

Council of Europe

Working Group

Children, Democracy and Participation in Society

Children's participation in schools and the local community

Overall conclusions and lessons learnt

Report on 6 Study Visits

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1 Introduction

*“Planning something for children without asking them is absolutely stupid.”
(Boy, 11 years old, Norway)*

*“Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship. The creation of a society which combines a commitment to respect for the rights of individuals with an equal commitment to the exercise of social responsibility must promote the capacity of individuals from the earliest possible age, to participate in decisions that affect their lives.”
(Landsown¹, 1995: 4)*

*“Adults miss the point. When is a child considered skilful enough to contribute and participate actively? If you do not give them the opportunity to participate, they will not acquire skills. Give us the chance early and see how we fly”.
(17-year-old Malaysian delegate to the UN Special Session on Children²)*

During the last two decades, many European societies have undertaken efforts towards the ideas about children’s participation and voice. Enshrined in Article 12 of the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child, these notions have gathered both general support and efforts at practical level. Of course, there is a considerable variation between the European countries: they have different welfare state regimes with quite distinct forms of the relationship between the family, the civil society, the state and the market; different conceptions of childhood and different patterns of intra-familial relations as well as different histories with regard to the political system and its development. Whilst not ignoring these differences, the movement towards promoting children’s rights, and in particular children’s participation, across Europe can be seen as an important step forwards to implement democratic and equal rights for all citizens, including children and young people.

The idea of putting children’s participation into practice as well as taking their interests and needs seriously into account is also closely connected to the conditions and experiences of childhood that have changed during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Briefly speaking, the following general trends can be identified across Europe: the changes in the demographic development lead to the question of generational distribution of resources and rights (decline of birth rate and increase of life expectancy, ageing population and society), and the increased differentiation of children’s life circumstances changed their experiences of growing up (e.g. increasing number of children who are affected by parental divorce or separation, steady decline of the nuclear family and diversification of family types in many countries). Although there are differences between European countries, we have to keep in mind that the twentieth century notions of society as a distinct, geographically bounded entity are in decline. Hence, the nation state as a unit has decreasing purchase on the emergent realities of the new century

¹ Landsown, G. (1995): *Taking Part: Children’s Participation in Decision Making*. London: IPPR

² UNICEF (2003): *The State of the World’s Children 2003*. New York, Geneva: UNICEF (quoted on page 1)

which has also implications for childhood: research findings indicate that children are moving backwards and forwards national boundaries, joining and separating from households. In that respect, the so-called “New Technologies” (e.g. internet) are important tools for transnational mobilities, the flow of information and products, values and images that have implications for the socialisation processes of children nowadays (for those who have access to these new technologies). Another trend, which has an impact on childhood, concerns the ways in which the twentieth century has witnessed increased levels of institutional control over children. The introduction of compulsory schooling in many European countries (but not in all) and children’s exclusions from paid work (also not in all countries) lead to a creation of child-separated areas and to a change in the perception of children in economic terms and as a consequence to their exclusion from rights due to the lack of obligations and contributions to societies and their social (security) systems (apart from their performance at school).

Although the exclusion from paid work and the access to education is still not true for all children in some European countries (e.g. in Portugal or Albania), we are faced with the phenomenon of child poverty in all European countries, regardless of their level of industrialization and wealth (e.g. see latest OECD studies). These facts stress the weak position of children and young people in modern societies.

On the contrary, we can see the emergence of the idea that children should have a voice in decision making at all levels, in particular concerning matters that affect their lives, which can be interpreted as a consequence of wider trends towards individualization. With regard to legal regulations, the adoption of the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child by almost all states of the world (except the United States of America and Somalia) can be seen as a turning point which leads to the perception of children as equal citizens and social actors and not only as objects of decisions taken by adults.

The right to participate on equal levels is a fundamental human right. In this connection, we should be aware of the fact that the problems and challenges of building and establishing participation are not unique for children; many similarities can be identified in relation to adults or different groups of adults, e.g. women or disabled persons. Following the experiences in the past, successful participation depends on bringing together a number of factors, clear benefits to be gained from it, and the resources required to support and to sustain participation. To some extent these key notions are also true for children’s participation, to be supplemented by some child-specific issues (e.g. a child-friendly design of participation projects and initiatives). The social model of active citizenship has become relevant for many groups in our society. However, the 19th century, which was declared the “Century of the Child” (by Ellen Key in 1902), paid far more attention to the contribution *to* children than the contribu-

tion of children. Nevertheless we are starting to recognize and notice the contribution that children make by taking the mutual interdependence of children and adults into account. Thus, participation projects must be designed as projects *with* children and not only *for* children.

Against this background, the Council of Europe initiated the project “Children, Democracy and Participation in Society” under the programme “Focus on Children and Families”³ which is one of a series of activities and projects within the Directorate General III for Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe to promote social cohesion and tackle policy issues affecting children and families. The initiative is also supported by the Council of Europe’s Integrated Project “Making democratic Institutions work”.

This report summarises the findings and conclusions of six study visits undertaken in the frame of this project on children’s participation in close co-operation with the members of the Working Group set up under the Forum for Children and Families. The study visits aimed at getting a deeper insight into children’s participation projects that are implemented in schools and the local community in six European countries, namely Albania, Austria, France, Norway, Portugal and United Kingdom.

The following chapter gives an overview on the six study visits, starting with brief descriptions of the investigated projects and organisational details of the visits. In the following section, the procedures undertaken and our experiences during these visits are described in detail. The third chapter includes the lessons learnt and the overall conclusions we have drawn based on the findings of the visits (see reports of the study visits). Besides the importance of preparatory work and recommendations for a successful implementation and dissemination of the outcome, special emphasis is put on the role and tasks of adults as well as on the issue “child-friendliness” according to the needs of children and young people who get involved in a participation project.

2 The visits

2.1 Brief description of projects and visits

The basis for the six project visits was a compilation of 68 project descriptions in the field of children’s participation in schools and the local community, received on a call of the working

³The Forum for Children and Families is a multidisciplinary body set up under the European Committee for Social Cohesion to address and discuss issues related to children and families.

group. These 68 project descriptions were carefully read and ranked in what concerns the approach and methods of children's participation. The working group members finally selected six projects according to the criteria developed in collaboration with the consultants' team⁴. The main purposes of the visits were to gain deeper insight into their practical assessments, implementation and impact. The following section contains a short description of these projects, the procedures undertaken, and our experiences regarding the practical aspects of the visits.

2.1.1 Austria: "Q.I.S. – Quality in Schools – Playground Dreams"

Time and location: 25 to 26 March 2003, Eisbach-Rein

Co-ordinator: Bettina Christian (Austria) and Renate Kränzl-Nagl (Austria, consultant)

Participants: Stanislas Frossard (Switzerland), Ulrike Beschorner⁵ (on behalf of the Austrian Ministry for Social Security and Generations) & Renate Kränzl-Nagl (Austria, consultant)

Working language: German

The project "Quality in Schools" (Q.I.S., see information on www.qis.at), initiated by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, is a nationwide programme that aims at encouraging and supporting schools to review, monitor and develop their own quality standards. The core element of the Q.I.S.-initiative is the school development plan ("Schulprogramm"), which is worked out by all school partners (headmaster, teachers, pupils, parents, non-educational staff, citizens) and serves as a guideline and planning tool for educational action.

The primary school in Eisbach-Rein developed such a plan, and is recommended by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture as a model of good practice. Their development plan contained concrete plans for improving the school's quality and led to a wide range of school activities on a local, national and international level. All children (aged 6-10) participated in the improvement process by carrying out a survey on the topic "The school I am dreaming of" and by discussing the results with classmates and teachers. An analysis of the children's ideas showed that changes related to the school premises were of high importance for them (e.g. coloured classrooms, more plants, more space to relax or play) and that they were unhappy with the school's playground. After the discussion of these findings, the teachers and parents decided to implement a project called "Playground dreams" in order to satisfy the need of a child-friendly playground in a creative way. The project which started in the school year 1998/99 aims at structuring the school's playground into a unique natural and creative all-weather adventure playground based on children's ideas, and every school year

⁴ See report of the 2nd Working Group meeting held on 28 – 29 November 2002 (Council of Europe, Strasbourg).

⁵ The foreseen WG co-ordinator, Mrs Bettina Christian, could not participate in the visit due to other obligations.

specific subprojects are implemented (mainly by teachers and parents) in order to improve the quality of the playground (e.g. herbal spiral, new equipment, barefoot path, labyrinth of willow trees).

Apart from putting the children's ideas into practice, a main objective of the project is to experience a very creative process with children, who are predominantly involved in the preparatory work by means of child-friendly participation techniques (gathering ideas, setting priorities, illustrating proposals).

2.1.2 Albania: "Stop Child Labour in Albania"

Time and location: 7 to 8 April 2003, Tirana

Co-ordinator: Velina Todorova (Bulgaria)⁶

Participants: Ibrahim Ismayilov (Azerbaijan) & Renate Kränzl-Nagl (Austria, consultant)

Working language: English (interpreter)

The main objectives of the project "Stop Child Labour in Albania", a huge national programme, are to provide non-formal education and psychosocial assistance as well as means and tools to exercise the right of participation for child workers and trafficked children. In that respect, the programme aims at the fulfilment of three major activities: (1) Establishment of Children's Clubs whose aims are to rehabilitate the affected children through non-formal education and psychosocial services, to strengthen the voice of children and provide them with means and tools to exercise their rights, and to increase children's participation at the local and the national level. (2) Strengthening the governmental and non-governmental capacities to fight against child labour and trafficking by offering training courses on international standards related to children's rights and child labour. (3) Sensitising the public on children's rights, child labour and trafficking, through a national public campaign.

The project was initiated and implemented by the Children's Human Rights Centre of Albania (CRCA), a non-governmental and non-profit-organisation (www.crca.org.al).

In total, 425 girls and 575 boys (6 to 16 years old) are involved in the numerous activities of the Programme "Stop Child Labour in Albania". Children participate in all the steps of the programme. They are actively involved in the preparation of the daily activities of Children's Clubs, exhibitions, protests, public campaigns and meetings with local and national authorities, newsletters and other publications, evaluation of the programme etc. The participating children are identified by schools where the programme took place or, if they do not attend school, by social workers who are in contact with their parents or get in touch with child labourers at their work places.

⁶ Mrs Velina Todorova organised the visit, but was not able to be present in Tirana due to visa problems.

The aims of the Children's Clubs are to increase children's participation at the national and the local level and to reduce the number of child workers in the districts where the clubs have been established. The target group of the Children's Clubs are marginalized children from poor or divorced families, children from Roma and gipsy communities, trafficked children, children at risk at their work place and child workers. In general, the clubs are open for all children four hours a day, but closed during school holidays. A facilitator and/or a social worker are present every day in each Children's Club. The Children's Club in Tirana is located at a primary school and attended by approximately 60 children a year.

2.1.3 Norway: *"Children and Youth: Empowerment, participation and influence"*

Time and location: 28 to 29 April 2003, County of Vestfold

Co-ordinator: Guri-Mette Vestby (Norway)

Participants: Audra Mikalauskaite (Lithuania) & Renate Kränzl-Nagl (Austria, consultant)

Working language: Norwegian/ English (interpreter)

The visited project is an extensive five-year programme (1998 – 2003) which aims at increasing the engagement among children and young people, collecting contributions from children and young people on their different spheres of life, and raising the influence of children and young people in municipality planning and other decisions that affect their living conditions. Currently, it is a collaborating project between three regional partners and 12 out of 14 municipalities in the county of Vestfold. Although the project addresses the age group 0 to 18 years, most activities are directed towards the age group 8 to 14 years.

The programme contains a great diversity of activities in each of the participating municipalities, based on a children's assessment about their needs (carried out in 1997). The core project of the programme is "Children's Tracks", a method to gain information on children's use of space in their spare time. The participants (9-12 years old) register areas of specific value for children on maps according to the Municipality Master Plan for land-use; they are working in small groups, supported by a teacher and a professional of the planning unit. The results of these registration sessions, compiled in a final map, are used for the municipality planning process, and are included in the geodataprogramme "AREALIS", a nationwide electronical planning tool. In 2002, all involved municipalities have worked out extended guidelines concerning children's interests in the Municipality Master Plan for land use, which is a legal obligation for the municipalities.

Another initiative are the Children's Councils (age 11-14 years) where children participate as elected representatives and work in advisory groups for authorities at the local and regional political level.

Information on the projects is available on the internet (www.vfk.no). The programme is currently being evaluated by two scientific institutes.

2.1.4 Portugal: "The School and the Assembly"

Time and location: 16 to 18 June 2003, Lisbon

Co-ordinator: Ana Nunes de Almeida (Portugal)

Participants: Guri-Mette Vestby (Norway) & Renate Kränzl-Nagl (Austria, consultant)

Working language: Portuguese/ English (interpreter)

The project "The School and the Assembly", a huge national project in Portugal, addressed towards pupils aged 10 to 15 (and since 2000 also towards pupils aged 16 to 18), aims at strengthening children's participation in the local community by offering children the possibility to participate in a special session in the Portuguese Republic Assembly. During these annual sessions at the Parliament, children work together with deputies, ministers and the assembly president, they discuss subjects related to the educational system, children's rights and childhood and youth policies. One of the main objectives of the project is to show young people the values and practices of democracy, and to promote citizenship education.

The sessions of the "Young People's Parliament" take place twice a year in summer, with specific topics being discussed. Each participating school presents a project to the Parliament about the subjects discussed. These projects are developed by young people during the whole school year and presented by an elected pupil (MPs = Members of Parliament) in the parliamentary sessions.

The projects start with a first phase in September: schools are invited to take part and are informed about the procedures, they submit documents on the indicated topics which are assessed by a national jury. The second phase includes the election of the MPs (amongst all participating schools) and preparatory meetings for the session at the Parliament. In the third phase, the Parliamentary sessions take place, in 2003 on the topics "The Environment" (pupils aged 10-15) and "The organisation of political power, political participation by citizens, the organs of sovereignty, the Assembleia da República" (pupils aged 15-18). The whole sessions are broadcasted live by a public television channel and by the parliamentary channel. In addition, there is an annual book publication about the sessions at the Parliament. Information is available on the internet (www.parlamento.pt - "Young People's Parliament"). An evaluation of project, including an assessment of the participating young people, started last year and is still ongoing.

2.1.5 France: “Conseil Communal de Jeunes Brie”

Time and location: 19 to 21 June 2003, Brie en Charentes

Co-ordinator: Stanislas Frossard (Switzerland)

Participants: Ana Nunes de Almeida (Portugal) & Ulrike Zartler (Austria, consultant)

Working language: French

The visit addressed the Youth Council of the community of Brie, which was installed in 1996 and consists of about 20 children (aged 10 to 14) who are elected annually by their classmates. The main objectives of the project are to initiate young people for democracy and citizenship at the community level, to socialise them into the political system, to promote their interest for and their participation in the life of the community, and to encourage them to take on responsibility.

The elections are organised in the same way as other political elections (official announces for candidatures, electoral registers, ballot papers). The elected members of the Youth Council then elect their representatives (president, vice president, secretary, deputy secretary, treasurer and deputy treasurer). They manage their own budget of around 4.000 Euros per year (coming from the municipality budget), but usually try to economise and spend very few money.

The Council convenes about once a month and works in 4 commissions (small groups of about 5 children, coordinated by an adult). The children realise projects that they create and initiate. Usually the projects are addressed towards all inhabitants and age groups of the community of Brie. Examples for projects which have been put into practice are the following: skate park, spring-cleaning in the community (collection of waste), Halloween celebration, carnival, dinner for elderly people in the community, competition on flowering houses within the community, visit of the National Assembly in Paris, riddle rallye, participation in the “téléthon” (charity event where children sell small objects).

Apart from these projects, the children play an important part in all the official ceremonies in Brie, where always one member of the Youth Council holds a speech.

The children get support from 6 adults who work voluntarily and unsalaried on the project.

Their main function is to advise the children in their decisions.

2.1.6 United Kingdom: “Playing for Real”

Time and location: 14 to 16 July 2003, Devon

Co-ordinator: Audra Mikalauskaite (Lithuania)

Participants: Ibrahim Ismayilov (Azerbaijan) & Ulrike Zartler (Austria, consultant)

Working language: English

“Playing for Real” is a consultation programme which has existed since 1996 and was designed to meet the needs of children regarding their play areas in a specific community or school. A mobile service has been developed to enable consultations to take place on playing space. Through environmental games, model making and discussions, children can give opinions about their play space and the equipment and landscaping they would like to incorporate. The aim of the project is to consult and discover the children’s views, needs and desires and to formulate a plan which the adult community can use for implementation, funding and developmental purposes. The participation of children in designing their own environment is considered to be a step towards citizenship education.

The organisational structure behind the project is the Devon Play Association, consisting of three part-time employees, a director and a management committee (information is available on the website www.devonplay.co.uk). Usually communities or schools contact the Devon Play Association if they intend to have a consultation. A “Playing for Real” workshop typically includes about two members of staff (with probably two volunteers) and 15 to 25 children who are age and gender mixed (5 to 14 years). So far, the focus of consultations has been on communities, but the service is being extended to schools and children and youth organisations.

“Playing for Real” takes into concern that playgrounds are often rather boring, and that children would design their play areas differently, to be adventurous, natural and wild. It tries to give children an opportunity to fulfil their wishes and to play in a natural environment. Safety issues and legal regulations and responsibilities are considered.

2.2 Procedures undertaken

The visits were scheduled for 2 to 3 days, carried out by a working group of 3 persons. The working group members splitted their roles into different parts in order to make their work more efficient (see appendix):

- The *working group co-ordinator* co-ordinated the visit locally and was responsible for the preparation.
- The *working group associate* was actively involved in the visit and responsible for specific tasks (see appendix).
- The *consultant* held the status of an observer and commentator and composed the report on each visit.
- The *local co-ordinator* co-ordinated the visit locally (in close co-operation with the working group co-ordinator).

How were the visits carried out? There were several core elements for all visits, which had to be adapted to time schedules and specific circumstances, and which differed in length and numbers, but were more or less part of each visit. These core elements were the following⁷:

2.2.1 Focus group interviews with children

The fundamental component of our conception is to include children themselves and to collect information on how they experience their role and their possibilities of participation. We look at children as being competent, active members of society, and we wanted to give them the opportunity to express their opinion on the visited project and on children's participation in general.

We chose the methodological approach of focus group interviews, as they support a more dynamic, spontaneous and "natural" research situation where children's individual contributions to discussions can be enhanced compared to face-to-face interviews, and imbalances of power between adults and children can be softened.

The interviews with children were organised in the format of focus group discussions, with an ideal number of 8 children (maximum)⁸. Children's participation in the group discussion was on a voluntary basis. Special emphasis was placed on the views of younger children (6 to 10 years). The groups were gender-mixed and age-mixed, with an ideal maximum age range of two years, as bigger age differences turn out to be impracticable.

The group discussions started with an introduction and warming up (self-introduction of all participants, brief information on the Council of Europe-project and the selection of the visited projects, outline of the intention of the discussion, explanation of the ground rules, and of the further use of the collected data).

The discussion was led with the help of a checklist that covers the topics and issues to be discussed. These were the following (in detail see appendix):

- Description of the project
- Role of adults in the project
- Role, gender, age and social background of the involved children
- Good and bad experiences with the project
- Results and impact of the project
- Recommendations for children and adults

⁷ A more detailed overview of the various procedures undertaken can be found in the study visit reports and in the appendices.

⁸ Due to time restrictions and practical reasons it was not possible to fulfil this criteria in the United Kingdom; we had to carry out a group discussion with all involved children (26 children).

The outline only provided the framework for the facilitator to explore, probe, and ask questions. This rough guideline should support a natural situation and give all children the opportunity to participate, also encouraged by open-ended questions and ideally by child-friendly techniques. Different kinds of advice for the facilitator were collected by the consultants in the document “Guidelines on how to interview children” (see appendix). The visits showed that the success of this method was closely related to the facilitator’s abilities of talking with children in an adequate way and creating a permissive environment that encourages children to say what they think, without pressuring or frightening them.

The discussions were documented via tape-recording and note taking (by the WG associate and the consultant who were both present). In addition, the consultant took field notes and collected additional information (see appendix).

2.2.2 Interviews with adults

During every visit, we carried out semi-structured face-to-face interviews and/or group discussions with adults in order to get a deeper insight into the project from their perspective. The interviewed persons were responsible or actively involved adults, e.g. the initiator of the project, parents, teachers, principals etc. It depended very much on each specific project who was interviewed, as different approaches seemed to be reasonable for different projects. The checklist on what to ask for includes the same dimensions as the checklist for interviews with children, plus some special questions for adults (e.g. financial matters).

2.2.3 Meetings of the Council of Europe- delegation

There were several meetings of the Council of Europe-working group (i.e. the WG co-ordinator, the WG associate, and the consultant) during each visit. The visits ideally started with a WG meeting, containing information on the visit and additional material collected by the WG co-ordinator, and a short briefing and exchange for the interviews with children and adults. During the visit the WG members also had an exchange. The most important meeting was held after the official project visit in order to exchange information, discuss results and reflect impressions of the project.

2.2.4 Reports

After the visit, the participating consultant prepared a report on the whole visit, based on the interviews (all interviews were taped), our experiences during the visit, the analysis and inter-

pretations of the working group members, and the additional material that was collected during or before the visit (e.g. leaflets, brochures, guidelines, websites).

The reports were checked with the WG members and (in almost all cases) with the local co-ordinator, and submitted to the Secretariat (Directorate General III – Social Cohesion, Social Policy Department).

2.3 Our experiences

The local visits were very important in order to have direct approach and get detailed information. It would not have been possible to get a substantial impression of the projects only by the brief descriptions we received after our call, or by other sources of information (e.g. project's websites).

In total, we carried out interviews with 81 children (in the format of focus group discussions) and interviews with 47 adults. In practically all cases, our interview partners were especially cooperative and willing to give us information on their projects. Children as well as adults were proud and impressed that their project had been chosen for detailed study by the Council of Europe, and showed high interest in the other chosen projects, our working group, its framework and the Council of Europe. As one French boy pointed out, our visit was an occasion they had "*only once in a lifetime*".

Although all visits were fruitful and contributed to a deeper insight into (favourable) conditions of children's participation, the preparation of the visits was more time-consuming than expected, and particularly complicated if the working group co-ordinator was no local (this was the case for the visits in Albania, France, and the United Kingdom).

Our visits were not only interesting for the working group, but also had a special importance for the persons involved in the local projects with regard to public relation matters. Being chosen out of 68 projects by a working group of the Council of Europe represented a special honour and affirmation for the involved persons (who often work voluntarily), and provided them with a good opportunity to get more publicity for their work and for the topic of children's participation. In almost all cases our visits were connected with press conferences, presentations to local politicians, local press, and stakeholders – a fact which sometimes required changes in the timetable.

In order to thank the children for their contribution in the group discussion and their willingness to talk about their participation experiences, they received brochures explaining the role and position of the Council of Europe, as well as small gifts, provided by the Council of

Europe (balloons, notepads, games). The leaflets and gifts were highly appreciated by the children and turned out to be particularly helpful, as they supported our efforts to make the children feel important and underline their special significance for our project. Unfortunately the leaflets with information on the Council of Europe are only available in German, English and French, which excluded the children in Norway, Albania, and Portugal from this information.

For the relationship between the CoE working group and the local participants (children as well as adults) it was essential to show interest in the project without being in the role of judging their activities. For example, it was sometimes important to stress that we did not visit the project with the aim of graduation – during the visit, some children asked if we already knew what their grade would be.

3 Overall conclusions and lessons learnt

This section provides an overview on the lessons we have learnt when visiting the children's participation projects in six European countries. These lessons are based on the main findings of the visits, the good and bad experiences concerning the implementation of the projects, the recommendations of the interviewed children and adults as well as on the discussions amongst the working group members and the conclusions drawn by the consultants' team (see study visit reports). Bearing in mind that this compilation of experiences with six different types of children's participation projects in schools and the local community will serve as a basis for a final product, we have divided this section into seven crucial parts. Highlighting the results regarding the impact of children's participation as a starting point, we will concentrate in the following section on useful preconditions to put participation projects into practice. Afterwards we turn to the important issue of the preparation of projects and to the role of adults who are involved in the project at different levels and stages. Special emphasis is put on factors to ensure a child-friendly and successful implementation of participation projects from children's perspective. The chapter is rounded off by findings concerning documentation, dissemination of results, information exchange and evaluation.

3.1 Impact of children's participation

The impact of the visited projects is manifold: children, parents, teachers, other adults, schools, local authorities and communities, as well as the community as a whole benefit from the initiatives. Our interviews showed that children's and adult's estimations are in considerable accordance: both evaluate the impacts of their projects quite similarly.

How do children benefit from their participative experiences?

On an individual level, children can benefit in various aspects from participation projects and programs. The most important ones are:

- *Respect and empowerment*

Children make the experience of a new culture of decisions and rule making between children and adults. They are treated respectfully and taken seriously by adults, they are empowered to fight for their rights, and perceive their success in this field. These factors can strengthen children's self-confidence (in particular those from migrant's, see Norwegian project, or from socially excluded population groups, e.g. Roma children, see Albanian project). Children participate actively in life spheres that once were restricted for them (e.g. decisions on the local policy level), which makes them feel important.

- *Political socialisation*

Children are socialised into the political system, they learn how democracy works and get an insight into the work of politicians. The training in democracy and its rules is one of the most important facts, which certainly has an impact on children's political socialisation.

- *(Peer) education and multiplication*

A participative culture of decision seems to increase children's responsibility, and participation can lead to more careful approaches towards common goods. Children report that they handle new equipment and installations more carefully, as they feel more responsible for it when they have participated in the decision process on what equipment should be bought and how it should be installed.

In several cases we also could notify the effect that older children served as (role) models for younger ones (peer education).

Furthermore, children disseminate their positive experiences amongst those who don't participate in the projects: children act as multipliers.

- *Relationships between children*

Most projects have positive effects on the relationships between the involved children, as the common work for the project leads to a stronger solidarity and strengthens the team spirit among the participating children. Many new friendships were established in the framework of the different projects.

- *Fun and enjoyment*

Children in adequately implemented projects learn that participation can be fun. At the best, they experience that participation doesn't have to be something boring, but something lively and enjoyable.

- *Personal and social skills*
Children have the opportunity to learn or train important personal and social skills, e.g. methods of conflict resolution, decision-making and communication. In some projects on the political level (e.g. Portugal, France, Norway), they learn to speak out and express themselves, and to give speeches in front of an (adult) audience. They also learn to give reasons *why* they hold a certain opinion, why they refuse or dislike something, and they learn to be responsible.
- *Gender mainstreaming at an early age*
Participation projects often allow to train skills and competences of children at an early age, regardless of their gender. In this connection, it is interesting to note that girls often play a more active role compared to boys: they act more reflective and proactive, they hold higher positions (e.g. in the Parliamentary sessions in the frame of the Portuguese project as well as in the Children's Councils in Norway and in France). We conclude that participation projects are a useful tool to strengthen gender mainstreaming at an early age from which individuals as well as the whole society benefit.

Benefits for adults working with children

Participation projects can increase adults' awareness for children's needs, opinions and wishes. At the same time, adults can benefit a lot from children and from the work in those projects. They get in contact with children and their viewpoints, they get new ideas, and they recognize the potential of the young generation. In the framework of projects on the community level (e.g. in France) they also learn to divide power with children.

When adults listen carefully to children and take them seriously, they discover how sophisticated, sensible and thoughtful children's views are, and how much knowledge they have on different topics – which often surprises adults. In that respect, adults learn a lot about the conditions of childhood nowadays that are not comparable with their own childhood. Thus, the active involvement of adults in children's participation projects enhances the realization of life long learning conceptions.

In many cases, the relationships between adults and children are improved due to the participation project, e.g. the experiences of the school projects show that working closely together and achieving a common purpose has positive effects on the relationships between children and teachers. Most adults highly appreciate the experiences they make in the framework of their (often voluntary) activities.

Impact on school and community life

One important impact of the visited projects is the enrichment of social life within schools and communities. Children participate actively in the school or local community life, and in most cases they play an important part within their village or school.

Several projects led to the creation of new meeting points in the municipality (see Austrian, French and Albanian project), which certainly has positive impacts for the social life. The involvement of local authorities in the projects can generate an increased awareness of children's rights within the community. Local politicians and authorities learn about children's needs and interests, their visions and strategies, and their approach towards problems. Therefore, children's participation can become a core element of the municipality's life. If children devote their time for community aspects and commit themselves to the community they live in, this can change children's standing in a community and adults' views on participation, as it becomes more self-evident to include children in all decisions (as the French project shows, children's inclusion is also increasingly demanded by the community's adult population).

Impact on society and politics

Our study indicates clearly that society and politics can benefit a lot from children's participation projects. The projects raise the awareness of children's views and needs at the policy-maker level, which is a highly important impact. A good example for the awareness-raising impact of children's participation programs is the Albanian project. One of the major achievements of this project was that the government of Albania has realized the existence of child labour in Albania – a fact that has been more or less ignored in the past. Since the start of the project, the government is willing to co-operate and to implement initiatives to prevent and fight against child labour. As a consequence, a national public authority against child labour has been established recently. Furthermore, there has been a sensitisation in the media concerning child labour, and children are increasingly participating in media events related to this issue.

Politicians who are faced with children's views and interests are often surprised about the very realistic and concrete ideas proposed by children and young people. Nevertheless, the strongest efforts have still to be done with adults who are not taking children's interest for real, especially when children's interests are crossing their own ones.

Finally, the whole society benefits a lot from children's participation projects because the needs and interests of children can only be defined by themselves and not by adults. Hence, gathering new data for social reporting on childhood is another important effect of participation projects. This makes it possible to get a profound basis for decision-making for matters that affect children's lives, as well as to contribute to questions of distributive justice of resources and rights between the generations.

3.2 Useful preconditions

The results of the study visits indicate clearly that the following preconditions serve as a very useful framework for the implementation of participation projects:

National background and international movement towards children's rights

As far as the political, social and cultural background of the visited projects are concerned, we found, as we had expected, differences between the countries with regard to their historical development and their tradition of democracy. For example, Portugal is a very young democratic republic whereas Norway has a long tradition in promoting democratic rights. Nevertheless we recognized a raising awareness of children's rights and the importance of children's participation in all six visited countries regardless of their different historical development. This might be an effect of the adoption of the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as of other documents and initiatives at the international level. Thus, all efforts to implement international documents, legal regulations and policy recommendations to strengthen children's rights on the national level (as well as at the regional and the local level) will serve as a useful precondition to put children's participation projects into practice.

What we have observed are different reasons and motivations to push children's participation projects forwards which are of course closely connected to the political development in these countries. In the so called „young democracies“ (e.g. in Portugal), the main motivation is to influence the political socialisation of young people by offering them opportunities to learn the rules and procedures of democracy as early as possible. In Norway we found a long-standing tradition of promoting children's rights, but we had the impression that even in this liberal, highly modernized country participation projects are always threatened because they depend on the goodwill of politicians or other authorities, which is the case for all initiatives in this field. In addition, the intention to implement participation projects is closely related to the current living conditions of children and young people in these countries. For example, in the case of Albania different problems that affect children's lives are faced and lead to different projects' topics (namely to fight against child labour) compared to investigated projects in other visited European countries (e.g. Austria).

To conclude, the implementation of children's participation projects does not predominantly depend on the historical development of the political system and/or the social and cultural background on the national level, but to a great extent on the international movement towards children's rights. This is an important finding with regard to international transferability of our results. Although the need of sensitising strategies to convince adults of the importance of children's participation, the motivation to promote participation initiatives, the topics of planned projects or the conditions of implementation may vary between the countries, this is not the case regarding the engagement of people to initiate children's participation projects,

which is strongly influenced by the international documents, mainly the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Political support and legally binding documents

Strong political support on different levels is crucial for any participation project with children. Although convincing policy makers and other stakeholders of the importance of children's participation is often very time consuming (which has to be taken into account during the preparatory work), it is an essential precondition, otherwise the project will fail. We found that legally binding documents, that are including obligatory commitments of policy-makers, are useful tools to establish and implement children's participation projects. For example, in the Portuguese project „The School and the Assembly“, an official declaration was signed by the members of the Parliament as well as by children who were acting as deputies to ensure the political support of this nationwide initiative.

Existence of programmes at national or regional levels

The existence of programmes and initiatives at the national and regional level can serve as a useful framework to initiate participation projects at the local level. The main objectives of such programmes must not necessarily include the promotion of children's rights, although this is often a hidden goal. For instance, the nationwide Austrian programme „Quality in Schools“ which is initiated by the Federal Ministry of Education does not focus predominantly on children's participation, but on the quality improvement of schools, even if the participation of children is one of the core elements of this initiative. This is to some extent similar for the Albanian nationwide Programme that deals with various initiatives to stop child labour where children can actively participate. As to the Norwegian project, we found that a regional programme that aims at promoting children's rights basically and that includes legal obligations for the municipalities to implement projects builds the frame for many participation activities at local level. This is to a certain extent also the case for the visited project in the United Kingdom.

Co-operation with schools (and other child-related institutions)

Another result of the study visits deals with the co-operation with schools that is essential for any participation project due to numerous advantages: schools are easily accessible for children (regardless of their social, ethnic or cultural background), the staff (teachers) is well-experienced in child-friendly methods and used to work with children, schools are central life spheres of children and well-known institutions for them; schools are wide-spread across the country and almost all children are attending schools (although there are differences between the countries). The organisational structure behind each national education system can be used efficiently for the implementation of participation projects, as demonstrated in the Aus-

trian, Portuguese or the Norwegian cases. Furthermore our results indicate that a separation between participation projects on local community level and participation projects in schools does not seem to be appropriate because the active involvement of schools seems necessary for community projects, too. If children can not be approached via schools (e.g. street children, see Albanian project), staffs from other child-related institutions, initiatives or programmes according to the child welfare system might be useful to reach them (e.g. social workers, street workers).

Existence of networks and positive experiences in the past

Existing networks of potential partners at national, regional and/or local level can serve as a very good basis for a successful co-operation in the frame of planned participation projects. This includes positive experiences of collaboration between schools and the local community, between NGO's and governmental representatives or local authorities, between teachers and parents, and many others. In addition, good experiences with other participation projects in the past where networks between adults and young people have been set up, are an excellent precondition to start new initiatives. For example, in the Austrian project, the long tradition of parental support and the active involvement of parents in school plays an important role (e.g. the school development plan which is worked out by all school partners), and the long-standing co-operation between the school and the local community leads to the creation of a participation project in order to improve the school's quality. The politicians' willingness to co-operate and to support this endeavour was strongly influenced by positive experiences with young people in the frame of a former participation project at local level.

3.3 Preparatory work

The findings of the study visits indicate clearly that very careful preparatory work is essential for a successful implementation of participation projects *with* (and not only *for*) children. In that respect, a lot of work has to be done by adults. Nevertheless our findings show that it is important to involve children as early as possible in the planning process.

Involvement of children in the planning process

The early involvement of children and young people is crucial for the decisions on which topic the participation project will focus on. An assessment of children on the issues that are important in their view is recommendable before the project starts officially (see Austrian, Norwegian and Portuguese project). Hence, the early involvement of children and young people includes all matters that are related to the content (bottom-up and not top-down approach!) and the methods, but usually they are not interested in administrative matters. During the pre-

paratory phase, the establishment of strong alliances between children and adults that will serve as basis for collaboration within the project is of high importance.

Finding potential partners (adults) and building networks

The preparatory work is also characterized by finding potential partners and developing a close working relationship between them. Depending on the projects' theme and its range (be it national, regional or local), the partners can vary (parents, teachers, local authorities etc.). Nevertheless, motivating potential partners to get involved in the project and convincing them of the importance of children's participation are a very time consuming task that has to be taken into account during the planning process. If a nationwide project is planned, spacial barriers, travel time and costs have to be kept in mind. For example, in the Portuguese project the Ministry of Education serves as a link between the children at schools across the country and the centrally located project-co-ordinators of this nationwide project. To conclude, the establishment of strong networks or the consideration of already existing networks or structures are important successfactors for children's participation projects.

Fund raising

With regard to financial matters and available resources to prepare and implement a children's participation project we found different, often very creative ways of fund raising. For example, the Albanian project is funded by international donorships and sponsors due to the lack of funding by the Albanian government. Austria gets sponsorships by enterprises to realize the children's wishes for new and expensive equipment at the playground. In Norway, a co-financing strategy (the project is partly funded by ministries, municipalities and other stakeholders) leads to a higher motivation of all stakeholders to take part actively and support the participation project. Furthermore, in many projects adults are working on voluntary basis and unpaid (e.g. parents).

Identification with goals and flexibility of the project

We found that agreements on and a strong identification with the projects' goals are of high importance for a successful implementation. Hence, discussions on the goals and clear commitments among adults are recommended before the project starts. Nevertheless, the projects' objectives can change from time to time which requires permanent reflections and perhaps a re-orientation of the projects' goals and its implementation. Due to the fact that children's participation projects are never static but always in a transition (by the way, the needs and interests of children might be also different from year to year), flexibility concerning the goals and the design has to be taken into account in the preparatory work.

Starting with small projects and permanent improvement

As we have seen in the Portuguese and the Albanian case, it is highly recommendable, in particular for nationwide initiatives, to start with small projects and to test the tools and the design of the project (e.g. if the methods are child-friendly and accepted by children) before any enlargement. A step-by-step implementation allows permanent improvement of the project. If possible, interruptions of the project should have been avoided, but it depends on the project (e.g. for children involved in the Austrian school project, the break due to school holidays was convenient, whereas for children who attended the Albanian “Children’s Clubs” it was very unpleasant that these clubs were closed during the summer).

Project management and co-ordination

During the preparatory phase, a lot of work has to be done by adults concerning the development and design of efficient, transparent and flexible organisational structures behind the project. These managerial tasks include: building a core team that is responsible for a successful implementation, agreements on the time schedule, taking care for personnel resources and all financial and administrative matters. Furthermore, a clear work distribution among the involved adults as well as between children and adults have to be created, based on strong commitments of all participants. In addition, the working conditions (e.g. working on voluntary basis and unpaid, see parental support in the Austrian, Portuguese and French project) of the involved grown-ups have to be transparent for all involved persons in order to avoid misunderstandings from the beginning.

3.4 Role and tasks of adults

The roles and tasks of adults regarding children’s participation projects are manifold. Generally speaking, they play a key role to support children in their work and to take care for a child-friendly preparation and implementation of the project. Due to the fact that participation projects are sometimes huge and very complex initiatives, numerous adults are involved who have specific tasks at different levels and stages of the project. The fulfilment of these tasks in a satisfying way requires specific skills and competences that are not “naturally” given.

Role and tasks of the initiator(s) and co-ordinator(s)

The initiator plays a key role in all investigated projects: his/her “burning heart” for investing a lot of time during the preparatory phase and pushing the implementation of the project forwards, convincing potential partners and establishing strong networks at national, regional and local level as well as fighting against all barriers and obstacles and never giving up are essential successfactors for the projects and common characteristics of all initiators we have met.

The initiators of the investigated projects are highly motivated persons who are often influenced by international movements to promote human rights (women's rights, children's rights or rights of other socially excluded groups of population, e.g. Roma people).

The main tasks of the co-ordinator, or ideally a core team of co-ordinators, are to take care of the implementation (e.g. use of child-friendly methods, achievement of goals), the documentation (e.g. preparing project descriptions, interim and/or final reports) and the dissemination (e.g. contacts to mass media). The co-ordinators are the angle point within the projects' network and responsible for the information flow amongst the involved actors and between involved and non-involved persons or institutions.

The role and tasks of adults working with children

The core activities of the adults who are working with children are to assist, advice and support them in their work. They are responsible for putting a child-friendly design into practice which requires specific skills and competences (see below). In this connection, their active involvement can vary from facilitating meetings (e.g. during the children's councils we have observed in the French, Norwegian and Portuguese projects) to assisting children in the effectiveness of their work (e.g. by providing materials on the subject of the project, training on speeches, explaining the procedures and rules, etc.). Furthermore, they serve as a link between children on the one hand and policy makers or other involved stakeholders on the other. As mentioned above, a close co-operation and exchange of experiences with the projects' co-ordinators is essential to fulfill these tasks and to improve the project permanently.

Other involved actors and stakeholders

In addition, there are adults and/or institutions that are involved in the project, although they are (often) not directly working with children. Nevertheless they play a key role during the preparation, implementation and dissemination phase of the project. Of course, the number of these actors and their responsibilities may vary from project to project, but generally speaking, the common feature is to support the project as much as possible (e.g. by providing funds and other resources, political support, unpaid working time, promoting the project etc.). The field of involved (but sometimes for children invisible) actors behind a participation project covers a wide range: politicians and other authorities at different levels (e.g. local authorities such as the mayor or abbot, representatives of ministries, ombudspersons for children and youth), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), funding bodies (e.g. international donors) or parents associations, to give a few examples. With regard to the practical implementation of children's ideas that has mainly to be done by adults (e.g. installing new equipment on the playground, see Austrian and UK project), the involvement of external experts might be necessary.

Co-operation and networking among adults

As far as the co-operation among adults is concerned, clear and transparent communication structures are necessary to ensure an efficient information flow regarding the progress of the project (e.g. organisation of regular meetings, submission of interim reports, up-to-date information on websites). On the whole, transparency is a key issue for a successful co-operation to prepare and implement a participation project. A successful co-operation also requires a well-established network of involved adults and stakeholders.

Required skills & competences and training of adults

Depending on the role and the tasks of the involved adults, different skills and competences of adults are required. Those adults who are working with children have to be self-critical, flexible and willing to listen carefully to children and young people. In that respect, certain personal and social skills are indispensable (see in detail chapter 3.5).

Aside from these personal and social skills and competences that are also important for other involved adults, the initiator(s) and co-ordinator (or the members of the co-ordinating team) should be well-experienced with and trained on project management. Moreover, community building skills are also of importance for a successful implementation of children's participation project. This was illustrated by the project visited in the United Kingdom: a playground is not an isolated place, and a wide range of powerful, but not necessarily directly involved stakeholders and adults in the community play a key role and have to be considered, e.g. parish council, parents' association, local community, schools. Their contributions and support are indispensable in order to sustain the project and guarantee its support by the community. It is therefore necessary to take these groups and stakeholders into consideration.

If the above mentioned skills and competences are not existing to the appropriate extent, training of adults is highly recommended (training seminars, guidelines and manuals for adults, sensitising and awareness-raising campaigns, etc.).

3.5 Principles of a child-friendly project's design

Every process from preparatory work to the implementation of a children's participation project and the dissemination of its results must be designed in a child-friendly way, according to the age of the addressed children and young people. Bearing in mind that things which seem to be „normal“ for an adult would not be acceptable for many children, child-adequate working conditions, settings and methods have to be developed and tested. In that respect, the main task of adults is to create a child-adequate design and modify it if it turns out not to be child-friendly enough. A child-friendly design of a participation project consists of many elements as described in the following:

Respecting children and being honest

Our findings show clearly that children are very sensible if adults do not treat them with respect or do not take their views and interests seriously into account. Moreover, it is important to be honest and to explain to the children if their proposals are feasible or not or that the implementation of their suggestions could take some time. The adults' perception of children and young people as subjects with a creative potential and as experts is crucial for a child-friendly climate.

Early involvement of children and openness for all children

An early involvement of children and young people is recommendable, because it raises the motivation and the identification with the project's goals. In general, it should be easy to get involved and to stay involved. For example, teachers can encourage children to initiate new projects or to take part in ongoing participation projects. In general, the projects should be open for all children and young people regardless of their social or ethnic background, their performance at school (see Norwegian project) or the political interests of their parents (see French project) in order to ensure that nobody is excluded. This leads to the question if children should get involved in participation projects on voluntary basis or not, which is recently discussed very controversially. We found that both strategies do have positive impacts: The involvement on voluntary basis guarantees that children are highly motivated and that they are feeling very responsible to achieve the projects' goals (see projects in France, Albania). On the contrary, the advantage of obligatory participation can be seen in the fact that the project approaches also children who would not participate voluntarily in these projects due to many reasons (e.g. children from migrants, see the project „Children's tracks“ in Norway).

Concrete, child-related themes and visible results

Furthermore, the themes children and young people are working on have to be very concrete and closely related to their daily life (e.g. re-newing a playground, see projects in Norway, Austria and the United Kingdom). In addition, the projects' outcome should be concrete and visible for children as soon as possible. Especially for younger children it seems to be important to achieve (at least several) results promptly, while everyone is enthusiastic about the project. The visibility of results is one main success factor in the views of children.

Provision of sufficient information on the project

A child-friendly design includes also the provision of information on the project which should be created in a child-friendly format (see below) and easily accessible and understandable. In addition, information on the whole process (e.g. time schedule, date of meetings) and procedures (e.g. sessions or electoral rules) should be transparent for all involved children.

Clear work distribution between children and adults

The success of a participation project depends on a very strict and clear work distribution between children and adults: to guarantee child-friendliness, it has to be clarified from the beginning that children are responsible for the content, because they are the experts concerning childhood matters and that adults play only a supportive and not an intervening role. In a few cases (e.g. in Austria), we found that children are mainly involved in the preparatory work whereas adults are responsible for putting the children's ideas, proposals and wishes into practice.

Child-friendly settings, methods and formats

The questions of child-friendliness is closely connected to the settings, methods and formats used in participation projects (e.g. use of paintings and photos, chaired discussions, text and lay-out of printed material, working in small groups, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to express its opinion, etc.). Due to the increasing number of publications and guidelines on child-friendly tools and methods produced during the last years, it is highly recommended to use these sources⁹. Generally, a child-friendly design means to take the needs of children and young people into account in an enjoyable way. One of the manifold examples is the so-called "James Bond game", as performed in the UK project: This game aims at the exploration of the site or playground, and children usually adore this game as they behave like spies on a secret mission. Children explore the area around different "standpoints" (free-standing posts) by performing different tasks (e.g. they have to find something colourful or something spiky in this area, they have to answer different questions on what they like/dislike in this area, and they have to find a secret name for this place).

This short example illustrates that having fun whilst working in a participation project is a key principle of a child-friendly projects' design.

Appreciation of children's work

Following an understanding of children as key persons in participation projects who are responsible for the content and the outcomes, an appreciation of their work seems to be appropriate. Aside from receiving gifts (e.g. stickers, mouse-pads etc.), we recognized that official documents are of high importance for children (e.g. diploma or a personal letter from the President of the Parliament in the Portuguese case). Children also appreciate to be provided with visible symbols of power (e.g. in the French project, they wear the "tricolore" sharp as well as the mayor and the deputy mayor in important ceremonies, which has an enormous symbolic value for them). Furthermore, the appearance on TV or in newspapers is very exciting for them (and their families as well) and raises their self-confidence. Unfortunately, signs

⁹ For example, a very recommendable publication is the following: Save the Children Fund (2002): Participation. Spice it up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations. Dynamix Ltd.

of appreciation by adults are often only foreseen for children who are acting as representatives (e.g. as deputies) and not for the children who are involved in the preparatory work. Thus, more awareness of the „invisible“ work done by involved children is recommendable.

3.6 Documentation, information flow and dissemination of results

With regard to the documentation of children's participation projects, the flow of information among the involved actors and between involved and non-involved persons or institutions, the dissemination of results and the exchange of experiences at different levels, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Easy access to information, flow of information and feedback

Information on the project has to be easily accessible. In this connection, new technologies (e.g. internet) are useful tools to provide information on the project¹⁰ (e.g. a brief description of the project, reports, date of meetings etc.). As mentioned above, the information flow between the participants as well as the feedback to all involved actors has to be co-ordinated centrally by the core team of the project. Information campaigns to sensitise the public and other publicity strategies are recommendable to improve the information flow between involved and not involved children or adults (see Albanian project).

Documentation of the project and dissemination of its results to a wider audience

As far as the dissemination of results to non-involved children is concerned, the material (interim and final reports, summaries) has to be prepared in a child-friendly format (child-friendly text and lay-out, see above). Available publications produced on regular basis (e.g. annual report of activities, see the Albanian or the Portuguese project) are useful tools to disseminate the outcomes at the national level. Children and young people should be involved in the documentation and dissemination process as intensively as possible (e.g. writing articles). The integration of the projects' results in nationwide databases is another dissemination strategy to make children's interest and needs visible and accessible to a wider audience (e.g. to policy makers or planners), as demonstrated by the Norwegian project „Children's tracks“. In addition, our findings indicate that the whole project can benefit a lot from a good and fruitful collaboration with mass media (e.g. newspapers, TV, etc.). In that respect, the development of public relation concepts as well as of publicity and marketing strategies are essential and have therefore to be considered by adults in the planning process of the project. With regard to the documentation of the project and the dissemination of its results, available documents in English or another European language (e.g. a brief description of the results and the impact) are recommended to strengthen networking at the national and international level.

¹⁰ Five out of the six visited projects provide information and material on their websites.

Exchange of experiences and networking

We found that children are very eager to exchange experiences with other children who are also actively involved in participation projects. They would like to know more about the good and bad experiences made, e.g. concerning the themes, the outcomes or the co-operation with adults, etc. During almost all study visits the interviewed children expressed their interest in an exchange with children in other European countries, not only on participation projects but also on children's living conditions in general. We conclude that the exchange among children and young people at the international level should be improved. Another issue raised during the visits concerns the children's opportunity to talk about their experiences at home which is highly important for children.

Furthermore, the exchange of experiences among adults as well as between adults and children and/or young people at international level could be improved, as pointed out by many interviewees (e.g. organizing seminars, work shops, conferences etc.).

3.7 Evaluation of the project

A systematic and regular evaluation, based on children's views, is one very important element of children's participation projects. Such an evaluation should be taken into consideration from the beginning in order to improve the project permanently, and should ideally be carried out by external professionals and not by involved adults. Children should be informed about the results of the evaluation. The consideration of children's views during the evaluation process is crucial for any improvement of a participation project (e.g. an assessment of children on regular basis). For example, a detailed evaluation is helpful to understand why certain children withdraw from projects. Furthermore, the findings of an evaluation are also of interest for former participants of the projects in order to see if their work has had a concrete impact or not, and if their membership has influenced their lives, perspectives, political engagement and commitment on community level.

In addition, the involvement of adults in an evaluation is an important issue in order to improve the project management and to reflect the implementation process and the outcome critically (ideally together with children).

Although the high relevance and importance of evaluation is well known, only a part of the visited projects are evaluated to a satisfying degree. In most cases in-depth evaluations are not possible due to budget restrictions and insufficient resources. Hence, financial resources for evaluation should be considered in the project's budget (and in fund raising plans) from the beginning.

4 Appendix

The appendix of this report includes the following documents:

- Study visits. General information and organisational matters
- To Do's for the WG co-ordinator
- Guidelines on how to interview children (focus group interviews)
- Checklist for focus group interviews with children
- Additional form – focus group interviews with children
- Checklist for interviews with adults
- Additional form – interviews with adults