4 Data Collection***

Different data sources are used in order to answer the research questions. The policy theory is based on written and oral arguments concerning the policy. For this study, the Youth Act, the Explanatory Memorandum to the Youth Act, and both evaluations regarding the Youth Act are used to establish the policy theory. In addition, policy design is measured through the policy documents of municipalities regarding their youth care policy of 2015 and goal achievement is measured through data retrieved from Statistics Netherlands concerning youth care use in 2015 and 2019. This means that all the data is collected through secondary sources.

### ***3.5 Data Analysis***

After collecting the data, each source is used for the analysis. The policy theory sets the criteria for analysing the policy design and goal achievement. The collected policy documents are read and coded based on the policy goals to measure the variables for policy design. The latent content of the policy documents is used to evaluate the content quantitatively. Each variable has its keywords which are searched for in each document using the program ATLAS.ti. Next, each quote is examined on relevance to state the level of specificity, which includes whether the quote concerns specifics on the youth care system of that municipality and is not a repetition of the Youth Act in general and if it can be coded at a different level than previous coded quotes for that variable. When the section is relevant, the specificity of that section is rated. Based on the assessment of the various quotes, a general rate is given for the specificity of each goal per municipality. Concerning the reliability, for each policy document, the same keywords are researched and coded for each document, ensuring consistency. However, as a consequence, a specific relevant quote might have been excluded if municipalities used different words to indicate the relevant variables. In addition, a random sample of five policy documents is coded twice to ensure consistency in the coding. However, the re-coding is done by the same person as the first coding, which could influence the reliability.

Goal achievement is analysed by comparing the data of 2015 and 2019 concerning youth care use in each municipality. The data were analysed using the statistical software SPSS. Descriptive statistics are used to analyse the change in youth care use. Each variable represents a proportion of one type of youth care in comparison to another type of youth care. Therefore, the proportions are grouped per five per cent. A comparison is made in a cross-tabulation with the results of 2015 as the independent variable and 2019 as the dependent variable. Each variable expects different results, visualised with colours, whereas green shows a positive result and red indicates negative results. Since most variables use the same categories for their percentages, there is an overlap, which is indicated with yellow, which refers to the results of both years falling into the same category.

The relationship between the variables of policy design and goal achievement is analysed by comparing the results of both concepts. Each hypothesis is transformed into a cross-tabulation with the two relevant variables of both concepts. The sample size of this study consists of only a small part of the population, so in order to analyse the relationships, the results have been converted to ordinal variables. As a result, a cross-tabulation was created using the SPSS software to visualise the relationship between two variables with the ordinal scales.

## 4 Results

The overall goal of this study was to study whether the policy design of Youth Act goals in municipalities can explain the achievement of these goals. The context concerns the policy theory regarding the Dutch Youth Act, whereas the measurements for the policy design and achievement of its goals are based on this theory. Therefore, in the first paragraph, the policy theory is explained. Then, the policy design regarding the goals is analysed in the selected municipalities in the second paragraph. The third paragraph highlights the changes in youth care use over time in the selected municipalities, hence the goal achievement. Finally, the last paragraph shows the results that analyse the relationship between the policy design and goal achievement in the selected municipalities in order to answer the research question.

### 4.1 Policy Theory

The 2009 youth system shows many shortcomings concluded by the parliamentary working group regarding the future exploration of youth care (Heijnen & Teunissen, 2010) and the evaluation of the Youth Care Act (Baecke et al., 2009). The way in which youth care was organised and operated had to undergo a substantial change. Based on these sources, the main shortcomings of the system were:

- too much pressure on specialised youth care, whereby preventive and light care and the self-reliance of youngsters and their social environment are used insufficiently;
- lack of cooperation regarding care for youngsters and their families due to different systems;
- deviant behaviour is unnecessarily medicalised; and
- the cost-driven effect derived from these shortcomings (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

Based on the shortcomings of the old system, the government has proposed a bill for a new youth system, which aims for a youth system that is more simple, efficient and effective. The policy theory of the Youth Act is based on strengthening the youngsters' self-reliance and the caring and problem-solving capacity of their social environment (Rutte & Samsom, 2012). To achieve this, the following transformation goals have been formulated:

- prevention and more reliance on the responsibility and possibilities (self-reliance) of youngsters and their parents, with the cooperation of their social environment;
- de-medicalise, unburden and normalise support by strengthening the educational climate of the social environment of youngsters, such as families, schools, and other facilities;
- providing youth care more suitable and customised to the situation earlier in order to reduce the need for expensive specialised youth care;
- more coherence by integrating the principle "one family, one plan, one director", by changing the different budgets into one financial system, which ensures more cooperation between organisations and networks; and
- more autonomy for professionals so that they are able to customise the support to the needs of the youngster by reducing regulatory pressure and more use of the social environment of the youngster (freedom of action). (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013; van Yperen, Wijnen, & Hageraats, 2016).

The policy theory presupposes that by decentralising all the youth care to municipalities, administrative and financial preconditions are set as an incentive to invest in prevention and light youth care, which will reduce the need for specialised and forced youth care. The ultimate aim of the bill is to strengthen the youngsters' self-reliance and the caring and problem-solving capacity of their family and social environment (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013) in order to enable the youngster to grow up healthy and safe, to grow up towards independence and to be sufficiently self-reliant and to participate in the society. To achieve this, youth care must be aimed at reducing, stabilizing, treating and eliminating or

dealing with the consequences of psychological and psychosocial problems, behavioural problems or an intellectual disability (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January). The principles of the new youth system are reflected in the Youth Act goals (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

The policy theory prescribes that the municipalities work out a plan periodically for prevention, youth care, child protection and youth rehabilitation. This plan shows the municipality's vision and objectives regarding youth care, which directs the municipal decision-making process. It does not prescribe the outcome of the decision-making process, therefore, the municipality is free to organise the youth care as they see fit. Not the 'how' is prescribed, but the 'what'. This ensures that every municipality can shape their policy to the local needs, is able to customise help to youngsters and their social environment, and allow room for innovation (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

This study will focus on the first three goals since they are strongly interrelated in terms of content, whereas the fourth goal concerns multi-complex youth care, and the last goal regards the role of professionals. In light of this, the first three goals will be further explained.

#### *4.1.1 Prevention and Self-Reliance*

Prevention regarding the Youth Act concerns prevention-oriented support for youngsters with a risk for psychological problems and disorders, psychosocial problems, behavioural problems or an intellectual disability, or parents with a risk of parenting problems (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January). According to the policy theory, more prevention regarding accessible parental support should prevent the youngster and their parents from needing more expensive and specialised youth care later. In addition, preventive activities should include: information and advice, foreseeing problems, access to a range of youth care, light educational care and coordination of care (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

The policy theory states that parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children, and the government should only be involved when parents can no longer do so. Therefore, the new policy focuses on the self-reliance of youngsters and their parents. Suppose parents have insufficient parenting capacities to deal with issues regarding (the upbringing of) their children. In that case, youth care should provide the parents with tools that help them strengthen their parenting skills. Furthermore, restoring and strengthening the problem-solving capacity of youngsters, their parents, and their social environment helps them solve their problems themselves or indicate what help is needed (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

The Youth Act prescribes elements that should be included in the municipal policies regarding youth care. Article 2.1 component A concerns the implementation of prevention and early identification of issues concerning growing up, parenting, psychological problems and disorders (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January). This section concerns activities that should ensure that problems are prevented or mitigated for youngsters and their parents (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013). In addition, Component C regards advancing the parenting skills of parents and the social environment in order to enable parents as much as possible to take responsibility for the upbringing of their children themselves, and component D refers to deploying, restoring and strengthening the problem-solving capacity (self-reliance) of youngsters, their parents and social environment (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January). The policy theory suggests that there should be a demand-oriented attitude within youth care activities, based on the self-reliance of youngsters and their parents, whereby they maintain the responsibility as much as possible. Moreover, activities are needed that offer help and advice to parents in an accessible way to support this responsibility (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

### *4.1.2 Strengthening the Educational Climate*

According to the policy theory, a good approach from the start can prevent problems in the long run. By strengthening the educational climate, the Youth Act provides a system in which de-medicalisation, unburdening and normalisation are central. A social environment that is a positive environment to grow up in, with good basic facilities and encouragement for sport, play and talent development, should prevent the need for specialised youth care. The expertise of professionals in districts, neighbourhoods, schools, day-care and families regarding the welfare of youngsters in the social environment influences this (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013). Therefore the Youth Act prescribes in article 2.1 component B that municipalities should include activities focusing on strengthening the educational climate of the social environment of youngsters in their policy (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January).

### *4.1.3 Customised Care*

Providing customised care contributes to all the previous goals. With customised care, prevention can be used where necessary and in a way that suits the situation and the self-reliance of youngsters and parents and the possibilities within the youngsters' environment are considered as much as possible when providing care (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013). The policy theory also prescribes in article 2.3 component 4 that youth care must take into account the needs and personal characteristics of the youngster and their parents and the religious, personal beliefs and cultural background of the youngster and their parents (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January).

The municipalities must provide a quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient youth care system to fulfil the tasks prescribed in the former. Quantitative sufficient regard a youth care system in which all types of youth care are offered at all times. The need for a particular type of youth care differs from case to case, which results in a different range of services in every municipality. The youth care system must be able to provide the common forms of help and the more specialised, less common forms of help. The policy theory describes that municipalities can cooperate in some areas, most often the specialised youth care, especially for small municipalities where specialised youth care is expected to be less commonly needed. Due to the small demand for specialised youth care, the costs may take up a large part of the budget for small municipalities, hence the collaboration. Qualitatively adequate youth care implies that the youth care in the municipalities meets the requirements set for the youth care in the policy theory (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

To conclude, it can be seen that each goal is described at a high level of abstraction in order to give municipalities the policy freedom to write their policy specified to the local situation and based on the possibilities and the needs of individual youngsters and their parents (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013).

## *4.2 Policy Design*

The second sub-question recalls: *To what extent are the goals of the Youth Act specified in the selected municipal policies?* In order to answer this sub-question, the paragraph shows the results of the specification of the variables concerning policy design, which are prevention, self-reliance, strengthening the educational climate and customisation. First, each variable, its measurements, and the analysis results are explained. In addition, concerning the policy design, expectations are formulated regarding the influence of the location and size of the municipality on the variables of policy design. Therefore, the results of each variable are compared by the location and size of the municipality in order to confirm or deny the expectations.

### 4.2.1 Prevention

The aim of transforming the Dutch youth care system is to focus more on prevention and the self-reliance of youngsters, parents, and their social environment. Regarding prevention, the policy theory concerns activities with the theme of growing up, parenting, psychological problems, and disorders to prevent problems from occurring in the longer term (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013). The content analysis has focused on the specificity of prevention, specifically regarding activities in the policy documents.

Three levels measure prevention: the variable is not explicitly mentioned in the policy document, the variable is mentioned in the policy document, however, no activities are specified concerning the implementation of the variable, or the variable is specified by activities concerning the implementation of the variable. The mean overall score on prevention in all municipalities is 1,57, whereas the most common score is 2,00. An example of this 2,00 level is: *"Targeted use of prevention by making a target group analysis of a certain area: what kind of help is needed and anticipate it flexibly."* This quote shows that the municipality is aware of the differences per area and actively focuses on identifying the needs in order to match the activities to them. In addition, various quotes with level two consist of a list of preventive activities in a municipality. Table 2 shows the frequency of each score, which shows that more than 50 per cent of the policy documents mentioned prevention activities. An example of a level one score for prevention is: *"Help focuses on exploiting opportunities and possibilities and prevents stigmatisation where possible. This translates into a strong emphasis on prevention."* In this quote, the policy document mentions a strong emphasis on prevention; however, it does not explain how they will emphasise prevention with activities.

Table 2. Scores policy design on prevention

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Not mentioned</b>	2	3,7
<b>Mentioned</b>	19	35,2
<b>Activities</b>	33	61,1
<b>Total</b>	54	100,0

For the comparison between types of regions, it is expected that in urban regions, the policy documents are more specified (E1). In addition, comparing the municipality size, it is expected that the large municipalities have the highest specificity rate (E2), and medium-size municipalities have a higher specificity rate than small municipalities (E3). A detailed overview of the distribution of the specificity of prevention for rural and urban regions and sizes is shown in Appendix A.

For prevention, in rural and urban regions, the category of specifying activities concerning prevention is the biggest. However, more urban municipalities (66,7%) have activities specified for prevention than municipalities in rural regions (57,6%). Simultaneously, the mentioned group is ten percentage points larger for rural regions than the urban regions. This suggests that the expectation (E1) is met since, for urban regions, the proportion of municipalities that specified prevention with activities is the largest. Compared to rural regions, the proportion of municipalities within the category mentioned is smaller. Analysing prevention based on the municipality size shows that the municipalities that do not mention prevention are both large. In addition, the biggest category for each size is activities, however, for small and medium-sized municipalities, the activities category has a larger proportion (66,7%) than for large municipalities (50,0%). The distribution between each category is equal for small and medium-sized municipalities. The results contradict the expectations, whereas the results for large municipalities are the least positive in comparison to the other sizes (E2), whereas small and medium-sized municipalities are more alike (E3).

### 4.2.2 Self-Reliance

Self-reliance refers to the problem-solving capacity of youngsters, their parents and their social environment. Therefore, the policy theory prescribes that focusing on activities that deploy, restore and strengthen self-reliance helps prevent problems in the longer term since youngsters, parents and the social environment are able to deal with issues (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January). Self-reliance is measured with the same levels as used for prevention: the variable is not explicitly mentioned in the policy document, the variable is mentioned in the policy document, however, no activities are specified concerning the implementation of the variable, or the variable is specified by activities concerning the implementation of the variable.

The mean score for the specification of self-reliance is 1,52, whereas the mode score is 2,00. Table 3 shows a similar distribution for self-reliance as for prevention; however, levels one and two are more similar than the results for prevention. In addition, whilst level two may be the largest group, the difference with level one is much smaller than with prevention. Furthermore, similarly to prevention, level zero hardly ever occurs. For example, a level one quote regarding self-reliance is: *"We use and strengthen the self-organising capacity, the strength and responsibility of children, young people, parents and families (by families we also mean significant others in the environment) in which positive parenting has a focal point. We base this on what people can do together with this support network."* For level two, the so-called *"self-reliance conference"* method is referred to by various municipalities.

Table 3. Scores policy design on self-reliance

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Not mentioned</b>	1	1,9
<b>Mentioned</b>	24	44,4
<b>Activities</b>	29	53,7
<b>Total</b>	54	100,0

The comparison between the regions is expected to show a more positive result for urban regions concerning the specification of self-reliance compared to rural regions (E1). Simultaneously, concerning the size of the municipality, it is expected that large municipalities show the most positive results (E2), and small municipalities have the least positive results compared to medium-sized municipalities (E3). A visual overview of the division of the levels between the location and the size is shown in Appendix C.

The level of specificity for self-reliance based on location shows that one municipality does not mention self-reliance, which is located in urban regions. Furthermore, the distribution between the mentioned and activities categories for urban regions is identical. On the other hand, the activities group is the largest group for rural regions, concluding that rural regions better specified self-reliance in their policy documents than municipalities in urban regions, hence a contraction of the expectation (E1). Comparing the specification of self-reliance based on the size of the municipality shows that the municipality that does not mention self-reliance is small. Moreover, the results for small and large municipalities have the same distribution between specificity categories, whereas the activities category has the majority. For medium-size municipalities, the mentioned group has the majority, therefore, it can be concluded that large municipalities do not have a better specificity rate since it is similar to small municipalities (E2) and medium-size municipalities show the least positive results (E3).

### 4.2.3 Educational Climate

The educational climate concerns the professionals in districts, neighbourhoods, schools, day-care and families, but also associations for children, such as sports or art. Strengthening their expertise regarding child care can influence the upbringing of the children (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013). The educational climate is measured through the same categories as prevention and self-reliance: the variable is not explicitly mentioned in the policy document the variable is mentioned in the policy document however, no activities are specified concerning the implementation of the variable, or the variable is specified by activities concerning the implementation of the variable.

The mean of the level of specificity for the educational climate is 1,17, which is considerably different from prevention and self-reliance, which were both around 1,50. However, the most common level for the educational climate is 2,00, just as for prevention and self-reliance. A level one of specificity can be with a quote similar to: *"We invest in strengthening and maintaining the current youth support structure and pedagogical civil society"*, whereas a level two quote may be similar to: *"A social educational environment cannot be directed from above. For that reason, the municipality wants to strengthen the social educational environment and not organize it. This can be strengthened and stimulated, for example, by giving space to initiatives initiated from the social educational environment or by providing an incentive, facilitating and/or financing"*. As Table 4 shows, the division between level zero and level one is more even than in prevention and self-reliance, and level two has a small majority.

Table 4. Scores policy design on the educational climate

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Not mentioned</b>	14	25,9
<b>Mentioned</b>	17	31,5
<b>Activities</b>	23	42,6
<b>Total</b>	54	100,0

The expected results regarding the policy design on educational climate are that urban regions have better specificity than rural regions when looking at the location of municipalities (E1) and that concerning the size of the municipality, small municipalities have the lowest level of specificity (E3), and large municipalities have the highest level of specificity (E2). The results concerning the educational climate specificity level based on location and per size are shown in Appendix D.

The results grouped on-location show that for rural regions, the not mentioned group (33,3%) is bigger than the mentioned category (27,3%) whilst the activities category has a slim majority (39,4%). For urban regions, the not mentioned category is much slimmer compared to the rural regions (14,3%), however, the activities category is the largest category for urban regions as well. Thus, it can be concluded that the urban regions have better specificity than rural regions, especially considering the not mentioned category, however, the differences between the other categories are slim, which shows that the expectation (E1) is in line with the results. The policy design on educational climate based on size indicates that for large municipalities, the activities category has a large majority (50,0%). On the other hand, the distribution between the categories is similar for the small and medium-sized municipalities. The smallest category for small and medium-sized municipalities is in the not mentioned category, however, for large municipalities, it is the mentioned category. In addition, the mentioned category has a slight majority for medium-size municipalities, whilst the mentioned and activities category are equal in size for small municipalities. Therefore, it can be concluded that the results partially correspond with the expectations since the large municipalities show the most positive distribution between the categories (E2), however, small and medium-sized categories have a similar distribution between the categories in comparison to large municipalities (E3).



#### 4.2.4 Customisation

Providing customised care contributes to prevention and self-reliance and strengthens the educational climate. (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2013). The policy theory also prescribes that municipalities need to take into account the needs and personal characteristics of the youngster and their parents and the religious and personal beliefs and cultural background of the youngster and their parents when providing care (Jeugdwet, 2015, 1 January). The same division is used for customisation as for the previous variables.

The same three levels measure customisation as the previous variables: the variable is not explicitly mentioned in the policy document, the variable is mentioned in the policy document, however, no activities are specified concerning the implementation of the variable, or the variable is specified by activities concerning the implementation of the variable. The average score for customisation is 1,09, and the most common score is 1,00. This level one score can be identified by a quote similar to: "*The demand in the youth care system concerns appropriate and targeted use of interventions, whereby the focus is on lighter, short-term and custom within the social context instead of possible, heavy, long-term interventions outside the own social context*". The most common score differs from the other three variables, with level 2,00 as the most common score. An example of a level two score for customisation is: "*Because every family is different, we have to work more demand-oriented. This requires flexibility from the providers and customised help. There are no fixed trajectories, as it is now organized and financed, but looking at what is needed in this specific family. The fact that the family and its question or need for support lead does not mean you ask, we do. Important boundaries need to be monitored concerning cost control and quality. Nor does it mean that we stay away from you do not ask anything*". Table 5 shows no comparison between the distribution of the different levels of specificity for customisation and the other three variables. Whereas the distribution for prevention and self-reliance were similar, there is no such similarity for educational climate and customisation.

Table 5. Scores policy design on customisation

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Not mentioned</b>	6	11,1
<b>Mentioned</b>	37	68,5
<b>Activities</b>	11	20,4
<b>Total</b>	54	100,0

For the comparison between types of regions, it is expected that in urban regions, the policy documents are more specified (E1). Furthermore, by comparing the municipality's size, small municipalities are expected to score the lowest on the specificity scale (E3), while large municipalities have the highest specificity scales (E2). A detailed overview of the distribution of the specificity of customisation for rural and urban regions and size is shown in Appendix E.

The distribution of the specificity of customisation between locations shows that the mentioned category is most common in both regions, and the not mentioned category is the least common. Therefore, the conclusion is that there is little difference between the two regions, which is not in line with the expectation (E1). Regarding the size of the municipality, results show that the small and medium-sized municipalities have the same distribution between the categories in which the mentioned category has the large majority (77,8%). For large municipalities, the largest category is mentioned. Next is the activities category and only a tiny amount falls within the not mentioned category. In all groups, the not mentioned category is the smallest. Based on the results, the expectations are partially met, whereas the large municipalities show better results than the other groups (E2), however, the small and medium-sized municipalities are alike compared to the large municipalities (E3).

#### 4.2.5 Total Score and Combinations

There are some results worth mentioning in the distribution between the different variables. For each variable except customisation, the category activities show the highest level of specificity. Nineteen municipalities show the highest specificity rate for both prevention and self-reliance (35,2%). In addition, for a smaller group of municipalities (22,2%), both self-reliance and educational climate are specified with activities. On the other hand, when looking at municipalities that have a high specificity rate for one variable but do not mention another variable, the most striking result is in the relationship between prevention and educational climate, in which 18,5% of the municipalities have the highest specificity rate for prevention whilst the lowest specificity rate for the educational climate.

The results also show that in 33 municipalities, none of the variables are rated with the lowest specificity rate, whilst nineteen municipalities have one variable rated with the lowest specificity rate, and two municipalities have two variables not mentioned in the policy documents. Adding up the specificity rates shows a range between three and seven, as seen in Table 6. The results from Table 6 show that the most common sum is six. In this group, only three municipalities have one variable with the lowest specificity rate, whereas none of the municipalities within the sum of seven have a variable with the lowest specificity rate; thus, three out of the four variables are rated with the highest specificity rate for the municipalities with the sum of seven. On the other hand, municipalities with the sum of three have at least one variable with the lowest specificity rate. In addition, all except one municipality with the sum of four have at least one variable with the lowest specificity rate.

Table 6. The sum of all the specificity rates concerning the variables of policy design

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>3,00</b>	5	9,3
<b>4,00</b>	9	16,7
<b>5,00</b>	11	20,4
<b>6,00</b>	20	37,0
<b>7,00</b>	9	16,7
<b>Total</b>	54	100,0

Considering the sum of the specificity of the variables in relation to the location and size of the municipality, results show that the majority of municipalities with a sum of three are located in rural regions. In addition, for rural regions, the municipalities with a low sum of specificity (three of four) are considerably larger (30,3%) than for urban regions (19,0%). Furthermore, for both locations, the sum of six is the most common result. Regarding the size of the municipalities, the results show that the most common sum for medium-sized and large municipalities is six, whereas, for small municipalities, the sum of five and seven is equally common. On the other hand, the sum of three is the least common for small and medium-sized municipalities, while for large municipalities, the least common sum is seven. However, for large municipalities, the sum of six is a vast majority (55,6%), whereas the distribution between the different results for small and medium-sized municipalities are closer to each other. A detailed overview of the results of the sum of the specificity of all variables concerning policy design in relationship to the location and size of the municipality is shown in Appendix F.

The results show that the variables prevention and self-reliance are mentioned at best, whereas, for the educational climate, the activities category also has a small majority, however, the not mentioned category is quite more presented, and the differences between both categories are smaller. The variable customisation is the only variable in which the activities category does not have the majority. However, the mentioned category has, whereas the activities category has the vast majority over the smallest category not mentioned. The sum of all the specificity rates shows that most municipalities score an average (of five) or higher. In addition, the results show a small association between a high specificity rate for prevention and self-reliance.

Looking at the distribution between locations, it was expected that urban regions have a higher specificity score for every variable (E1). The results show that for two variables, the results are in line with the expectation, prevention and educational climate. In contrast, the results contradict the expectation for self-reliance, and the customisation results show no difference between the two regions.

Regarding the size of the municipality, it is expected that large municipalities have the highest specificity rate (E2), whereas medium-sized municipalities have a higher specificity rate than small municipalities (E3). Furthermore, the results of educational climate and customisation are in line with expectation two, whereas large municipalities show the most positive specificity rates. However, for prevention, large municipalities show the least positive results, and for self-reliance, the large municipalities do show positive results, but the results are similar to small municipalities. On the other hand, the results contradict the third expectation. For three variables, small and medium-sized municipalities show similar results concerning the specificity, and for one variable, the medium-sized municipalities show the least positive specificity rate.

### 4.3 Youth Care Use

The third sub-question is: *How did the use of youth care change in the selected municipalities between 2015 and 2019?* The results for answering the question are shown in the following section, which concerns the change in total youth care use, the change in the use of the network of the youngster and the change in use of specialised youth care. Each variable is first explained, and based on the expectations, the results of the change of each variable between 2015 and 2019 are shown.

#### 4.3.1 Total Youth Care Use

The proportion of young people receiving youth care is expected to decrease compared to all young people in a municipality (E4). To analyse this, the proportion of youngsters receiving youth care compared to the total number of youngsters in a municipality was examined. As Table 7 indicates, expectation four is not reflected in the results, whereas for more than 80% of the municipalities, there was an increase in youth care use between 2015 and 2019. Furthermore, the difference between 2015 and 2019 is slim in the municipalities that show a decrease in youth care use, which only shows a difference of less than five per cent points.

Table 7. Change in youth care use between 2015 and 2019

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Youth care is increased</b>	44	81,5
<b>Youth care is decreased</b>	10	18,5
<b>Total</b>	54	100,0

#### 4.3.2 Use of Network of the youngster

By strengthening the self-reliance in the youngster's social environment and the educational climate, the social environment and professionals in the youngsters' network should have grown in their ability to provide light youth care and refrain from specialised youth care (E5). In order to analyse this expectation, the results show how much light youth care has been performed in the network of the youngster. Table 8 visualises the proportion of light youth care performed in the network of the youngster between 2015 and 2019, in which an increase between the years is highlighted in green. On the other hand, a decrease is highlighted in red, and the yellow highlighted data indicates the municipalities where the proportion falls within the same group. Therefore, a decrease or increase could not be made clear.

Table 8. The proportion of youth care performed in the network of the youngster in comparison to light youth care

		2015						Total
		0-5%	5-10%	10-15%	15-20%	20-25%	25-30%	
2019	5-10%	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
	10-15%	1	6	2	3	0	0	12
	15-20%	0	4	9	4	2	0	19
	20-25%	0	0	1	5	3	2	11
	25-30%	0	0	1	1	2	1	5
	30-35%	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	35-40%	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	40-45%	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total		1	13	15	15	7	3	54

The data presented in Table 8 indicates a growth in the majority of the municipalities between 2015 and 2019 (63,0%), which indicates that the use of the network of the youngster increased more than the use of other light youth care. A decrease is shown in only seven municipalities. The yellow category indicates a slight decrease or increase in youth care performed in the network of the youngster, which regards thirteen municipalities. The results show that for a majority of the municipalities, the expectation (E5) is fulfilled in which the youth care performed in the network of the youngster is grown considerably compared to other light youth care.

### 4.3.3 Specialised youth care

By strengthening the educational climate and transforming help more customised to the youngster's situation, the demand for specialised youth care should decline (E6). The expectation is analysed by comparing the proportion of specialised youth care to the total amount of youth care for both years. Table 9 shows the municipalities where the proportion of specialised youth care decreased in green, whereas red highlights the municipalities that show an increase in specialised youth care. The yellow highlighted data indicates the municipalities where the proportion falls within the same group. Therefore, a decrease or increase could not be made clear.

A majority of the municipalities show a positive relationship between the years (40,7%), which indicates a decrease in specialised youth care, whilst 33,3% of the municipalities show an increase in the use of specialised youth care. For a similar amount of municipalities, the proportion between 2015 and 2019 falls in the same category as the total youth care use (25,9%).

Table 9. Change in the use of specialised youth care between 2015 and 2019

		2015								Total
		5-10%	10-15%	15-20%	20-25%	25-30%	30-35%	35-40%	40-45%	
2019	0-5%	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	5-10%	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	10-15%	1	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	7
	15-20%	0	3	2	6	0	0	0	0	11
	20-25%	1	2	5	4	4	1	1	0	18
	25-30%	0	0	1	2	5	2	0	0	10
	30-35%	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
	35-40%	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
	40-45%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total		2	9	11	14	10	4	3	1	54

However, the decrease or increase of specialised youth care is associated with the increase or decrease of light youth care since the expectation is that strengthening the educational climate and transforming help more customised to the youngster's situation ensures that the issues experienced by the youngster can be solved with light youth care and prevent the need for specialised youth care. Therefore, Table 10 shows the relationship between the change in light youth care and specialised youth care in the municipalities. The results from Table 9 are transformed into three values: green indicates a decrease, yellow indicates the same category for both youth care types, hence the neutral category, and red regards an increase. The same is done for light youth care, which can be seen in Appendix G: green indicates an increase, yellow indicates similar results, hence the neutral category and red indicates a decrease. The relations between the categories that contradict the expectation are highlighted in red. In contrast, the relations between the categories that confirm the relationship between light youth care and specialised youth care are marked with green. The yellow highlighted cells indicate a relationship between the same categories.

The categories in which the specialised youth care is increased are highlighted in red. For the main argument, it is never positive that specialised youth care increases. Additionally, the relationship in which light youth care decreases and specialised youth care remains the same is also highlighted in red because it contradicts the expectation (E6). Furthermore, the relationships with the same category are highlighted yellow, and the relationships that confirm the expectation are highlighted green.

Table 10. The proportion of specialised youth care in comparison to light youth care

		Light			Total
		Decrease	Neutral	Increase	
Special	Increase	5 55,6%	11 39,3%	2 11,8%	18 33,3%
	Neutral	2 22,2%	8 28,6%	4 23,5%	14 25,9%
	Decrease	2 22,2%	9 32,1%	11 64,7%	22 40,7%
Total		9 100,0%	28 100,0%	17 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table 10 shows a similar trend as the data from Table 9, where there is a negative relationship between light youth care and specialised youth care for 37% of the municipalities, whereas a positive relationship is shown in 44,4% of the municipalities. Furthermore, the yellow highlighted category is smaller in this relationship, with only 18,5% of the municipalities. These results confirm the expectation (E6) since, in more municipalities, light youth care increases more than specialised youth care, or the light youth care increases or remains the same, whereas the specialised youth care decreases.

#### 4.3.4 Total Score and Combinations

Table 11 shows that the sum of the scores of all variables measuring goal achievement is, for most municipalities, a minus one. It also shows that no municipality shows a negative trend for all the variables since the score of minus three does not exist, and two municipalities show a positive trend for all three variables concerning the youth care use with a sum of three. Comparing the results for each variable, it is noticeable that when there is an increase in youth care use in total, youth care performed in the network of the youngster shows an increase in a majority of the municipalities (50,0%) and the relationship between light and specialised youth care is in the majority of the municipalities positive (38,9%). However, for the relationship between network and specialised youth care, the most common results are a positive result for youth care performed in the network of the youngster and a negative result for specialised youth care (29,6%).

Table 11. The sum of all the change rates concerning the variables of goal achievement

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>-2,00</b>	4	7,4
<b>-1,00</b>	18	33,3
<b>,00</b>	15	27,8
<b>1,00</b>	13	24,1
<b>2,00</b>	2	3,7
<b>3,00</b>	2	3,7
<b>Total</b>	54	100,0

This paragraph shows a positive trend concerning the youth care performed in the network of the youngster and specialised youth care, in which the expectations five and six are fulfilled. However, the total youth care data shows that in most municipalities, the youth care does not decrease or only decreases a small amount, which was not expected (E4).

## 4.4 Relationship Between Policy Design and Goal Achievement

In order to answer the research question, the last sub-question recalls: *To what extent can the specific goals in the municipal policies explain the variation in the achievement of the Youth Act goals in the selected municipalities?* For the question, the results from the previous two sub-questions are used to determine the relationship between the policy design variables and their related goal achievement variables, hence supporting or not supporting the hypotheses seven to twelve. The paragraph is divided by the variables of the policy design. Each of these variables is related to one or two-goal achievement variables. Each relationship is explained, and which data is compared to study this relationship is indicated. Based on the data, it is concluded whether the expected relationship between the two variables is visible.

### 4.4.1 Prevention

The first expectation (7) concerns the relationship between the policy design on prevention and the change in the total youth care use. It is expected that the higher the specificity scale of prevention, the use of youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity. Therefore, the results from paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 concerning the relevant variables are compared to examine the relationship.

Table 12. The relationship between the policy design on prevention and the change in total youth care use

		Prevention			Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	Activities	
<b>Total youth care use</b>	Increased	1 50,0%	16 84,2%	27 81,8%	44 81,5%
	Decreased	1 50,0%	3 15,8%	6 18,2%	10 18,5%
<b>Total</b>		2 100,0%	19 100,0%	33 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table 12 shows the relationship between prevention and youth care use. As paragraph 4.3.1 indicates, the results of change in youth care use are not as expected, with only 18,5% of the municipalities showing a decrease in youth care use. Furthermore, for both an increase and decrease in youth care use, the table shows that not mentioned in the smallest category for prevention, mentioned in the second, and for both categories concerning total youth care use is the activities category the most common. As a

result, the expected relationship between the policy design on prevention and the change in youth care use is not visible (E7).

#### 4.4.2 Self-reliance

In the second hypothesis (E8), it is expected that in municipalities with a higher specificity for self-reliance in their policy design, the use of youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity. Therefore, Table 13 compares the variable self-reliance to the change in total youth care use. For self-reliance, the same categories are used as in paragraph 4.2, and the same goes for the total youth care use in paragraph 4.3.

Table 13. The relationship between the policy design on self-reliance and the change in total youth care use

		Self-reliance			Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	Activities	
Total youth care use	Increased	1 100,0%	21 87,5%	22 75,9%	44 81,5%
	Decreased	0 0,0%	3 12,5%	7 24,1%	10 18,5%
Total		1 100,0%	24 100,0%	29 100,0%	54 100,0%

As indicated for the relationship between prevention and the total youth care use, the results of the total youth care use are not as expected, making it more challenging to examine the relationship with self-reliance. However, the table shows that the activities category has a majority in municipalities with a decrease in total youth care use. For municipalities with an increase, the mentioned and activities categories have similar results. Therefore, there could be argued that the results are in line with expectation eight, however, due to the differences in sample size between the total youth care categories, it is difficult to conclude.

The variable self-reliance is also related to youth care performed in the network of the youngster, whereas a higher specificity of self-reliance in the policy design is expected to more use of the network of the youngster (E9). The relationship is examined by using the results from paragraph 4.2 concerning self-reliance. In addition, the results in paragraph 4.3.2 are translated into categories for the variable network, in which red regards a decrease in the use of the network, yellow regard the same categories for both years, which is referred to as neutral, and green highlighted cells regarded municipalities with an increase in the use of the network.

Table 14. The relationship between the policy design on self-reliance and the change in youth care performed in the network of the youngster

		Self-reliance			Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	Activities	
Network	Decreased	0 0,0%	3 12,5%	4 13,8%	7 13,0%
	Neutral	0 0,0%	6 25,0%	7 24,1%	13 24,1%
	Increased	1 100,0%	15 62,5%	18 62,1%	34 63,0%
Total		1 100,0%	24 100,0%	29 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table 14 shows that for the municipalities with a specification of mentioned or activities for self-reliance, the distribution between the change in the use of the network is similar. For both categories, most municipalities have increased the use of the network of the youngster. In addition, the only municipality within the not mentioned category also shows an increase in network use. Therefore, it can be concluded that the expected relationship (E9) between the variables is not visible since there is no difference between the categories mentioned and activities, and the category not mentioned also indicates a positive relationship with the use of the network.

#### 4.4.3 Educational Climate

For the specification of educational climate in the policy documents, it is expected that a higher specificity of strengthening the educational climate, youth care is performed more in the network of the youngster than in municipalities with lower specificity (E10). Therefore, in Table 15, the results of the specification of educational climate are compared to change in the use of the network of the youngster between 2015 and 2019, where neutral indicates that 2015 and 2019 are almost equal.

*Table 15.* The relationship between the policy design on educational climate and the change in youth care performed in the network of the youngster

		Educational Climate			Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	Activities	
<b>Network</b>	Decreased	2 14,3%	0 0,0%	5 21,7%	7 13,0%
	Neutral	3 21,4%	6 35,3%	4 17,4%	13 24,1%
	Increased	9 64,3%	11 64,7%	14 60,9%	34 63,0%
<b>Total</b>		14 100,0%	17 100,0%	23 100,0%	54 100,0%

The results show that for each category of educational climate, the municipalities in which the use of the network is increased is the largest group, whereas for the categories not mentioned and mentioned is equal to the second largest group, however, for activities, the municipalities in which the use of the network is decreased is the second largest. The increase in the use of the network is the most common for the municipalities in which educational climate is specified with activities, as expected, however, the results do not show that with a lower specificity rate, the use of the network increases less or decreases than the other categories. Therefore, the results are not in line with expectation ten.

The policy theory also suggests a relationship between educational climate and specialised youth care. Expectation eleven prescribes that in municipalities with a higher specificity of strengthening the educational climate in their policy design, the use of specialised youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity. In order to analyse the relationship, the results from Table 10 are translated into categories for the variable specialised youth care. Municipalities within a red highlighted cell indicate a negative relationship between light and specialised youth care, municipalities within a green highlighted cell indicate a positive relationship between light and specialised youth care and the yellow highlighted cells indicate the same results for both types of youth care, which cannot be labelled positive, nor negative, hence the category neutral.



Table 16. The relationship between the policy design on educational climate and the change in the use of specialised youth care.

		Educational Climate			Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	Activities	
<b>Special</b>	Negative	6 42,9%	9 52,9%	5 21,7%	20 37,0%
	Neutral	1 7,1%	2 11,8%	7 30,4%	10 18,5%
	Positive	7 50,0%	6 35,3%	11 47,8%	24 44,4%
<b>Total</b>		14 100,0%	17 100,0%	23 100,0%	54 100,0%

The results show a positive relationship for municipalities within the not-mentioned and activities categories. However, the least common relationship between light and specialised youth care is neutral instead of the expected negative relationship. Furthermore, whereas for the activities category, the neutral relation is the second most common, the second most common is a negative relationship for the not mentioned category. Thus, it can be concluded that expectation eleven is partially met since the municipalities with the activities categories shows the most positive relationship, however, the mentioned category shows the least positive results instead of the not mentioned category.

#### 4.4.4 Customisation

The last expectation (E12) concerns the relationship between the policy design on customisation and the change in the use of specialised youth care. It is expected that in municipalities with a higher specificity of customisation in their policy design, the use of specialised youth care has decreased more than in municipalities with a lower specificity. The relationship is examined by comparing the results of the specificity rate of customisation in the policy documents with the relationship between the change in light and specialised youth care between 2015 and 2019.

Table 17. The relationship between the policy design on customisation and the change in the use of specialised youth care

		Customisation			Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	Activities	
<b>Special</b>	Negative	2 33,3%	13 35,1%	5 45,5%	20 37,0%
	Neutral	2 33,3%	6 16,2%	2 18,2%	10 18,5%
	Positive	2 33,3%	18 48,6%	4 36,4%	24 44,4%
<b>Total</b>		6 100,0%	37 100,0%	11 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table 17 shows that the not mentioned category has an equal distribution between all the relationships for specialised youth care. In the mentioned category, a majority of the municipalities show a positive relationship between light and specialised youth care and a neutral relationship is the least common. However, for the activities category, the most common is a negative relationship, with a positive relationship as the second most common. This results in opposing expectation twelve since the mentioned category shows the most positive relationship between the variables. Secondly, the not mentioned category and the activities category show the most negative relationship between the two variables.

#### 4.4.5 Total score

Table 18 illustrates the relationship between the sum of the variables concerning policy design and the sum of the variables concerning goal achievement. The results for each sum for both variables are illustrated in Appendix H. The results show that most municipalities show a positive sum for policy design and a negative sum for goal achievement. In addition, the number of municipalities with a positive sum for both variables is bigger than that of municipalities with a negative sum for both variables.

Table 18. The relationship between the sum of policy design and the sum of goal achievement

		Policy Design		Total
		Negative	Positive	
Goal achievement	Negative	11 20,4%	26 48,1%	37 68,5%
	Positive	3 5,6%	14 25,9%	17 31,5%
Total		22 40,7%	32 59,3%	54 100,0%

Expectations seven, nine, ten and twelve are not visible in the study results. On the other hand, expectation eight shows in the results, however, it is difficult to conclude due to the differences in sample size between categories. In addition, expectation eleven is partially met with the activities category being the one with the most positive results for specialised youth care, however, the mentioned category has the most negative relationship, which is not as expected. Thus, four out of six expectations are not confirmed, and the other two are only partially confirmed. Therefore, the answer to the central question in this section is that specific goals in the municipal policies mostly do not explain the variation in the achievement of the Youth Act goals.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

The study focused on the research question: *To what extent are the goals of the Youth Act achieved through the local youth care policies in selected municipalities of the Netherlands between 2015 and 2019?* In order to answer this research question, four sub-questions were formulated to study the different elements of the main question, together with twelve expectations concerning the policy design, the goal achievement and the relationship between the various related variables. The policy design and the goal achievement are analysed for 54 municipalities. The answers to the sub-questions and the hypotheses are described in the previous chapter.

The results concerning the policy design indicate that two of the four variables are specified at best: prevention and self-reliance. Both variables are often specified with specific instruments or activities that ought to ensure the expected results in the municipality. The variable strengthening the educational climate is often mentioned with activities or instruments in the policy documents as well. However, the number of municipalities within the not mentioned category is more than for the former variables. In addition, where the category activities have a vast majority with the variables prevention and self-reliance, for the educational climate, the distribution between the categories is closer together. For the last variable, customisation, most municipalities only mention the variable, specifying activities as second. Based on these results, it can be concluded that most variables are specified by mentioning or specifying activities in all the policy designs. In addition, the results show that the variables prevention and self-reliance are specified the best, strengthening the educational climate is also specified most often at the highest specification level, however, the majority is smaller than for the former variables, and customisation shows the lowest level of specification in comparison with the other variables. Based on the policy theory and the literature, it was also expected that the municipality's location and size could influence the variables' specificity rate. The results show that the location influenced the specificity rate for two variables, prevention and educational climate. However, the size of the municipality mattered only for educational climate and customisation concerning only the large municipalities.

The results concerning goal achievement show that the total youth care use does not show a positive trend between 2015 and 2019, since in most municipalities, the proportion of youngsters receiving youth care increases, whilst it is expected that it decreases with the new youth care system. On the other hand, the variables youth care performed in the network of the youngster and specialised youth care show a positive relationship between 2015 and 2019. Youth care performed in the network of the youngster increases compared to the total light youth care, and specialised youth care decreases compared to light youth care in most municipalities.

The relationship between the policy design and youth care use is divided into six expectations, which show which variable regarding policy design is expected to influence which variable of goal achievement. However, the majority of the expectations are rejected based on the results. Expectations seven, nine, ten and eleven are not visible in the results of comparing the results of policy design and goal achievement. However, the relationship between the specification of self-reliance in the policy design and the change in total youth care use (E8) and the relationship between the specification of strengthening the educational climate in the policy design and the change in the use of specialised youth care (E12) are to some extent visible but not considerably. Therefore, four out of six expectations are rejected, and the other two are only partially confirmed.

Based on the results and the conclusion of the sub-questions, hence the hypotheses, it can be concluded that the expected the goals of the Youth Act are not achieved through the local youth care policies, with only two hypotheses partially confirmed and the remainder rejected.

## **5.1 *Limitations***

There are some limitations to be noted within this study. The first limitation concerns the method implemented within the study. In order to analyse the relationship between the policy design and goal achievement, the associated variables are quantified. For the policy design, the policy documents are read and rated based on the interpretation of the content. However, this interpretation is based only on the rating done by one person, which could affect the study's validity.

The second limitation concerns the sample size of the study. Whereas the number of municipalities is high, the sample size only considers 54 municipalities, which concerns sixteen per cent of the total amount of the municipalities in the Netherlands. The consequence is mainly visible in the results, in which categories are regularly represented by very few municipalities, making it difficult to draw conclusions from the results. In addition, the sample size might not fully represent all the municipalities in the Netherlands, which may affect the study's reliability.

The last limitation concerns the scope of the study. The scope only focuses on a small part of the policy process as well as a small part of the Youth Act. As stated in the literature, other stages in the policy process may influence each other. On the other hand, the literature also states that contextual factors may influence the results of a policy. These possibilities are not considered for this study's results but only focus on the relationship between two policy process stages. For policy design, the contextual factors concerning demographics, location and size, are taken into consideration to explain the results. Therefore, whilst the results of this study are valuable for excluding the other stages of the policy process and the other contextual factors other than demographics, these components might explain the study's conclusion.

## **5.2 *Future research***

Whilst the results of this study are interesting, it also shows that there are many opportunities for further research. As the last limitation indicates, the study only focuses on a small part of the policy process and the Youth Act. Therefore, future research might include other parts of the Youth Act. In addition, future research could also focus on a relationship between other stages of the policy process. Specifically, since the results show no relationship, it could be interesting to study the stage before or after the policy design. The literature on decentralisation shows the expectations deriving from its theory, which could be studied to determine how the theory on which the Youth Act is based explains the goal achievement. In addition, the implementation stage is not taken into consideration for examining the relationship, whilst it is the stage between policy design and evaluating the goal achievement. Therefore, examining the implementation of the policy design within the municipalities could give interesting insight to this study. Furthermore, this study's scope only considers the municipalities' location and size concerning the results of policy design, whilst literature indicates that contextual factors might explain the variation in policy design and goal achievement. Therefore, examining the results in relation to contextual factors other than location and size could help explain the study's results. Finally, to better understand the policy process, a future study in another five years may show more positive results since it is expected that implementing a policy takes up to ten years.

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## Appendix A. Sample size per province

Province	Small municipalities	Medium municipalities	Large municipalities
<b>Drenthe</b>	0	3	1
<b>Flevoland</b>	0	2	1
<b>Friesland</b>	0	0	2
<b>Gelderland</b>	2	2	2
<b>Groningen</b>	0	1	0
<b>Limburg</b>	2	0	2
<b>Noord-Brabant</b>	2	2	2
<b>Noord-Holland</b>	4	1	2
<b>Overijssel</b>	2	2	2
<b>Utrecht</b>	3	1	2
<b>Zeeland</b>	1	1	0

## Appendix B. Policy Design on Prevention

Table B1. Policy design on prevention based on location

	Rural regions	Urban regions	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	1 3,0%	1 4,8%	2 3,7%
<b>Mentioned</b>	13 39,4%	6 28,6%	19 35,2%
<b>Activities</b>	19 57,6%	14 66,7%	33 61,1%
<b>Total</b>	33 100,0%	21 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table B2. Policy Design on prevention per size

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	2 11,1%	2 3,7%
<b>Mentioned</b>	6 33,3%	6 33,3%	7 38,9%	19 35,2%
<b>Activities</b>	12 66,7%	12 66,7%	9 50,0%	33 61,1%
<b>Total</b>	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	54 100,0%

## Appendix C. Policy Design on Self-reliance

Table C1. Policy design on self-reliance based on location

	Rural regions	Urban regions	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	0 0,0%	1 4,8%	1 1,9%
<b>Mentioned</b>	14 42,4%	10 47,6%	24 44,4%
<b>Activities</b>	19 57,6%	10 47,6%	29 53,7%
<b>Total</b>	33 100,0%	21 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table C2. Policy design on self-reliance per size

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	1 5,6%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	1 1,9%
<b>Mentioned</b>	7 38,9%	10 55,6%	7 38,9%	24 44,4%
<b>Activities</b>	10 55,6%	8 44,4%	11 61,1%	29 53,7%
<b>Total</b>	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	54 100,0%

## Appendix D. Policy Design on Educational Climate

Table D1. Policy design on educational climate based on location

	Rural regions	Urban regions	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	11 33,3%	3 14,3%	14 25,9%
<b>Mentioned</b>	9 27,3%	8 38,1%	17 31,5%
<b>Activities</b>	13 39,4%	10 47,6%	23 42,6%
<b>Total</b>	33 100,0%	21 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table D2. Policy design on educational climate per size

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	4 22,2%	5 27,8%	5 27,8%	14 25,9%
<b>Mentioned</b>	7 38,9%	6 33,3%	4 22,2%	17 31,5%
<b>Activities</b>	7 38,9%	7 38,9%	9 50,0%	23 42,6%
<b>Total</b>	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	54 100,0%

## Appendix E. Policy Design on Customisation

Table E1. Policy design on customisation based on location

	Rural regions	Urban regions	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	4 12,1%	2 9,5%	6 11,1%
<b>Mentioned</b>	23 69,7%	14 66,7%	37 68,5%
<b>Activities</b>	6 18,2%	5 23,8%	11 20,4%
<b>Total</b>	33 100,0%	21 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table E2. Policy design on customisation per size

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
<b>Not mentioned</b>	2 11,1%	2 11,1%	2 11,1%	6 11,1%
<b>Mentioned</b>	14 77,8%	14 77,8%	9 50,0%	37 68,5%
<b>Activities</b>	2 11,1%	2 11,1%	7 38,9%	11 20,4%
<b>Total</b>	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	54 100,0%

## Appendix F. The Overall Scale of Policy Design

Table F1. The overall policy design scale based on location

	Rural regions	Urban regions	Total
<b>3</b>	4 12,1%	1 4,8%	5 9,3%
<b>4</b>	6 18,2%	3 14,3%	9 16,7%
<b>5</b>	6 18,2%	5 23,8%	11 20,4%
<b>6</b>	12 36,4%	8 38,1%	20 37,0%
<b>7</b>	5 15,2%	4 19,0%	9 16,7%
<b>Total</b>	33 100,0%	21 100,0%	54 100,0%

Table F2. The overall policy design scale per size

	Small	Medium	Large	Total
<b>3</b>	1 5,6%	2 11,1%	2 11,1%	5 9,3%
<b>4</b>	3 16,7%	4 22,2%	2 11,1%	9 16,7%
<b>5</b>	5 27,8%	3 16,7%	3 16,7%	11 20,4%
<b>6</b>	4 22,2%	6 33,3%	10 55,6%	20 37,0%
<b>7</b>	5 27,8%	3 16,7%	1 5,6%	9 16,7%
<b>Total</b>	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	18 100,0%	54 100,0%

## Appendix G. Change in the use of light youth care between 2015 and 2019

		2019				Total
		80-85%	85-90%	90-95%	95-100%	
2015	< 80%	1	0	0	0	1
	80-85%	0	1	0	0	1
	85-90%	0	5	9	0	14
	90-95%	1	4	20	6	31
	95-100%	0	0	4	3	7
	Total	2	10	33	9	54

## Appendix H. Results Relationship Between the Sum of Both Variables

		Policy design					Total
		3,00	4,00	5,00	6,00	7,00	
Goal achievement	1,00	0	3	0	0	1	4
	2,00	2	2	5	9	0	18
	3,00	1	3	3	5	3	15
	4,00	2	1	2	3	5	13
	5,00	0	0	0	2	0	2
	6,00	0	0	1	1	0	2
Total		5	9	11	20	9	54