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Models for Children's Involvement – A Collection of Case Studies

Nordic countries mark the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Aina Winswold and Anne Solberg

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Preface

Firstly, we would like to thank the Nordic Council of Ministers for the opportunity to prepare this publication. It has been both interesting and inspiring. We would particularly like to thank Cecilia Sjølander of the Children's Ombudsman in Sweden, Flemming Schultz of the National Council for Children in Denmark, Thomas Wrigglesworth of the Ombudsman for Children in Norway, Elina Nivala of the Ombudsman for Children in Finland, Margrét María Sigurðardóttir, Ombudsman for Children in Iceland, Tórhild Højgaard of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the Faroe Islands, Sabitha Jørgensen of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Greenland, and Janina Björni of Save the Children, Åland. We would like to thank them for their enormous engagement, for extremely valuable comments on the text, and for all their practical help.

We also wish to thank the authors of the articles in this publication. At short notice they have provided detailed descriptions of their projects and experiences of involving children and young people.

Oslo
20 October 2009

Aina Winsvold (Project Manager)
Anne Solberg (Project Worker)

Summary

This report was produced by Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) as commissioned by the Nordic Committee for Children and Young People at the Nordic Council of Ministers. The report contains 23 articles about children's involvement in different arenas in the Nordic countries and in the self-governing territories of Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. The articles illustrate a broad spectrum of models for children's participation, and these examples are intended to serve both as an inspiration and as toolkits for others who work with children and young people. The articles show the importance of involving children, that there are many different ways of practising involvement, and that the type of involvement depends on intention and objectives.

1. Introduction

This report was produced by Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) as commissioned by the Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) at the Nordic Council of Ministers, in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We present 23 articles, four from each of the Nordic countries and one each from the self-governing territories of Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. The articles are based on projects, all of which were aimed at promoting children's involvement, and they describe concrete examples of participation in important arenas in the everyday lives of children and young people: pre-schools and schools, cultural and leisure time activities, municipal planning and political participation. We have also included articles about the involvement of children and young people with experiences as clients of the welfare system.

The Nordic countries and the self-governing territories have all ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are thereby obliged to make arrangements for children's participation. The Convention is used by the authorities as a guideline for policy and practical application, and to ensure that legislation and guidelines promote the involvement of children and young people. Ratification provides a common framework, but national legislation leads to variations in scope, degree of obligation and degree of implementation, and countries ratifying the Convention have only undertaken to ensure that the structures enabling involvement are in place pre-requisites for involvement will form the basis. Even if there is a strong focus on children's participation on a rhetorical and ideological level, there is still no legislation that regulates the actual influence of children and young people in society.

But there are many strong arguments for involving children and young people: involvement is a right, it is educational for all concerned, it can provide important knowledge, it can help find good solutions, and it means showing respect for children's integrity. It can also form standards for democratic practice. Involvement can be perceived as a way of learning to become responsible and conscious citizens and the process in itself can create a link between young people and society, and between young people and adults. In the public arena it is no longer a question of whether children should be involved in decisions, but rather how this can be done to ensure practical and meaningful participation.

The search for current projects and articles involved finding literature via search words in national and international scientific databases. We also looked for current projects via the contact networks of the children's ombudsmen in the various countries, through voluntary organisations and

search engines on the Internet. There was limited literature about children's involvement, and the amount varied considerably between countries. There were surprisingly few projects that involved children from minority groups. The children's ombudsman in each country provided valuable information throughout the process. Most of the articles we commissioned were written by people involved in the projects. In a few cases the texts were written by people who did not themselves participate.

There is a wide variation in the degree to which the projects that formed the basis of this report have been open or steered. The texts vary in focus, and there are differences in terms of describing and applying results, and who has interpreted and described the processes. Our ambition is that the articles can serve as inspiration and a toolkit for others working with this theme. As we will see, the texts show great variation in the type of participation, how children and young people are included, and how the decisions are supported.

We present four examples from pre-schools and schools. School is perceived as an arena in which children can learn about democracy and where they can exercise democracy in practice. This perception has now filtered down to pre-schools, and young children are becoming involved in planning day-to-day activities. When such young children are to participate, the attitudes of adults and their ability to pick up on what is not so obvious, not least the children's body language, are vital to what can actually be attained.

We show seven examples of how it can be organised when young people are involved in shaping their own leisure activities and exert influence over the planning of their surroundings. Three of the articles are mainly about physical surroundings, and how the involvement of children and young people can improve planning and decision-making processes. The other four articles concern involvement on another level, i.e. how children and young people are involved in developing and driving various measures and activities. Several of the examples highlight the challenges associated with involving children and young people in planning and shaping their everyday lives. They also participate actively in planning and implementing regional events. This type of organisation encourages network-building and possible activism.

Seven articles illustrate various ways of exerting political influence. The articles span a broad spectrum of political participation. Three of them describe comprehensive systems for involvement. The contributions provide insight into how young citizens are involved on municipal and national levels, and explain how work in public authorities can be orientated towards young people. Two of the articles focus on youth councils. Two others describe how children and young people can exert influence through stand-alone events. They illustrate influence through activism and how children and young people participate in dialogue with adult officials at a conference about what constitutes a good life.

In some of the projects, the children and young people are primarily consulted, while in other projects they are included at all levels. The quality of the involvement seems to depend more on content than on organisation, and the extent of children's impact also seems to largely depend on the extent to which those people driving the activities are willing to open up for change. Planning is needed so that channels other than the traditional ones can be used. Structural changes may also be necessary and the influence may need to be formalised. The political arena is rarely arranged for children's and young people's influence. When two different cultures with two different languages meet, the parties must adapt to one another through dialogue. But in order to promote children's involvement, it is important that structures are in place so that the dialogue can take place on children's terms, and that they themselves can be involved in influencing the terms. This will ensure that the young people's opportunity to influence does not depend on the degree to which those that are older than them are willing to release control. At the same time, there will be a continuous need for training, as there are constantly new children and young people. Fixed structures and good models will be a start for attaining results and establishing such projects.

Five articles concern children with unique experiences. By this we mean children and young people who have a relationship with the welfare services and so have different experiences to most children. The texts show how important it is for decision-makers to collect experiences from vulnerable children and young people who are in a disadvantaged position in relation to those who are to make decisions on their behalf. When this is done, children then feel they are listened to and that their views are taken into account. This applies not least in environments that children may experience as strange, such as child care institutions, and when the child has been taken into care, perhaps against his or her will. Taking children seriously does not necessarily mean that children need not adapt themselves to certain organisational structures and relationships.

A common thread in these projects is that an empowerment process seems to take place through involvement. It results in the creation of a social network and children become aware of their rights and experiences and that they can help others. At the same time they realise they are experiencing something unique, and that their experiences are important. The need for structures and adults who can provide support comes out clearly in all projects.

The actual involvement can be both an objective and a means, and content, form and relevance are important for the mobilisation. The type of involvement that is most appropriate depends on the objective of the organisation. If children and young people are to experience that involvement is meaningful, it is important that the influence is practical, regardless of its level.

How involvement works in practice determines what the youngest children get out of being involved. Here the attitudes of adults working with

children are very important, not least how they include the children. The projects described also show clearly that the involvement process requires safe and clear parameters. The goals must be defined and the working methods must be understandable.

The biggest barrier to children and young people becoming involved in practical decisions, when that is the objective, is that those people who are to share the power question children's competency and maturity. There are various reasons for this. They may wish to protect the children, and involving them is time-consuming and requires hard work. Furthermore, such a division of power necessitates the person with power relinquishing some control. Children are required to be qualified to participate, and it is the adult who decides whether the child has sufficient maturity. When the balance of power is weighted from the start, the stronger party must be sensitive and responsive and he or she must be really committed to the task. The fact that age and maturity determine status is problematic. There is a risk that young people can be dismissed if they think differently to adults, that they lack the insight necessary for them to be worth listening to. When access to information is limited, there is a risk of incorrect information and so the child may not get an overview of the consequences.

Stimulating involvement is a way to strengthen children's social and cultural capital. Genuine participation will improve the quality of decision-making processes and thereby improve activities and services so that they correspond better with what the young person needs and wishes. It will also promote protection of children, empower them and boost their self-esteem.

2. Involvement

Since the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified, rhetoric about children has changed considerably. There has been greater focus on humanisation, individualisation, user-adaptation and democratisation. Within these different disciplines there has been greater perception of children as active and competent players with unique experiences and as an important part of society. The attitude to children has changed from seeing them as objects and passive recipients, to instead regarding them as subjects with rights and thoughts that should be respected[1].

The expressions 'participation' and 'involvement' have been increasingly used as key words in many parts of the world. In the Nordic countries there are a constantly increasing number of players who formulate requirements for including children and young people as informants and partners, both in terms of decisions significant to their own lives and to society in general[2]. In the public forum it is no longer a question of *whether* children should be involved in decisions but rather *how* this can be done to ensure effective and meaningful participation. Public authorities in Norway emphasise four arguments for the involvement and participation of young people in their local communities, in addition to this being their legal right[3]:

Democracy: Matters are better illuminated and considered if young people are included in the process, and the knowledge base on which decisions are made is improved and broadened. Participation can help to develop young people's democratic skills, and can help to encourage wider political engagement.

Local community and development: Young people can play an important role in positively developing local communities. They have alternative experiences and a different type of knowledge about their surroundings, and can therefore offer different types of solutions compared to adults. At the same time, involvement can help to strengthen young people's sense of belonging in an area and their sense of well-being which will also make the local community more attractive.

Culture and politics: Young people's involvement can strengthen creative diversity. If their experiences are included in the process, different groups and cultural expression become more visible. This strengthens civil society and the individual's social capital, and helps to create trust between generations and between different groups in society.

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[1] Glaser 2008
[2] Søftestad 2007: 115
[3] BLD 2009: 89-90

Social inclusion: Including citizens and giving them responsibility can improve social affiliation and boost self-esteem. This is seen as an opportunity to build social competence and, by doing so, prevent social exclusion.

There are many other strong arguments for involving children and young people: it is a statutory right, it provides much important information, all parties learn from it, it is an effective way of finding good solutions, and helps show respect for children's integrity. It can also set standards for democratic practice. Some people perceive involvement as a learning process through which young people become responsible and conscious citizens. The involvement process in itself can create a connection between young people and society, and between young people and adults[4].

But implementing an effective involvement process is not an easy task. It is important to be clear that children can be incorporated into decision-making processes merely to legitimise decisions that have already been taken. On some occasions children do not wish to participate, or participation can problematic in other ways. This can raise ethical and legal issues.

Involvement can refer to both process and result[5]. There can be involvement as an equal partner authorised to express views, but it rarely means independent authority to make decisions. Involvement entails open dialogue where decisions are made in collaboration[6]. Children and young people can participate in the shaping of their own lives, society and politics from their own situation and with their own expression. At the same time, there are many different opinions about how to proceed in practical terms. For example, there is a clear difference between involvement and consultation, and while some people see consultation as a category of involvement, others see it as a separate category[7]. In practice the two terms are often used synonymously, but if someone participates by contributing viewpoints, this is different to being involved in decisions. This is the most crucial difference[8].

2.1 Models

There is a wide variation in how open or steered the projects that formed the basis of this report have been. The texts vary in focus, and there are differences in how the results are applied and described, as well as who has interpreted and described the processes. Consequently, we cannot make direct comparisons about the nature of children's involvement. The texts primarily illustrate the range of involvement. We will discover that children in very different situations are consulted in various ways, and that they are

[4] Thomas 2007: 200
[5] Thomas 2007: 199
[6] Søbstad 2006
[7] Thomas 2007: 199
[8] Thomas 2007: 200

involved to varying extents. But we find common ground that makes it meaningful to compile the projects in this way. In doing so, we have been inspired by Harry Shier's model[9] in which he divides the concept of children's involvement into five different levels.

- Children are listened to
- Children are supported in expressing their views
- Children's views are taken into account
- Children are involved in ongoing decision-making processes
- Children share power and responsibility for the decisions that are made

The three first levels are a minimum requirement for following the intentions in Article 12: Children are listened to, they are supported in expressing their intentions and these are taken into account. In other words children are *consulted*, and their views are an integral part of the considerations when decisions are to be made. But these grounds do not mean they are *involved*. Involvement implies that children are involved in decision-making processes (or negotiations) as they take place and, as in Shier's fifth and highest level, children share power and responsibility for the decisions that are made.

Most of the projects described in this report fulfil the three first levels. Some of them involve children at higher levels, but the basis for defining their position varies greatly. In some cases it is clear that young people share power and responsibility, while in others it is a matter of interpretation how high up the hierarchy the project can be placed. At the same time a hierarchical model like Shier's cannot embrace the complexity in the projects. The levels do not necessarily build on one another, and the highest level need not be the ultimate. It would naturally depend upon the objective of the projects, the intention of involvement, how much children themselves wish to participate, and on what the influence can be exerted.

Work with Shier's model has shown that it is primarily useful in processes that involve decision-making. This applies to several of the projects that are described. However, the model is less useful for other types of involvement – and we will see examples of this.

Sharing power and responsibility is placed at the highest level in the model, but it is important to be aware that participation in decisions in a way that brings responsibility can be experienced as a burden[10]. It is also important to emphasise aspects of participation other than co-determination. Children's participation also has a socialising effect, which can be just as important as being involved in decision-making[11]. The social importance of networks, new relationships, and discussing with and learning from each other can be just as important for individuals as policies challenging existing

[9] Shier 2001
[10] Thomas 2007: 205
[11] Liden 2003: 100

knowledge and changing something[12]. Everyday influence also means a lot. It does not necessarily mean taking part in all decisions, but children can nevertheless be involved in influencing their situation.

It is the actual content that determines the level of participation. Elements that are important here include attitudes, non-verbal communication, types of information, and a flexible model adapted to age and the matter in question. Even if overall structures are in place, the most important conditions are at individual level. The actual basis for involvement is children's rights but, at the same time, the formulation of objectives in the various measures and projects is more complex and often linked to conditions other than children's rights[13]. This also characterises the nature of the involvement.

A total of 23 projects are described, four from each of the Nordic countries and one from each self-governing territory area. We have chosen to present the projects in four main categories: Pre-schools and schools; Culture, leisure and surroundings; Political participation; Children with unique experiences.

[12] Thomas 2007: 206
[13] Kjørholt 1997: 55

3. Pre-schools and schools

Schools today have a responsibility to promote democracy so that children are educated to develop democratic attitudes, and are trained in decision-making processes, political processes and cooperation[14]. School is perceived as an arena where children can both learn about democracy and where there is the opportunity to exercise democracy in practice. This view has also filtered down to pre-schools, and young children have become entitled to participate actively in planning day-to-day activities. Involvement at pre-school level concerns children's participation in various ways, but depends a lot on the adults' attitudes and the way they relate to children[15]. Both in school and pre-school, there are many conflicting interests that both include and exclude. Our perception of children's capacity is fundamental to how we treat them and how we structure educational activities.

3.1 Sweden: Use of the Trialog method in student council networks to improve student democracy

By *Ove Strand*, Process Manager, Trialog, Smedjebacken

3.1.1 We care – do you?

This somewhat provocative question illustrates one of the basic ideas behind the ENID project – *Elevrådsnätverket i Dalarna* (Student Council Network in Dalarna). Far too many schools in Sweden set up obligatory student councils, where children and young people are put in contexts that they find hard to understand and where they cannot see the big picture. The conditions and tools that would allow engagement to flourish are also lacking. Through a number of conscious choices and strategies, and a strong emphasis on adult involvement, ENID has given the student council network in schools the knowledge and will to take full responsibility for implementing democracy.

Implementation

The student council network started in 2008 with seven participating schools, years 6/7 – 9. At the start of the project, the schools had come varying distances along the road to democracy. A couple of them reported functioning student councils but most answered that "*We need a kick to get started"*. The same applied to informal influence – the classroom issues.

[14] Mikkelsen and Fjeldstad 2003: 21-24
[15] Sjøvik 2007: 97

The project was run in two stages: Part 1 comprised three conferences with the titles *"Introduction – review of the current situation"*, *"Are students creators or followers?"* and *"Vision – a school with democratic competency."* As a result of these conferences, Part 2 of the project was started in the 2008/09 school year with a stable network (approximately 45 people) that produced a common vision document for network meetings at each of the seven schools.

Empowerment!

The network meetings have belonged to the pupils! Before the meeting, the host school's pupils in the ENID group (3–5 pupils) engaged the entire student council as officials, hosts and entertainers. According to the pupils, this key part of the project involved maximum participation. Even amongst those pupils with more peripheral tasks, participation left its mark: *"I feel so big today!"* (girl in year 6 who welcomed the visitors, including teachers and heads, at the school entrance). The ENID pupils were responsible for the programme, proposed which items would match the common agreed theme for the day, and added them to the process manager's programme items.

Learning Styles

Here we have chosen to present a typical example of how participating pupils developed through the process and how their engagement influenced adults, both teachers and their head teachers – the network meeting on Learning Styles. As mentioned previously, the majority of student councils lacked in-depth experience of real influence – usually it extended to the formal influence – the student council functioned because it was obliged to. When the speeches and different exercises about Learning Styles were over, something had happened! The instruction and exercises had served as an alarm clock, creating an 'A-ha!' effect. Dormant engagement was given power and creativity through new knowledge.

As a first stage after all the input, the pupils wanted to hold discussions in mixed-school groups, but without the adults. This had previously been experienced as a positive experience – *"We did it like this"*, *"We've never heard of that – tell us how you do it"* – and it gave strength and boosted self-confidence.

The next stage involved discussions where pupils and adults sat together. These were the most interesting sessions. It was interesting to see how the adults were impressed and surprised by the young people's engagement and apparently newly-acquired insight, and also to see how the pupils' chance to exert greater influence was influenced by seeing how 'other' pupils spoke in the presence of their head teachers. This illustrated the best aspects of networking.

The results – what ended up in the action plan and what was awoken in the participants – are therefore a consequence of training in a network and

that 'the other party', the adults, participated on the same terms = an open and receptive environment = condition for change.

Progress Discussion

In the network meeting on "The Progress Discussion", a provocative introductory exercise revealed great pupil dissatisfaction with this central component of pupil influence. Another of the exercises showed that the progress discussion was experienced as an 'away game'. A further review where all parties estimated the distribution of time in the progress discussion showed clearly that the teacher and parents occupied most time. Overall the workshop showed that the idea of the progress discussion as 'my time' was only recognised by one or two out of 20 pupils. After discussions according to the above model, the result was unanimity and support for each other on the need for change. In future, the pupils will be given the chance to lead, and be trained in leading, their progress discussion – 'pupil-led progress discussions'.

The pupils' newly-aroused interest and unanimity led to these two components featuring prominently in the action plan.

3.1.2 Strategies – success factors

Maximum participation

In the introductory phase, the school that initiated the network was appointed the 'model school'. On various occasions pupils from this school have been responsible for programme items and served as examples or illustrations for the others in preparation for discussions and reflections. In this way, all pupils were given support in accepting the new responsibility brought about by the network. *"It's been so good to hear from other pupils about how to do things and to feel that you can"*.

In order to minimise the risk of hostage situations, the project management chose to train the participants in influence and democracy using a special method. This gave all participants an analysis tool – the Participation Ladder – for critical review of each decision-making process. The pupils are thereby equipped to reflect over the process from the perspective of influence. We can also see that consistent evaluation guaranteed quality in the project.

Not only young people

One of ENID's most important strategies was that heads and staff representatives should participate in the network. A student council network with only student council representatives would have had little, if any, prospect of attaining its objectives.

The common, parallel thread

ENID's action plan for "A school with democratic competency", prepared with a vision document as an engine and compass, is a compilation of ENID's prioritisations for the work on pupil influence in schools and can serve as a general document for work on democracy in individual schools.

Initially, 'action plan' and 'vision document' were alien concepts for the pupils. Evaluations indicate that they now understand how different things in school are inter-related and that the ENID action plan provides important support to the student council work – "*A good action plan for how we will develop a good student council organisation that can work to improve pupil democracy*".

3.1.3 Results

As previously mentioned, both participants and the project management regard ENID as a success.

In a rewarding and absorbing way, the process has led the participants to joint agreements and prioritisations, mainly because the different parties have listened to the same lectures and taken part in the same exercises. Through the pupils' engagement, the adults' ideas that increased influence automatically increases a sense of responsibility have been reinforced.

The network's participants have chosen to continue after the project period, and view the action plan as a working instrument for the future. Individual schools describe how the pupils' engagement has taken a completely new dimension. And in conclusion, we see that the pupils in the network schools are not alone in their engagement; they know and feel that they have adult partners who are prepared to support, and put forward counter-arguments or a positive response. In other words adults who do not neglect them or treat them with nonchalance. Adults who guarantee continuity. The answer to the question at the start of this article is undoubtedly "Yes".

3.2 Iceland: Sæborg pre-school: An example of how children can influence their everyday lives

By *Anna Gréta Guðmundsdóttir* (Principal), *Auður Ævarsdóttir* (Catering Manager of the pre-school) and *Kristín Hildur Ólafsdóttir* (Project Manager)

In Sæborg pre-school we put a lot of emphasis on themed projects and allowing children to investigate these subjects thoroughly. The idea for this project arose when the staff were preparing for the pre-school's 15th anniversary. How about suggesting to the children that they could take a closer look at the pre-school and discover what they thought about it? With the project we wanted to understand the children's perception of the pre-

school, amplify their understanding of the Sæborg phenomenon, and ask the children to look at the building in a new way. The children engaged in the project were aged between three and five.

The project started with discussions in small groups of children in the pre-school. *What can we find in Sæborg?* The children's ideas varied, ranging from counting things to their activities such as colouring, painting and resting. It was funny to hear one of the children say that we "butter" in Sæborg, but it was a little early for them to practice buttering their own bread during the afternoon snack.

The children were then asked to draw pictures of Sæborg. Naturally, the quality of pictures showed their varying abilities when it came to drawing, but all children had many ideas about their Sæborg when they were asked about their pictures. One of the girls (3 years, 7 months) described her drawing like this:

> "It is Sæborg. It is a Sæborg ship, sailing on the sea. There are stairs. The dangerous stairs, so you can get up to the loft. Really many. The stairs are really down here. That's a window and a door. There is a gate. Look, my Sæborg is finished!"

After discussing the pictures, it was time to experience Sæborg. We strolled round Sæborg in small groups. We looked at the places that childen did not normally see, such as the staff's lunchroom, conference room and laundry room. We encouraged the children to look at the pre-school in a new way. They could pretend to be in the staff's shoes in the lunchroom and were given some water in a coffee cup: "*My coffee is boiling hot with a fly in it!*" The kitchen was the room that was most exciting, and where they received a warm welcome. They had to wash their hands and wear a hairnet before they could enter the kitchen. All the equipment attracted a lot of attention.

Visiting Soffía, the manager of the pre-school, was also very exciting. One of the children talked about Soffía at her café, and another child reported that Soffía prints out things, writes, and goes to the toilet. While the children went round the rooms while exploring the building, their ideas and questions were recorded and used when developing the discussion and the next stage in the project.

> "Why are there two sinks in the kitchen? Why is there ice in the freezer? Why is there electricity here? Why is there a torch here? Why does water come out of the tap? Do you wee in the toilet sometimes? Do you wee sitting down? Do you print things?"

When the children had investigated the various areas, we asked them what they knew about Sæborg. They could now name many more places in the building, and they knew the building much better. "*I know everything about Sæborg! About Torvet and the rooms. The kitchen too. And the little creature that lives with Anna the cook*". In the children's discussion, we discovered that those children who ate in the central room of the pre-school – Torvet – experienced other things than those who ate in the other rooms.

For example they could see when somebody fetched food in the kitchen and when people went past them. Consequently, we decided that all children should experience eating in Torvet.

We had seen and talked a lot about Sæborg, and now we wanted to show the children an architect's drawing of the pre-school. The children quickly understood the drawing – especially after we pointed out the entrance to the building. The children also noticed four circles that surrounded Torvet, but they couldn't understand what these meant. So the children went out of the room and out to Torvet to investigate it. One of the children quickly caught on that the circles represented the four pillars in Torvet. They ran round Torvet and counted the four pillars that corresponded to the circles on the drawing. At that point, we wanted to look more closely at what the children felt was really interesting and exciting in Sæborg.

After thorough consideration, we decided to use a digital camera that was designed especially for children. The children walked around the pre-school, one at a time, taking pictures of the places they felt were interesting and, at the same time, we recorded their ideas and thoughts. We thought it would be interesting to see what they chose to photograph, which would often reflect their interests. One of the girls (3 years, 8 months) chose to take a picture of three-sided mirror in Torvet. Her favourite place has always been Torvet since she started in the pre-school, so it wasn't surprising that she chose to take a picture there.

> Teacher: "Where did you take the picture?" Thea: "In Torvet. The mirror." Teacher: "Why did you choose to take a picture of the mirror?" Thea: "Because I think it's nice." Teacher: "What do you see in the mirror?" Thea: "Myself. Lots of Theas. Really many. Too many to count."

One boy (4 years, 1 month) chose the kitchen, which he found most fascinating. He went straight to the kitchen with camera in hand and was adamant that he wanted to take a picture of the sink and the tap.

> Teacher: "Ari, what did you want to take a photo of?" Ari: "The tap in the kitchen." Teacher: "Why did you want to take a photo of the tap?" Ari: "Because it's most cool."

The children chose to photograph very different places, and their pictures and ideas were put on a wall display so they could show them for their parents and talk about them with other children. We continued working with the photos and decided that the children would draw the places they had photographed.

Sæborg's anniversary was approaching, and discussion started to turn towards the celebration. We discussed in small groups about what we felt should happen.

> "Eat lobster soup and reindeer! And cakes. Sæborg can't stop. No, not eat its cake. Invite Sæborg to a party. Eat a cake. A bright red cake. A brown cake. Enormous.

Many cakes. And layered cakes. And bright red layered cake. And orange layered cakes."

As can be seen, the children's ideas often focused on food.

Their ideas were quite fantastic and we could not use them all. We wanted to find out a bit more about their ideas, so we asked the children to draw the party just as they imagined it. They did this in pairs together with a teacher who wrote down their ideas. Their pictures were beautiful and were packed with incredible anniversary parties. It was also something of a fairytale world, because enormous candles could be turned into prison bars if necessary, there were horses at the party along with churches, ravens and many other things.

The party was largely influenced by the children's ideas. One child's drawing was used for the invitations, and the Catering Manager made a wonderful lobster soup in honour of the day. The actual cake was not bright red, but it was very distinguished and was inspired by the children's ideas. The children participated in the party with their artwork, they carried a new flag out of the building to a new flagpole that had been donated to the pre-school. The children sang an anniversary song for Sæborg that was especially composed in honour of the day.

The project, which ended with the anniversary party, had reached its objectives. The children now looked on their pre-school differently, they talked a lot with each other, and the teachers learned much more about the children's views and ideas. It was also fun to see their fantastic ideas about the party; they participated more and were involved in planning the party on the basis of their own ideas. The pre-school's anniversary party was a great success. The children were very proud of the party, because they played a major role in preparation and planning.

3.3 Denmark: Practising democratic values in Hylet pre-school

By *Erik Nielsen*, teacher at the Hylet pre-school

3.3.1 Children and democracy, or education for democracy.

Hylet sport-based pre-school was opened in 1972 as a slightly different pre-school, one where involvement in decision-making and democracy would be in focus. Consequently, the children were involved in decisions from the very beginning, particularly decisions that they themselves could cope with and understand.

Democracy – one of the basic values at Hylet.

From the very beginning, and even true today, it has been very important that children's democracy should be real; children could be involved in decisions within the frameworks that we teachers/parents felt they could

cope with. But they were not to believe that they could be involved in deciding everything between heaven and earth.

We are still the adults and it is we that have the experience and knowledge about how society fits together.

An example is that, when we are going out to play a sport in winter, the children cannot decide if they are to wear a warm jumper or not. We adults make that decision on the basis of our experience of cold and winter. But the children can be involved in choosing which sport we will play and which playground we will go to. On some occasions the decision is straightforward, but usually the children will present arguments about why they want to do something specific. For example, they may not have been to a particular place for some time, or because it is the most suitable place to play the game they have all agreed upon.

If there is a vote (through a show of hands), then some will win with their proposals and others will lose. We then make an agreement with the children that next time we will visit the other place without taking a vote.

So children can be involved in deciding some things, but there are also things that we adults decide upon.

Children cannot decide if they want to go on an outing or not. They have no choice on the matter, as it is part of the pre-school's overall educational approach that we have developed together with the parents. We see the pre-school as a community, where we have common experiences and where certain things have to be done.

Another example is food. We have meals all day in the pre-school. Here the children can also help to decide on what we will eat. They can make suggestions, which they make at the children's meetings. But their suggestions must be within the framework set out through decisions made by staff and parents about a healthy and varied diet. They cannot decide that we will eat ice cream and cake, but tasty tomato soup and curried herring are possible.

All the time it is about finding the balance between what decisions children can and cannot be involved in, bearing in mind their age, experience and development.

The most important thing is to take the children seriously and listen to what they have to say... but also to what they do not say. When we go for walks away from the pre-school, the children follow a routine, i.e. they always have a regular partner whose hand they hold, and it is the adults who have decided the partners. We also have fixed eating groups with fixed places. But nothing is so fixed that it cannot be changed. So, if a child wants to sit/walk with someone who is not their regular partner, they can visit other groups, hold a different person's hand, etc. But when this is not possible, the adult must have strong arguments. A "no" is not just no. It is "No, because...".

Children's meeting

Approximately once a week, we hold a children's meeting. We define our children's meetings as a democratic forum at child level, where children can praise and criticise each other and adults, and make suggestions concerning everyday life in the pre-school. The children's meeting is a forum at child level. The meeting is arranged as follows: the oldest child is responsible for counting the number of participants, ensuring that the number of chairs matches the number of children that are attending, and for arranging the chairs in a horseshoe shape.

During the meeting, one child and one adult act as chairmen, drawing the agenda on a board placed at the opening of the horseshoe. The meeting starts and ends with songs. The meeting has four fixed items on the agenda: praise, criticism, gymnastics/sport/play/movement and children's item.

The children sit down and voting takes place to elect one child secretary, who draws the minutes, and one adult secretary, who writes the minutes. These two act as chairmen at the next meeting.

The meeting begins with the child secretary from the previous meeting 'reading' the minutes they drew at the previous meeting. The agenda item 'Criticism' may involve, for example, someone complaining that someone has taken pieces from someone else's Lego base, that the boys did not lift up the toilet seat, or that someone is teasing. Such matters are discussed at the meeting and are recorded. The children propose solutions to the problems. At the next meeting, we read the previous minutes and discuss whether there has been an improvement. Someone may be praised for being a good playmate, or there may be praise because the food we were served was tasty. Here, the adults can make comments that help the child. Under the children's item, children can make suggestions about outings, food, toy days, etc. Under this item they are also asked, for example, to say if they have been on holiday, have got a new baby brother or sister, or been collected by a grandparent. Suggestions that come up are discussed at the meeting, and decisions made. The adults are responsible for ensuring that decisions are followed up and implemented.

The adults help children raise matters. If, during a discussion, a child makes a suggestion about an outing or food, we say, "Bring the matter up at the children's meeting". Before the meeting we remind the child about it in case they have forgotten.

Sometimes parents help their children by mentioning to an adult in the pre-school that their child has a problem or a suggestion that they might need help to remember. On other occasions, adults may remind children about things that have been suggested in the pre-school, or suggest to children that something should be taken up at the children's meeting.

Naturally the oldest children have most to say and make most suggestions. They can judge the right time to take things up. The youngest children also say things but not always at the right times. The older children learn to overlook this – they were the same when they were younger.

Purpose of the children's meetings

The individual child learns to speak before a group and take a position on their own and other people's attitudes. Children's vocabulary is strengthened when we sit and talk. The child is supported in expressing their feelings and thoughts. For example, problems occasionally arise in a children's group that someone may feel bad about; we can take these up at a children's meeting and solve them together. We sit very close together and hold the child who feels wronged and help him or her to speak out.

We talk about good and poor behaviour, how to treat one another, and how to play with other children. We help children speak out in front of others if they experience physical or verbal assault.

The entire children's meeting is based on a democratic process, where children are given a feeling for voting and democracy. The children use the subjects at the children's meeting to resolve conflicts themselves. We teach children that democracy can be used for something.

It is important that we adults who work with children are very receptive to what they have to say and what they suggest, and that we give them an answer. We as a staff know that children enjoy these meetings. They tell us this, as do their parents who give us feedback about the children's enthusiasm. Some of the children have introduced such meetings in their homes. The books of minutes are on display so the parents can read/browse through them, which they often do.

The older children's enthusiasm spreads to the younger ones. The latter look up to the older ones and try to imitate them. But it is not just at the children's meetings where the older children are role models. They are role models in all other ways at the pre-school. But this is also something we consciously work with, making children responsible for their behaviour and showing particular consideration for the younger children and those that have just started at the pre-school. Another example is the 'walking buddy'. When a new little child starts in the pre-school, one of the oldest children is appointed their walking buddy and they stick together for the year. Apart from holding the young child's hand, the older one also has overall responsibility for ensuring that the younger child is happy in the pre-school. This is very important for the older child who benefits from the responsibility. At the same time, the younger child looks up to the older friend and learns from him/her.

Metro example.

We also try to give the children an insight into how democracy works in the world outside the pre-school. An example is when the Copenhagen Metro opened. The trains have no drivers and it rapidly became popular for the children to stand in the first carriage and 'drive' the train – but they lacked a steering wheel and driving buttons. The staff wrote a letter to the Metro company on behalf of the children and asked if it might be possible to equip the Metro carriages with a toy control panel and we promptly received a

positive reply from their communications officer. The children and an illustrator from the company jointly designed a control panel that was not only kept in our pre-school but also sent to the pre-schools located along the Metro line. Our aim with the project was to show the children how democracy can work – that if you want to change something you must do something about it.

A democratic evaluation

When we reflect on the many years we have worked with democracy and children's meetings, we can see that this has had a positive influence on the children. We still have a lot of contact with our former children after they have left the pre-school, and their parents. The responses we have received, both from the children but even more so from their parents, give us the same message.

They apply democracy in school and in their leisure activities. They have learned to speak in front of large groups, they have learned to take things up at meetings, and they have learned that if they want to change something, they themselves must be involved in doing something about it. Consequently we are quite convinced that the way we have worked with democracy has had a positive effect on the children. The children have really been able to use the little seed of democracy that we, together with their parents, have sown in them for their future life in school and leisure time.

3.4 Iceland: The inclusion of children aged 2–16 in developing and introducing a new school programme in Mosfellesbær

By *Gunnhildur María Sæmundsdóttir*, School Consultant at Mosfællesbær School

3.4.1 Children's voices

The Mosfellsbær Education Committee, which manages the schools in the municipality, decided to reform the school programme. The work is now under way and is expected to be finished by autumn 2009. The decision to reform the school programme was made on 16 May 2009, when the School Assembly was held – a meeting for interested residents in the municipality. The purpose of the assembly was to listen to the residents' views on what comprises a good school. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children are entitled to express their views and are to be able to influence their own surroundings and conditions. In order to comply with this right, a project was started in the weeks leading up to the School Assembly called *Save the Children – Children's Voices*. The purpose of the

project was to encourage children aged 2–16 in pre-schools and primary and lower secondary schools to express their views and attitudes on how they would like their schools to be. The method used in the project was a Mosaic method. The method consists of six steps[16].

It was acknowledged that children have a hundred languages and so different methods were used to successfully interpret their attitudes and experience of being in school. Emphasis was placed on finding the methods that suited each individual. Several of the methods were combined, i.e. part of one method was often combined with part of another.

The jumping-off point is that children are active participants in development and they can best formulate knowledge and experience from their own lives. In recognising children's talents, the adults have cause to consider their own limited understanding of children's lives. Consequently the focus is on listening to children instead of working from their attitudes and known facts.

The method used means that children, teachers and parents develop attitudes and opinions.

The method is flexible and developed so that it can be used in various situations and at different schools.

The method is based on children's experiences instead of acquired theories.

It is emphasised that the method can both be used as a tool for evaluation and can be integrated into the everyday work of the school.

In the *Save the Children* project for children aged 2–9 years, three working methods were used to identify opinions and attitudes. Firstly, children's behaviour, play and choice of toy were examined to form a basis for evaluating what the children seemed to be looking for. Secondly, a conscious discussion was started with the children. For example, they were divided into small groups in which they talked about the school. The discussion focused on important issues, such as why they come to school, what they found most interesting, what is important, what they want to know and want to be able to do, and how they enjoyed school. As a third working method, a digital camera was used to try to capture what it was that the children were most interested in. Here too, the children were divided up into groups and they were allowed to photograph whatever made them happiest and what they were most interested in. It could be a certain place, friends or objects. The camera is certainly a new language that children can use to express themselves without words, showing what they think and see. A large number of pictures can be taken very easily with a digital camera.

This age group revealed many experiences about what makes a good school and what was most important. However, it could be seen that friends

[16] (Reference: Interesseaktørers deltagelse og indflydelse på skolers indretning, arkitektur og skoleprogram. (Þátttaka og áhrif hagsmunaaðila á hönnun skólabygginga og skólastefnu.) A report for RannUng in Mosfellsbær, September 2008

and peers were a common thread and that play sessions with them were extremely important.

It is quite evident that, for these children, play was significant, both outside and indoors. The photos they took showed this very clearly. Most of the photos were taken in the playground, especially when other children were playing. Some of the photos were from the places where they have their rest, which are also very dear to them.

Children aged 10–12 were invited to participate in the School Assembly in a special group of pupils. However, we had worked with them in discussion groups in school before the Assembly. The Assembly was attended by 22 pupils, and everyone seemed pleased about the opportunity to express what they felt and believed. One of the pupils said that he "didn't know that pupils were allowed to say what they felt about the school, but it was great to be able to do that". We worked with similar questions with this group as with the younger pupils, i.e. what do you want to learn and what do you want to do when you are grown up? The pupils were also asked about how they enjoyed and experienced school. *"What should school life be like for children?"*. These children wanted to learn more about various natural sciences like astrology, natural history and biology. They also wanted to spend more time outdoors, investigate the environment and, not least, learn how to live in the outdoors. They also had very strong opinions about how children should enjoy and experience school – they should feel harmonious and that harassment should be forbidden. They expressed a wish to choose the languages they wanted to learn. They wanted to be allowed to participate in the teaching, to be "the teacher" and they also wanted to work more in groups.

The oldest children, aged 13–16, were invited to participate in the School Assembly on the same footing as local residents, and were asked in particular to contribute to the debate about what makes a good school. In order to spark discussion and to encourage active participation in the Assembly itself, we held group discussions with the young people at school beforehand about the subject, i.e. what makes a good school.

Unfortunately not many of the pupils in this age group came to the School Assembly. However, we were determined that we wanted their opinions and attitudes to be expressed. We then worked with the idea of a special School Assembly for this age group. The idea was to use a school day in the autumn when the young people in Mosfellsbær could attend such an assembly and we really hope that some of them will help to plan and organise such a meeting.

The objective of the project was to listen to children's opinions and attitudes because we were convinced that children could express their opinions and feelings about their school surroundings and the teaching they are offered. They have opinions that should be taken seriously, as well as knowledge that is important and that they can best express themselves.

Many studies show that young children have good abilities and skills in expressing feelings and views on matters that concern them. The right to be heard is one of the pillars of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and their right to influence the planning of their own lives is acknowledged. This acknowledgement has brought increased democracy in school activities, where the children themselves have a voice. Their opinions are to be respected as well as their ability to decide for themselves. (Source: Sjónarmið barna og lýðræði í leikskólastarfi – Children's opinions and democracy in pre-schools.)

As previously mentioned, it is very important that children's own ideas and opinions are reflected in a new school programme. It is also important that adults are open to change and listen to children's voices – we must be convinced that their voices are an important element in the development and improvement of our school.

Naturally it would be simplest to listen only to the adults and their opinions about what makes a good school. Listening to children's voices involves a challenge and a risk. It means that their voices are actually involved in planning the school work, so people are forced to rethink both their working methods and their planning and preparation. In other words it is about jumping into the deep end of the pool and examining established ways of working, your own ideas about how things work best – and that is not necessarily the easiest thing to do.

The new school programme currently under preparation will reflect the following opinions and viewpoints that children aged 2 to 13 expressed:

- It is important to allow time and space for play with friends within the school's work.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on various natural sciences, such as biology, natural history, astrology, etc.
- Teaching should be more practical and less theoretical, and should take place outside more often.
- Pupils want to be challenged and be given more demanding tasks, they want to learn to look after themselves better, not least out in the natural environment.
- Pupils would like more languages to choose from.
- Pupils should be more active in their education and participate actively with the teacher in the actual teaching – nobody can be a passive recipient.
- Pupils want to work more in groups with their classmates. Children are social individuals like the rest of us. School work should be based more on their social skills and their strengths.
- Children clearly require that everyone should feel harmonious at school and that harassment will not be tolerated.

Hopefully the adults are prepared to cooperate with change and listen to children's attitudes. Hopefully they have also accepted the evidence that children's voices are important for development and reform of the school into something even better.

Listening to children's views results in more effective school work and, not least, happier and more interested children. This does not imply that children are generally uninterested – quite the opposite in fact as, by nature, children are curious and cheerful. As a society we need to motivate creativity and innovativeness in everyone, particularly during the current rapid development and advances in all possible areas. The belief in top-down organisation is gone; now we are unanimously agreed that good results are obtained with active input from all participants, varied working methods and, not least, working together.

3.5 Discussion: Pre-schools and schools

These articles show the importance of encouraging involvement, regardless of age. The Trialog method for promoting pupil democracy is a tool for creating structures that make it easier to build networks. Here the social importance of participation emerges clearly, and also the importance of information. The degree of participation depends on how this tool is used.

Both pre-schools are good examples of how young children get a lot out of their everyday environment, and the same applies to the adults who work with children. The Sæborg pre-school illustrates examples of spontaneous involvement and participation, showing that major and dramatic changes are not necessarily needed when creating an environment where children participate in the pre-school. In the Hylet pre-school, the structures for participation are more rigid and the adults have a clear agenda. The procedures for the children's meeting are taken from traditional democratic meetings. The adults set the terms and the children adapt themselves to these, but at the same time it gives the children a structured opportunity to exert an influence on their surroundings. When such young children participate, critical elements are important – the adults' attitudes, the ability to capture what is not so apparent and, not least, the adults' body language.

The School Assembly project in Mosfællesbæ municipality is also an example of where adults have decided the terms for participation and the type of participation. Here, it is clear that this particular form is highly suitable for younger children, while slightly older children are looking for something different. This corresponds with research findings that show that young people today often prefer other channels for exerting influence than the traditional ones[17]. Furthermore, in this case, correct structures have been placed for participation, but the significance for children depends on the processes on the inside, and on what can actually be attained.

[17] Ødegård 2009

4. Culture, leisure time and surroundings

Children's knowledge and perspectives receive far too little emphasis in municipal plans and decisions[18]. There is now growing awareness that this must change. In this chapter, we look at seven examples of how foundations can be laid so that young people can participate in shaping their own leisure time and exert influence over planning their surroundings. Three of the articles mainly concern the physical surroundings and how children's involvement can strengthen the planning and decision-making processes. We learn about whether the Norwegian MIABE method is usable for making children and young people aware of the physical planning of their local environment, and involving them in simple, small-scale improvement projects. The Soft GIS method described in the Finnish project also shows a model that forms a structure for involvement in planning the surroundings. In the Icelandic project presented towards the end of the chapter, children are involved in planning a new school building.

The other four articles concern involvement on another level, i.e. how children and young people are involved in developing and driving various measures and activities. From Iceland we have selected an example that shows how young people are extremely creative when they organise a concert. The examples from Sweden and the Faroe Islands show what type of influence young people can have on running their recreation centre/youth club. The report from Åland illustrates involvement that concerns both building networks and opening the door for activism.

Several of the examples concern challenges relating to involving children and young people in the planning and shaping of their everyday lives.

4.1 Norway: Use of the MIABE method to promote involvement of children and young people in their immediate surroundings

By *Kari Bjørka Hodneland*, MIABE Project Manager

4.1.1 Small Ugly Places

The pilot project called Small Ugly Places was jointly run by the City of Oslo and the architectural practice, Form & Arkitektur. Around 250 pupils,

[18] Gjertsen 2000: 5-18

mainly aged 10–12, from five inner-city schools in Oslo participated along with their teachers. The project was an integrated component of the Safe City municipal campaign, and part of the municipal plan for 1996–98. The project ran for nearly one-and-a-half school years, and concluded with an exhibition in the City Hall Gallery. The pilot project was extended in various forms for a three-year period, also as part of a European project on involvement. The aim of the project was to use public spaces for practical learning and teaching. In liaison with municipal departments pupils worked with measures to improve the appearance and maintenance of public spaces near the schools, thereby creating safer and more pleasant areas for the benefit of all users in the community.

Method

The internally-developed Model for Increased Awareness of the Built Environment (MIABE) was used as an implementation tool. The model was originally used for place analyses but has also proved to be highly usable in projects involving children and young people.

MIABE is a learning and teaching model closely linked to the national curriculum for compulsory education. It consists of a series of different components that stimulate actions. For example, in a group, one member might want to take photographs, another may want to draw a map, one may want to write a report and perhaps everyone wants to build models. This makes it difficult to see which pupils have been most active, and the aim is that as many as possible can find an activity at which they become skilled. Research (Hodneland 2007) has shown that some of the components are more important than others in attaining involvement. This applies particularly to the acquisition of an expanded vocabulary, which I will return to later in the article. MIABE is not looking for the "right" answers, but attempts to stimulate critical thought processes and discussion, based on knowledge acquired through work with the features of the public space. The model is based on group work.

MIABE in practice/the small ugly places

MIABE assumes that teachers and pupils attend courses before the actual start of the involvement project. The organiser/coordinator of the project (with a professional background in architecture) was responsible for the course content, and also attended the individual classes several times during the course of the project.

The pupils were given an introduction to the history of the local area. New concepts such as public spaces, street furniture, etc. were explained and the pupils made notes in their logbooks. The groups themselves chose which small ugly area they wanted to work with. A small ugly area could be part of a street, part of a large square, etc. Most important was that the area contained a number of elements that could be improved. The pupils first had to complete a recording process that gave them an overview of the measures

that were necessary/desirable to improve the appearance and maintenance of public spaces near the school. Briefly, this meant that the pupils learned to observe more actively when acquiring knowledge: they looked, smelled and listened, touched various materials, drew maps of their area, took photographs, made sketches and took notes. The groups summarised all their records, and discussions began about what was ugly, what they wanted to keep, what they could do themselves and what they had to request from the municipality. All viewpoints had to be motivated.

This phase included the special MIABE component about acquisition of specialist vocabulary linked to features in public spaces and public administration. It also included components about proposals for new design and writing letters to municipal departments. Pupils quickly learned to use terms such as municipal departments, facades and street furniture in discussions with one another or in written communication with various municipal departments, architects and designers.

Pupils formulated questions to learn more about what people in the neighbourhood thought about the themes the groups were investigating: "Do you think that they [the municipality] should set up more sheltered seating areas so that people can take cover from the rain?" Although actual responsibility for implementing the pupils' proposals for change lay with the municipal authorities, there were many things the pupils themselves could improve, such as removing illegal posters from a wall in the public space.

In one class, all groups chose to work with proposals for new design of street furniture. The groups chose various design elements, such as rubbish bins, benches, and bus and tram shelters. Does a rubbish bin have to be a dark green cylinder? The yellow rabbit in the photo loves to eat chocolate wrappers, and was one of many proposals for the design of new rubbish bins. In a group letter to the municipality, the class wrote as follows: "To City of Oslo, Technical Department. Class 3c–4c has been studying the area around its school and has found a number of small ugly areas. We have also designed new benches, signs, rubbish bins and shelters and we need help from the municipality to get these developed. We value your help!!!"

In another class, where many pupils came from a minority-language background, the teacher and pupils agreed that all the work with the small ugly areas could be used to improve their level of written Norwegian. The groups wrote letters to newspapers, formulated questionnaires and wrote many letters to municipal departments. At the opening of the exhibition about the small ugly areas, two of the boys gave talks about why they felt that all the report-writing had been "a bit boring at times".

In one of the classes that participated in the pilot project the pupils were only eight years old. Communication with the municipality was too difficult, but they became involved by making one of the small ugly areas more pleasant for everyone by planting tulips.

Was this involvement? In the context of children and young people, we see that the concepts of involvement, influence, participation, active

involvement, etc. are used synonymously. My own definition has developed through reflection over our MIABE-related projects, but is also influenced by planning theory. In brief, involvement means actions by everyone, that there has been dialogue with adults from different professions, and that the involvement process should end with something tangible, such as that described above.

An involvement project in which MIABE is the tool for attaining goals is run as an integrated part of normal teaching over a long time (preferably a school year), and not as a day- or week-long activity. The project takes no time from normal teaching, but forms the starting point for long-term interdisciplinary project work. If involvement is to be more than being involved in a project about this or that – in order to fulfil a sort of minimum requirement for involvement – the children must acquire knowledge about what the project and the involvement aspect means, which is why schools are chosen as the arena.

Why use public spaces as the arena for learning? Public spaces are "owned" by everyone and everyone can influence their appearance. The features in the public space also belong to children's life values. Benches, fountains and rubbish bins are things most children experience long before starting school.

The main objective when using MIABE is split into two parts. Firstly, to increase children's and young people's awareness of the local built environment and, secondly, to promote an introduction to practical experience of the involvement aspect of democracy for *all* children and young people at least once during their education. School is compulsory for all children and young people, so in principle the project reaches everyone, even though there are inevitably large variations in the degree to which the individual is actually involved.

Another objective is that no social changes are needed to run a MIABE-related project, and a third is that the involvement process benefits both the individual and society. I believe this is the only way that all children and young people can be prepared for involvement in society that is sustained after the involvement project has ended. Using the model seems to prepare for involvement for all but, however good a model is, it cannot guarantee that all children and young people using it will be equally active (Hodneland 2007).

Results/summary

The project was regarded as successful. It attracted a lot of media attention and, as was previously mentioned, led to an exhibition in the City Hall Gallery and an invitation to become part of a European project about involvement. The small ugly spaces were visibly improved, and within the time frame and budget. The project was therefore a municipal success story. The children's contribution and work were taken seriously by the adults linked with the project, and the pupils showed great enthusiasm, whether

they were planting tulips or writing letters to municipal departments. "We were at work," said one of them afterwards.

But there were mistakes. For example, teachers were selected "top down" via the school administration and we were not sufficiently wise to emphasise that "things take time". "Why should I waste time on this when nothing happens?" asked one pupil in their logbook. Did any of these mistakes have any practical consequences? No, they didn't – everything was corrected and/or explained during the course of the project, but the "repair processes" took time.

Evaluation took the form of a booklet of ideas for compulsory schools (Hodneland and Christoffersen 1998). As described in this article, children's voices were heard in many areas but not, for example, in the form of interviews or discussions with them about how they felt about participating in such a comprehensive involvement project. It is important to emphasise that Small Ugly Places was not a research project, but a practical involvement project initiated by the City of Oslo with a clear objective. Children and young people were the key characters in the project but their voices were not apparent in the documentation that was available. In an attempt to improve this, some of the children who participated were interviewed later (Hodneland 2007). Everyone stated that they were motivated by being taken seriously, by being able to choose the place and to work with something in which the child was skilled. Malin argued that they had to feel that "something was happening" before they could believe that they had influence, i.e. that they had really been involved.

The work to establish political and administrative support for the project took many months. Use of MIABE in involvement projects like Small Ugly Places requires an administration that is responsible for and follows up inquiries, as was the case with the City of Oslo. What about future use of MIABE? The model can be used by pupils aged 10–15 as one of several tools for preparing involvement in relation to the school's outdoor and indoor environment under the auspices of the municipal company, Undervisningsbygg KF, in Oslo.

4.2 Sweden: An example of how young people can exert influence in their recreation centres

By *Lena Lück*, Recreation Coordinator for the Municipality of Jönköping

4.2.1 At the youth recreation centres in Jönköping, it's the young people who make the decisions

In the municipality of Jönköping, it has long been considered a matter of course that children and young people will be able to exert influence over the environments in which they spend a good deal of their lives. A lot of energy has been expended on developing a political action plan for children and young people, and on organising municipal initiatives based on this to increase children's and young people's influence. For example, the Board of Recreation has assigned its department the task of increasing young people's influence at the youth recreation centres by testing out models in which young people actively participate in the administration of budgets, plans and designs for premises, and programmes and activities in their recreation centres.

Programmes and activities are now being run under strong youth influence at three of the municipality's nine recreation centres. The three centres are each working with different models, and each model has been selected according to the nature of activities and what the leaders think will best suit the young people there.

The Ankaret recreation centre in Huskvarna uses general meetings to give everyone a chance to speak. Everyone at the centre assembles for general meetings once a month. Proposals have to be submitted at least one week before each general meeting. If a proposal entails an expense of more than SEK 5,000, another general meeting must be arranged to discuss it. When a proposal is voted through, the person who presented it is given the responsibility of ensuring that it is carried out – with help from recreation centre leaders if needed.

Rani, 16, is active at Ankaret and thinks that the general meeting model works well:

> "We get a little time after the proposals have been presented to grab a snack and think them through... It could be a bit tricky there in the beginning, when people were voting down each other's proposals just to be difficult." Elias, 17, another active member adds, "But then people realised that if they voted down a proposal, their own proposals got voted down, too."

The young people's proposals for the Ankaret centre can concern just about anything, but they do not have responsibility for the entire budget: "We can use some of the money allocated to the recreation centre. For our proposals, I mean. But when the money is gone, it's gone and then we don't have any left to do things with," explains Rani.

The Dalvik recreation centre works instead with a steering committee composed of seven young people aged 13–17. This committee is intended to represent the young people who visit the centre, and meets once a month to decide on things like school holiday activities, trips, purchases and everyday activities.

"It's much more fun when we get to take part in the decision-making," says Robert, who is 15 years old and a member of the steering committee at the Dalvik recreation centre. He lists off things the young people have done on the initiative of the steering committee: a trip to Stockholm, a trip to Copenhagen, a football trip to Kalmar, several overnight stays and a fishing trip.

Young people at the Dalvik recreation centre are also responsible for a portion of the budget. They receive SEK 20,000 per year to use for various purposes. The hardest part can be organising activities that suit everyone and getting proposals from the young people who are active at the recreation centres. If they do not submit any proposals, someone on the steering committee has to make proposals.

At the Forum recreation centre in Öxnehaga, work with young people's influence is at a more informal level. Forum is a large recreation centre with nearly 80 young people visiting on a typical evening. It can be difficult to hold general meetings for such a large and fluctuating group. Instead, meetings are frequent and spontaneous and everyone is encouraged to come forward with ideas and to help implement them. The kitchen is a meeting place. It may seem simple, but this is a very conscious strategy by the staff. It's all about being flexible and finding the method that suits that particular recreation centre, at that particular time.

For example, the young people at Forum painted and put together a cosy room for the older members – all on their own initiative and from a small budget that they were responsible for administering. But the best idea that came from the members, which required quite a large input from young people and adults alike, was the festival last spring – Öxnehaga Live.

"We invited artists who performed in the dining room and we did almost everything ourselves," says 19-year-old Said. He's a regular at Forum and has been hanging out here since the fifth year of school. He thinks things are more fun when the young people have more say in what happens at the recreation centre. "We didn't do anything before. Now we do loads of things."

For Öxnehaga Live, the young people got to contact the artists themselves and help with the budgets for sound systems and fees. They searched for sponsors and organised dressing rooms. All jobs carried the same status, from arranging the order of the artists in the programme to working in the cloakroom. Everyone was needed.

Attempts have been made to let the young people keep Forum open certain nights on their own, but it's been difficult. Said explains:

"So many come, and they don't have as much respect for us as they do for the adults. They think, 'My friend's working tonight so I can do whatever I want'." So they've had to take a step backwards with this idea, but plan to try it out again as soon as any of the young people want to try being the boss for a night.

In the autumn, there are plans to work more towards letting young people gain insight into the finances, perhaps through a steering committee that will receive a certain portion of the budget to administer. This has been discussed and received a positive reaction from the young people themselves.

The Democratic Coordinator for Jönköping has arranged several training days for recreation leaders and others who work with young people to discuss their experiences and gain new tools for working practically with youth influence[19]. The Coordinator herself has a background as a recreation leader and knows what things are really like in the centres and how much is demanded of the staff there. It's one thing to say you're going to work with youth influence – and quite another thing to put it into practice:

"Some recreation leaders think, 'What am I going to do now? I'm not needed now'," she says and points out that adults can feel some uncertainty as to their roles in youth-driven situations. "But adults are still just as important. They just have a different role. They become coaches."

4.3 Finland: Use of Internet for gathering information on inhabitants' perception and use of their local environments

By *Marketta Kyttä*, Researcher

4.3.1 Soft GIS method as support for children's involvement

The way that all inhabitants, regardless of age, perceive their environment and the ease of day-to-day life comprises the central criteria for good environmental planning. As large-scale consumers of outdoor environments, children and young people have particularly much to say about the quality of their environments.

Finland has been striving to promote the involvement of children in community planning since the 1990s[20]. Experience has been gained in many different locations while developing various types of participation methods and critically assessing them. The list of tested methods is long: future

[19] Methods for meeting techniques, planning and dialogue can be found in the book "Vi spelar roll" [We Matter]. There are also valuable tips for working practically with youth influence. This book and working materials for it can be downloaded from www.jonkoping.se/fritid

[20] *Horelli, L. (1998)* Creating child-friendly environments: Case studies on children's participation in three European countries. Childhood, 5, 225 – 239.

Horelli, L. & Kyttä, M. & Kaaja, M. (1998) Lapset ympäristön ekoagentteina. [Children as ecoagents of their living environments]. Helsinki University of Technology, Department of Architecture, Publication 49.

workshops, photography, CAD planning, miniature planning, sticker maps, etc. Most of the methods were successful in engaging the children and they work well in regard to environmental education. However, conveying the children's opinions to the planners and to other authorities has not been as easy. This is why new methods are needed, methods that are more effective and user-friendly than those previously applied.

Using the Soft GIS methodology, location-based information is collected concerning the inhabitants' perceptions and everyday behaviour. The inhabitants' perceptions are then given an address that links them to a physical environment and already implemented planning solutions. This localised information on perceptions is, from a planning point of view, considerably more valuable than the feedback received from the inhabitants via traditional means[21]. The Soft GIS methods on the Internet allow larger groups of inhabitants to be heard. These methods have already been applied in seven locations with different target groups, with the aim of examining how the inhabitants rate the quality and safety of their living environments, what relationship children and young people have to their environments, etc. Nearly 4,000 Finns have participated in the Soft GIS studies. The methodology has also attracted considerable international attention[22].

Image 1 The Soft GIS application for children and young people in Åbo (www.Soft GIS.fi/turku).

The "Lasten ja nuorten Turku" Soft GIS application is a web-based application aimed at primary and secondary school children in Åbo. In the planning stage, the designers attempted to make it as appealing and

[21] *Kahila, M. & Kyttä, M. (2009)* Soft GIS method as a bridge builder in collaborative urban planning. In Geertman, S. & Stillwell, J. (2009) eds. Planning Support Systems: Best Practices and New Methods. Springer. pp. 389 – 412

[22] See www.pehmogis.fi

interesting as possible for this particular target group. Using this application, information is collected on issues such as places that have played an important role in the lives of children and young people in regard to things to do and social contact. The children draw their route to school, for example, and describe how safe or unsafe they perceive it to be. They mark out places that they consider important by putting balloons on the map. They also answer questions about their own well-being. This allows us to locate the best places for social interaction, the best places to climb, where to go for peace and quiet, where to skate, and so on.

The City of Åbo's soft GIS study was implemented in close collaboration with the Åbo school system. Our demonstrators visited over 50 schools, where more than 1,837 primary school pupils (year 5) and secondary school pupils (year 7) participated in the study during computer classes. The study took one lesson to complete. The City of Åbo's Soft GIS data consists of more than 12,000 perception-based position markers that children and young people placed on different parts of the map of Åbo.

Even an urban environment can be child-friendly

The primary task of our study was to determine the extent to which the urban environment in its various forms can support the varied day of a child or young person. The project represents the new "environmental health study", which focuses on the qualities in an environment that promote health and prevent illness. Our study showed that the more densely built the Åbo children's residential district, the more often they went on their own initiative to the places they considered important, the greater the likelihood they would walk or cycle to school – and the more they liked the places that they had marked out.

In contrast to the earlier studies conducted in Finland[23], it seems that a densely-built urban environment can actually have significant child-friendly characteristics, particularly in regard to promoting children's daily exercise and creating a positive emotional connection. However, children in less-densely built areas, who generally had substantial freedom of movement, nevertheless did not always find any potential for activities in their local environments, and this was something that we found troubling. This can, on the other hand, be explained by the fact that leisure time is becoming increasingly steered and a lifestyle that is becoming increasingly urbanised.

Åbo benefits from the findings of the Soft GIS study

The project entails close collaboration with 11 different authorities in the City of Åbo. In addition to the planning department, other authorities such as those for health, school, social, youth and culture took part in the project. It was hoped that the project would provide information about the children's and young people's use and perception of the environment, physical

[23] *Kyttä, M. (2008)* Children in outdoor contexts. Affordances and independent mobility in the assessment of environmental child friendliness. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.

exercise on the way to and from school and during leisure time and various health variables, distributed according to area and school. Representatives for the administrative boards are utilising the study findings in the implementation of various preventative measures and, in more general terms, as an aid in planning.

Position markings in close proximity to the youth recreational centres, for example, were of particular interest to those working in youth services. If there were not many position markings in that particular area, youth services wanted to know where the young people were instead.

The results of the Soft GIS study have already been used in several community planning projects currently underway in Åbo, i.e. the city centre development project, recreation leaders' planning project, safety projects, school playground planning projects and the evaluation project of the interim general plan. Using information from these findings, we also produced summarised recommendations for the promotion of children's everyday exercise, including a proposal for developing non-commercial activities in the Åbo city centre. We also pointed out that the increasingly warmer winters caused by climate change should be taken into account when building sport and recreation sites.

Method development continues in Helsinki

According to our findings, the Soft GIS method was received very well by children and young people in Åbo. Although the method's test phase was associated with a number of technical problems, the children reacted positively to the study. The data collected with this method is extensive and in many ways unique.

The new findings have allowed further development of the Soft GIS method. The new Soft GIS application for children and young people was used in six different districts in Helsinki in 2009 (see Image 2). At the same time, an even deeper understanding was gained of the connection between environmental planning solutions, children's well-being and their relationship to the environment. This type of information is particularly valuable at a time when construction of communities that are both ecologically and socially sustainable presents a challenge for community planning. The criterion of the challenge is the well-being and future of the youngest inhabitants – children and young people.

Image 2 Helsinki Soft GIS application (www.Soft GIS.fi/helsinkilapset).

4.4 Iceland: Young people's organisation of a benefit concert: a joint project between Unicef and Reykjavik's Sport and Leisure Division (ITR)

By *Bergsteinn Jónsson* (Project Manager) &
Arnfríður Sólrún Valdimarsdóttir (Project Manager)

4.4.1 Background

UNICEF Iceland is one of a total of 36 national UNICEF committees. The national committees work to disseminate knowledge about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, they sell UNICEF cards and

products, provide information about and raise funds for UNICEF's work and contribute in other ways to the aid that UNICEF provides for children all over the world. ITR, Reykjavik's Sport and Leisure Division, organises after-school activities in the city for children and young people aged 6–25 (after-school centres, recreational clubs, youth clubs and youth centres). ITR takes the view that child and youth democracy is very important and has, for many years, run a very active youth council in each neighbourhood of the town as well as a joint council for all young people in Reykjavik.

Reykjavik Youth Council.

The seed of the project grew out of a meeting between two adult guidance counsellors from the two organisations who were discussing action plans and ideas for cooperation. Both UNICEF and ITR have relatively extensive experience of working with young people and youth democracy and they both have active youth councils.

The first step was to arrange a joint meeting of both youth councils. The participants in the project were 19 young people aged 13–18. It transpired during the meeting that both youth councils wanted to be involved in a project in which they could exert influence and take partial responsibility. The young people wanted to organise a project that concerned active involvement in society as well as having a constructive message. One of the reasons for this choice was that young people in Iceland had been mainly receiving bad publicity in the media and they wanted to change this.

At the first meeting it transpired that both youth councils had plans to organise concerts during the winter. After lengthy discussions, the young people came to the conclusion that a joint concert would be a good community project and a way to show Icelandic people that most young people are positive and constructive and can contribute something valuable.

> "I learned a lot from this project. The project gave me good experience of working with many people with different ideas. I also learned that such a large project takes a lot of organising and patience. I discovered that it's very important to have a strong work ethic, a positive approach to the project and an open mind. I also learned that Iceland has many incredibly talented and creative young individuals, who are ready to ready to donate their time and strengths to a worthy cause. I liked that." (*Helena, 18 years*)

The project

On a joint working day, three groups were set up: one for PR, another for music and a third for organisational and financial matters. The young people chose their group according to interests. The groups jointly set the parameters for the concerts.

The PR group prepared a media plan. They chose four individuals, two from each council, to act as spokespersons. They were trained in how to work with the press and about the power of words. The group held a press conference, in which one of the participating bands participated and gave

several interviews to the three largest newspapers in Iceland. During the concert they were interviewed live on television and radio. In addition, the concert was transmitted live on prime time national radio (6.30 to 9.30 pm).

The music group had the fun assignment of choosing bands to match the target group. Six popular bands were chosen to play and all of them played for free.

Setting up such a project required money and organisation, so the finance group had extensive discussions about who could sponsor the concert. At that time all the companies in the Icelandic financial sector were very eager to sponsor events organised by or for young people, where company logos could be highly visible. After a few meetings and much discussion about sponsorship and whether it would be commensurate with the message of the concert, the young people decided that the ideal thing would be to hold the concert without sponsors, without sweets, pizzas and soft drinks – just music, mineral water and positive thinking. And that was the result. The theme for the concert was Western young people's materialism and consumption compared with the needs of developing countries.

> "I learned a lot from this project. It doesn't matter how big or small a part of society you are, whether you are powerful and rich or a poor student like me, you can always help other people." (Sigga, 16 years)

In order to interest their peers in the concert theme, the 19 young people made a PowerPoint presentation that was shown during the concert. The PowerPoint presentation comprised many slides with moving messages where consumption in the west was compared to needs in the developing countries. For example: *Did you have to stand in line for the toilets? 40% of the world's population – 2.6 billion – are also standing waiting....let's do something about it!*

The UNICEF youth council also collaborated with local designers and produced T-shirts with printed motifs that symbolised the work and ideals of UNICEF. They were sold during the concert to help raise funds for UNICEF.

The ITR youth council also constructed an empty stall as part of fundraising and the non-consumption theme. Here, people could choose "not to buy" anything and thereby donate funds to the work done by UNICEF. The idea of the empty stall was to publicise our consumption in the west. The project group wanted the stall to be visual and artistic. Various food products, bottles, canned goods, etc. were painted white. The white colour symbolised, for example, purity, light, joy, honesty and kindness. Since all the food products were painted white, the stall appeared neutral. The concert guests could not purchase soft drinks and popcorn as they would normally do, since the shelves were filled with white objects. Instead, the customers could purchase a vaccination that could save lives, a white bottle and a white can, and thereby donate money to the work done by UNICEF.

> "It was great fun creating the 'empty stall'. We studied magazines about interior design and visual art. It looked great with all the white objects on the shelves. All of us working on the stall wore white outfits. When you think about people our age in developing countries and how little they have compared to us, I felt bad. Most young people in Iceland have far too much stuff. Stuff we don't need. Sometimes you simply buy something, because your friend has bought the same thing. It's just crazy." (Sigga, 16 years old)

The youth councils chose Reykjavik Art Gallery as the venue for the concert and two young entertainers as hosts. The two hosts kept the audience aware of the concert's message and various UNICEF short films were shown between the bands. The entire concert was transmitted live on Icelandic national radio during prime time (6.30 – 9.30 pm) and two young people from the PR group were interviewed live on the television news.

All in all, the young people were very pleased with the project and their own efforts, but they did feel it would have been even better with more guests.

> "Perhaps we could have organised the PR better. There were not enough guests in relation to the size of the room and we'd have liked to have seen more faces. Perhaps we could have created more advertising material for the concert and it would have been better if we'd started our PR earlier in the process. Many peopled didn't hear about the concert until it was over, but they'd have liked to have come." (Helena, 18 years)

The cooperation between the two councils went amazingly well. The young people were so incredibly talented and creative. Such a large project required tremendous organisation and patience. All the young people, the two adult guidance counsellors and the two organisations donated their time and efforts for several months to create the right structure for the concert. The live transmission and great media coverage meant that the young people's original objective for the concert had been attained: to prove that young people often have big ideas and can coordinate and implement a project with positive action; a non-commercial event with an important and relevant message for society.

Both UNICEF and ITR want to set up another cooperation project comprising a new concert. Both organisations have plans to make the concert an annual event. However, such a project demands so much time, organisation and resources, and the economic outlook in Iceland is a little gloomy at present, so the plans have unfortunately been shelved for the time being.

The project's implementation gave us information from which we could evaluate what it would mean for both youth councils if our project were expanded. In the development phase of the project, frequent dialogue between the two youth councils is important. All the tasks must be considered and it must be made clear which methods work and what the young people gain from them. Another important issue in the process is user

inclusion, i.e. when the young people will be directly included in the project. We believe young people should be included in all decisions – the project must belong to them. They want to interact and decide how to formulate it. Young people are increasingly active and co-producers, so we adults must be constantly on the ball, thinking innovatively and in new ways.

4.5 The Faroe Islands: Experience of participation at the Youth Centre (*Ungdomshuset*) at Tvøroyri

By *Tórhild Højgaard*, Attorney at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Faroe Islands

4.5.1 Pakkhús 4

On the Faroe Islands in recent years, a number of youth centres have been set up where children and young people can meet in their leisure time. The larger youth centres are open each weekday, while the smaller ones are open a few days a week. What they all have in common is that they offer a variety of activities for children and young people.

The youth centre called Pakkhús 4 opened in May 2008. The youth centre is housed in a renovated warehouse at Tvøroyri, which is on Suðuroy – the most southerly island of the Faroes. Pakkhús 4 is the product of an inter-municipal cooperation between Tvøroyri and Hvalba. Tvøroyri municipality is responsible for running the centre, and Hvalba municipality makes a financial contribution.

The aim of the youth centre is to give children and young people somewhere to meet, have fun, do things together and have positive experiences.

Pakkhús 4 has two part-time employees – a manager who is also a qualified needlework teacher and one employee who is a musician. The centre is open three days a week on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The centre is open for children from years 4 to 7 from 2–6 pm and for young people from year 8 up till 18-years-old from 7–11 pm. It is also open on occasional Saturdays.

Membership, etc. is not required and all children and young people are welcome, even if only two municipalities are jointly involved in running the youth centre.

Approximately 15–20 children on average and roughly the same number of young people use the youth centre during opening hours. There are girls as well as boys, although there are generally more boys. The boys seem to be more sociable and are happier in a larger group. The young girls are often in pairs and leave if there is too much noise.

Co-determination and participation

At Pakkhús 4 there is a children's council and a youth council. Members of both councils are elected annually.

The purpose of these two user councils is to allow the children to exert influence and participate in decision-making. The tasks of the councils are to formulate proposals and make decisions on activities the centre should offer apart from the regular activities. A bonus is that the children learn to be involved in decision-making processes and learn how to exert influence.

The experience so far is that it takes a lot of support/influence from the adults to keep the councils active. The adults have to constantly encourage the councils to meet, organise activities, etc. If the adults are not actively engaged, the council work soon falls apart. In particular the youth council finds it difficult to take initiatives, and it has been shown that nothing will happen unless the adults constantly encourage the youth council to meet and arrange activities, etc.

Therefore it has to be concluded that the youth council is not working. The young people would prefer – in their own words – "to be left in peace" and just be allowed to use the regular activities in the centre. It is easier to get the children's council to take initiative, even if this also needs a lot of encouragement from the adults. The children seem more motivated by new activities in the centre.

In addition a "centre meeting" is held every fortnight in Pakkhús 4. The main purpose of this meeting is to inform the users of the centre about planned activities, etc. Because the councils do not work optimally, all the users of the centre – both children and young people – can propose activities for the centre to arrange. Here the adults ask each individual user to propose what they would like to see arranged. It has also been shown that users of the centre have difficulty making decisions and usually answer "I don't know". It is clear that the children and young people are not used to making decisions.

Consequently there are attempts to encourage the children and young people to propose activities for the centre to organise, and to implement the proposals as far as possible. If the users of the centre do not make any proposals, the adults suggest activities and then take decisions in consultation with the users. It has also been difficult to make the children and young people take responsibility and organise activities themselves, so these are mostly organised by the adults.

When there are activities in the centre, everyone must participate. Neither the children nor the young people seem to mind this, and sometimes it actually seems as if they appreciate it.

The adults try as much as possible to guide and inspire the children and young people. They also instruct and try to encourage the children and young people to help and learn from each other. Their biggest and toughest task is actually to motivate the users of the centre.

Activities

Pakkhús 4 has some regular daily activities. A popular activity is music, where the children learn to play different instruments. This has been so successful that the centre has no fewer than two bands. Other activities include sewing, Play Station, computer games, table-tennis, pool, etc. In addition, everyone makes smoothies on Mondays and sandwiches on Tuesdays. From time to time dinner is made on Thursdays.

Other activities that have been arranged for young people include concerts, lectures, theme nights, make-up evenings, film nights and various competitions. The centre has organised concerts, trips and competitions for the children as well as courses in weaving, art and making knife shafts. All activities are free apart from the concerts, which cost DKK 20.

Planned activities include a collage course as well as instruction in drama/acting and chess.

As mentioned earlier it is difficult to make the children take responsibility and arrange activities. However, they are good at performing. Last summer the centre organised a Midsummer celebration where the two bands played, two groups danced and others cooked with the adults.

The results

Pakkhús 4 provides an environment that children and young people have longed for and enjoy. Here they can meet around shared interests and have a "healthy" social life instead of "hanging out" "on the streets, as the older boys in particular were used to doing.

It has been shown that young people in particular do not fully use the possibilities offered by the centre or take the opportunity to exert influence and make decisions. This may be because young people are not used to exerting influence or being involved in decision-making and so it seems alien to them. The expectation is that the younger users of the centre – the children – will eventually see the centre as <u>their</u> centre and increasingly make use of the opportunity to exert influence and participate in decision-making.

The centre's success with music has led everyone at Pakkhús 4 to unite in campaigning for better music rooms for children and young people in the area.

4.6 Åland: A project to strengthen youth influence and initiative in the archipelago

By *Charlotte Angergård*, Project Leader for BUS

4.6.1 BUS – Children's & Young People's Archipelago

The rights prescribed to children and young people by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – to participate and influence and to have their voices heard and their opinions respected – were a guiding theme through the one-year project, "Children's and Young People's Archipelago" (BUS). BUS was held in parts of the Swedish and Finnish archipelago and in the six archipelago municipalities of Åland from August 2006 to September 2007, and was aimed at young people aged 13 to 19. On Åland, the youth organisation SKUNK was the active party in the project and this article has been written from the perspective of the Åland community.

SKUNK youth organisation

SKUNK describes itself as an interest group for young people in the Åland archipelago. *Interest* has a double meaning – both to look after the interests of young people in the archipelago and to facilitate various recreational interests for young people in the archipelago by strengthening, developing and arranging various programmes and activities. The organisation works with children and young people aged 7–25 and programmes and activities are based on the principle of "youth leading youth". SKUNK is led by a council of members primarily between the ages of 14 and 20. The council is backed up by an older group leader who works an average of 20 hours a month with SKUNK. In spring 2006, the organisation was instrumental in seeking funds from the EU INTERREG IIIC to make the Children's and Young People's Archipelago (BUS) project possible.

Living conditions for young people in the archipelago

The idea for BUS originated in the living conditions of young people in the archipelago area. Proximity to nature provides a unique environment to grow up in and many positive opportunities. At the same time, the geographical conditions can be limiting. Factors such as limited communications and low population can restrict the opportunities for development in, for example, the recreation sector.

Through an extensive interdisciplinary project, project owners SKUNK, SIKO and Region Åboland want to show the opportunities available in the

Baltic Sea archipelago while at the same time increasing youth influence potential, strengthening youth initiative and creating networks between the various archipelagos. Strengthening young people's active citizenship and their chances to influence their local environment was one of the primary goals of the project. This was realised through various types of activity, including three youth conventions, a festival, local student council training sessions for students and teachers and various local youth conventions and activities. At the various events, radio programmes, documentaries, slideshows and opinion barometers were created. In various ways these reflected young people's different thoughts on life in the archipelago today and in the future.

The project also included the publication of four BUS magazines containing articles and reports by young people on BUS activities and on life in the archipelago. The magazine was sent to all households in the Åland archipelago as well as to the media, associations and decision-makers. The response was positive and became a way for young people in the archipelago to make their voices heard and to increase understanding and knowledge of the living conditions of young people in the archipelago.

Young people at decision-making level

Young people comprised the majority of the members on the steering committee that assisted the project leaders in the implementation of the project. This was an active decision, as the project owners had already decided while planning the project that the steering committee would be comprised of at least fifty percent young people, to ensure youth influence at leadership level. SKUNK, which has a tradition of utilising the skills and experience of young people, chose to appoint two previous council members, aged 19 and 20, as permanent steering committee members. They both had experience of planning, participating in and leading activities such as workshops, camps and exchanges. Their previous experience from board work in SKUNK also brought important organisational skills that were well suited to the work of the steering committee.

SKUNK's representatives in the steering committee were in turn backed by the organisation's activity leaders, who also served as substitute committee members. This gave support and coaching to the young steering committee members in the steering committee's work. It was a solution that worked for SKUNK. Another lesson learned from the BUS year in regard to young people in decision-making forums was the importance of investing time when planning meetings to develop methods that included everyone in discussions and decision-making. In principle, a group always consists of people who talk more or less than others and who take up different amounts of space. When someone is new to a certain situation, it can be difficult for them to get their opinions across, which is why it is important to use different methods to ensure that everyone gets time to talk. The chairman of the steering committee had the role of driving the meeting forward in an

educational manner, and ensuring that everyone understood the decisions that were made and that different opinions were conveyed.

Young people as target group and active participants

In BUS, young people were both target group *and* active participants. This meant that young people did not just participate in an activity arranged by adults; they also participated in the planning and implementation of that activity. Having young people as active participants was an important component of BUS, as findings have shown that activities for children and young people are often arranged by adults and based upon adult notions of what they *think* children and young people like and want to do. The utilisation of young peoples' ideas, skills and initiative was therefore the point of departure for the various activities arranged in BUS. However, during the project year it was discovered that many young people were not used to being taken seriously or feeling that their opinions could make a difference. This knowledge was important for the project leaders, who had the task of inspiring and motivating young people to action and giving them the space and courage to formulate and express their own opinions. When working with young people with such different backgrounds, the attitude and approach of the project leaders played an important role.

The project had set high goals for the number of implemented programmes and activities, but youth involvement was the project's guiding principle. The total project time was one year and this meant that there was sometimes quite a fine line between making quick decisions and making democratic decisions in which young people were involved. Much depended, however, on the leaders clarifying boundaries, decisions that had been made and the delegation of responsibility. The process and the decision-making procedure were important components in ensuring that everyone felt involved, could take responsibility and wanted to contribute to the activity. The BUS year provided experience of both success and failure in this.

Own input to leisure time

During the project year, three BUS conventions were held, one in each region. At these conventions, young people from all regions arranged and participated in activities based on three different themes: archipelago identity, media and initiative. The idea was that the conventions would attract both young people with special interests as well as those participating in the convention primarily for social reasons. The theme for each convention set the stage for the event and the young people and project leaders in each region then discussed what content and form their particular convention would have. The BUS conventions can be seen as an example of how young people can design their own leisure time. The young people were active in various ways according to experience and skills, by leading workshops, organising team-building exercises, arranging evening activities

and deciding menus. The project concluded with a festival, the planning of which had begun at the first BUS convention. The festival included music, workshops and social activities based on the concept developed during the project year.

Experience from the conventions and the festival shows that an event is more likely to be successful, where young people participate and enjoy themselves, and when they themselves are active in its planning and implementation. Instead of just serving ready-made activities, the project leaders' role was aimed more at acting as a resource. Guidance and confidence in the young people's ability to take leadership responsibility was also an important prerequisite for a successful event.

Involvement and influence in everyday life

There are five secondary schools in the Åland archipelago, all of which have student councils. One of the objectives of the BUS project was to cooperate with the schools and support student council activities. This was realised, for example, through local student council training sessions and meetings between the student council and their supervising teacher. Experience showed that the supervising teacher in many instances was alone in his or her role and that there was a need to exchange experiences on how to work as a supervisor and how to support the student council. The student council also needed to meet and improve knowledge about its role and student rights, and to exchange experiences. Through the project leaders' contact with the school and connection to the student council, BUS achieved a good connection with both teachers and young people. Because of this, project programmes and activities were not considered strange and the young people got to know the project leader; this provided security that meant that more young people wanted to participate in activities outside the school.

There was a desire to look at the possibilities of expanding the student councils into local youth councils in the relatively small Åland archipelago municipalities. Unfortunately, there was not sufficient time and resources for this, but it is still an interesting idea for small communities. This could raise student council status while providing the local community with a forum where young people's opinions could be utilised.

Experiences from the project

The project year was both intensive and instructive. It enabled both concrete activities and increased knowledge and skills concerning methods that allow active membership among both children and young people. Attitude has already been discussed in this article, but the importance of faith in young people's abilities and viewing young people as a resource cannot be emphasised enough. The point of departure in BUS was that young people can – and want to – be involved, an attitude that was important in the project in order to be able to work with young people from a participation perspective.

In the work with youth influence, it was important to remember that young people are not a homogenous group. BUS included young people from three different archipelagos, with different experiences both between and within the archipelagos. In the practical application of the project, it was important to find methods that opened up for influence and participation for all.

The potential for young people in archipelagos (or sparsely populated areas) to meet other young people was an important benefit brought up by SKUNK in discussions surrounding this article. In a small community, young people have a clear need to gain new perspectives, practice social skills, get the chance to take on different roles than the ones they have in their local environments, find new friends, try out other recreational activities and get inspired to work on the home territory.

4.7 Iceland: Children's contribution to the planning of a school building in Garðabær.

By *Anna Magnea Hreinsdóttir*, Head of the Pre-School

This project helps to make young children's lives more visible for politicians and town and country planners. There is a special need to investigate and develop appropriate methods for making children's lives more visible in town and country planning at a strategic level. Such an investigation should consider new ways to access young children's opinions and experiences, by listening to them.

When a new school building was being planned in the municipality of Garðabær in Iceland, the *design down process* was used. This means that the teaching context is analysed in a design group. This group comprised teachers from the pre-school and school, parents and other stakeholders. The group met several times during the winter of 2008–2009. The group discussed everything from general matters about the school to specifics. What opportunities did the surroundings of the school offer? How and what would the pupils study in school? At which groups was the school aimed? Was the school to have a library, sports hall and swimming pool? Was the school to be accessible to everyone in the community or just to school pupils?

Part of the design process was to listen to children's voices and opinions and to pass them on. To this end, two teachers interviewed nine children from three pre-schools and 42 pupils (aged 6–15) from five schools. They were interviewed in groups of 3–5 in their schools. The teachers realised that it was better to talk with the children in their own environment together with their peers instead of them participating directly in the design group with the adult

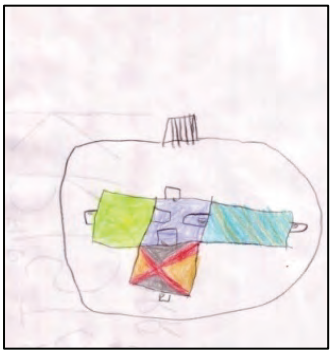
group members. This was to ensure a correct balance in terms of power in adults' and children's discussions.

The pupils were asked the following questions:

- What ideas do you have about a new school in Garðabær?
- What should the school architecture take into account?

The interviews were recorded and the youngest children drew pictures while they talked. The older children took photographs of what they felt was important in the area around the school. While they talked, the pupils showed the interviewing teachers around their schools. When the results of the pupils' interviews were complete, the teachers presented the pupils' views in the design group. The members of the design group felt that the pupils' opinions were important and helped them gain a better understanding of the pupils' needs.

The children saw the advantages of having both pre-school and school in the same building. Parents would not have to drop their children off at several different places. However, they were concerned that the school might be too big. The children wanted "a new school with many children, but not too big"; "The teenagers in school must learn how to behave and not tease the small children"; "If the children in the school are between the ages of one and 16, they shouldn't be together in the breaks," said one boy and suggested that the youngest pre-school children should be kept separate from the older children. They felt that it was important to protect the youngest children from the older ones.



The school would probably be big so the children felt that it was important that every child should have their own place to keep their clothes and that the school should have several entrances. "All children should have lockers, and the school should have many entrances," said one girl. The children wanted large classrooms with separate/special rooms for building with blocks, for arts and crafts and for music. "There should be a large dining room with tables and chairs and the children should be allowed to serve themselves," said one girl. The children felt it was important that they themselves could decide how much they should eat.

The library was the part of the school that children liked best, and so they put a lot of emphasis on having a library in the new school. A library should be "the quiet place" in the school and "the friendly place", and "there should be a cosy room with a sofa where you can lie down and turn the lights off," said one boy. "The bathrooms should smell good and have walls all the way

up to the ceiling and down to the floor," said one teenage girl, and also observed that there should be lots of mirrors in the new school.

The children said that there should be a sports hall with a swimming pool, a friendly reception desk and good showers in the new school. The playground should have boats, barbecues and big football pitches. The children were unanimous that the most important thing in the new school is the atmosphere and that it must be friendly.

The children's opinions and views in this project gave politicians and planners a valuable insight into the needs and experiences of Garðabær school pupils. Their views were useful to the architects when they were designing a new school for the municipality. The results show that the pupils' views were taken into account. For example, the architects ensured that there was a "cosy room" beside each classroom, and the bathrooms were designed according to the children's wishes. The design also included a special area for the youngest children in the school. There were several entrances and each child had a locker.

When children are consulted during the planning of a school, the intention must be precise and clear, and the aim should be to implement the results. If children's views are listened to, but then ignored, this can have a negative effect. This project has shown that pupils in pre-schools and schools have clear views that should be respected and taken into account when planning schools. Teachers and architects must set aside time to listen to the pupils so they can understand them better.

4.8 Discussion: Culture, leisure time and surroundings

The Norwegian MIABE[24] project is a good example of how young children can be involved in the planning of their local environment. The parameters for involvement were decided, the children were encouraged by local politicians, and the project attracted a lot of attention. These factors help to create expectations in the children that they are doing something important. The degree of involvement is crucial to the impact of the ideas and the tangible results of the involvement. The Soft GIS method is a similar model, preparing children and young people for involvement in planning their surroundings. This model makes active use of the Internet, so it reaches a

[24] Model for Increased Awareness of the Built Environment

large number of people and ensures that it is effective. A lot of work has gone into developing this model and it has been frequently used, even outside Finland. It provides a strong basis for hands-on involvement, but the effectiveness depends on how it is followed up. We know little about the extent to which it is fully followed up in the municipalities. Both MIABE and Soft GIS are consultative, and the children have no authorisation to make decisions, but their contributions are no less important for that.

The Icelandic project illustrating collaboration in arranging a benefit concert is a practical example of a social and instructive project. Here the aim was not to change something, but to do something social and, in the process, to both learn and develop skills. At the same time, the young people were very involved in something that they owned and that they themselves had helped to develop. These are factors that can be both engaging and motivating.

The projects involving the recreation centre in Jönköping and Ungdomspakkhuset in Tvøroyri describe ways for preparing young people to become more active in shaping their leisure time. We have seen that the projects attained very different results. The recreation centre in Jönköping is largely run by young people, they have substantial responsibility for it and are involved at all levels. At the same time, the adults also had a clear role. At the youth centre in Tvøroyri the staff tried to get the young people to participate more, but did not attain their objectives. The adults in the youth centre seem have taken a more traditional role – using these parameters it is difficult to motivate the young people to actively participate in planning and running the centre. The young people's standpoint on not participating can also be seen as a form of active expression. These two examples illustrate the importance of preparing the ground properly for involvement. How things are presented for children is also influential and determines the engagement.

Pupil participation in the design of the school building in Garðabær shows a consultative form of involvement; the intention was find out what children wanted in a new school. If this type of involvement is to be regarded as tangible by the children, it is important that the building reflects the children's wishes. In the Children and Young People's Archipelago (BUS) organisation, participation is on several levels. Both young people and adults are members of the steering committee, which takes decisions and is responsible for them. They also participate actively in planning and implementing regional events. This type of organisation can encourage the building of networks and even activism.

5. Political participation

While focus on children's and young people's involvement has intensified, there has been a drop in the numbers recruited to traditional children's and young people's organisations and to political youth organisations. This applies both to local political activity and locally-based social engagement[25]. Research has shown that young people generally are concerned about themes such as environment, substance misuse, criminality, racism and other tangible issues, but regard political parties and politicians with a certain scepticism[26]. Thus we observe that political engagement is more activity-oriented[27]. One interpretation of the drop in membership of the traditional organisations is that these no longer address young people's issues and needs to the extent they once did[28].

The authorities in the Nordic countries have a remit to involve children and young people in political associations. To this end they have encouraged municipalities to arrange youth councils and other channels for influence, where young people can come into dialogue with people in power and thereby exert political influence.

The seven articles in this chapter illustrate different forms of political influence. Three of them describe comprehensive systems for involvement. The two Finnish contributions describe how young people are involved at municipal and national levels, while the Swedish article describes measures to create youth-oriented work in municipal administration. The two articles from Denmark and Norway focus on youth councils. But we start this chapter about political participation with two articles that demonstrate how children and young people can exert influence through stand-alone events. The first describes influence through activism – young Sami people in Sweden who use a demonstration as a channel for influence. This is followed by a contribution from Greenland that shows how, at a conference about what constitutes a good life, children and young people can enter into dialogue with adults who represent authorities.

[25] BLD 2009: 102
[26] Ødegård 2001
[27] BLD 2009: 110 (citing Ødegård and Berglund 2008)
[28] Ødegård 2009

5.1 Sweden: Activism in a voluntary political organisation (Sáminuorra)

By *Lars Miguel Utsi*, Member of the Board of Sáminuorra

5.1.1 The voice of Sami youth

Sáminuorra is a youth organisation for all young Sami people in Sweden. Our organisation is nearly 50 years old and engages approximately 400 young Sami people in various activities each year. The average age of members is just below 18. We have particular political weight in Sami society because the organisation has existed for so long and because we have an active and engaged membership. This is shown by the most recent assembly that attracted approximately 80 members, one-fifth of the membership.

An important part of the Sáminuorra's success is our ability to take up issues from members and raise them for general discussion in the Sami community. Our members therefore feel they are participating and able to exert influence – which is not always the case for children and young people.

This requires a flat organisational structure. The route between member and the organisation's board must be short. The structure must also reflect the members' opinions and views well, so that the member's participation in the work of the organisation is practical and not just theoretical. In Sáminuorra we have various methods of working that help us run the organisation successfully.

It may sound like a cliché, but giving members freedom under responsibility is of the utmost importance. They must be able to express their opinions and to decide over themselves, but also be fully aware of the consequences of their actions. This mainly concerns purely practical issues. It may seem unimportant in the wider perspective, but in Sáminuorra we have seen that it is fundamental to activating members.

Sáminuorra has sometimes experienced problems at its assemblies, for example with attendance. Members have come to the assembly but, once there, have not taken part in the activities and meetings they had been expected to participate in. In individual cases, young people have turned up with alcohol, to which Sáminuorra has zero tolerance. However, in recent years, these problems have been dramatically reduced, apparently due to one measure: before each assembly, the members are informed of the rules and why they are in place. The information is clear on one point – it links the actions of the young people directly to the organisation's financial and political position. Alcohol at the assembly can result in withdrawal of grants to the organisation, and non-attendance of members can cause a loss of political confidence in the organisation. Clear rules are presented with precise explanations as to why they are in place. In this way, the members

also become aware of their practical opportunities to exert influence and their responsibility for the organisation.

The members are also closely linked to the organisation in political work. Issues that are discussed at member level in the organisation quickly reach the Sáminuorra board and can ultimately be something that the organisation drives as a political issue in the community as a whole. Sáminuorra's issues often attract the attention of both Sami and non-Sami media. What members discussed around a table at the start at the Sáminuorra can end up in the news and discussions in the media. The challenge for Sáminuorra is to use a working method that enables members to participate whilst being practically feasible for the organisation.

A model that Sáminuorra took from the ChaosPilots has proved to be very usable. A number of different themes are chosen, such as "Our future", "What will the organisation work with", and so on. The participants are divided into five groups and each group sits at a table. Each table is covered with writing paper, and each table has a different theme. A facilitator sits at each table. When a group sits at the table, the participants take turns to write down the first thing they associate with the table's theme. The theme, "Our future" perhaps stimulates associations such as "no emissions", "many friends", "warmer climate" and so on. When all group participants have written down their thoughts and suggestions on the theme, they change table. They go to a new table where the facilitator briefly describes the theme and what has been written so far. Then the group can once again associate freely around the theme. This procedure continues until all participants have sat at every table and written something about each theme.

The next stage involves a round of voting. The groups visit each table again and everyone gets to vote for their two favourite proposals within each theme. This round of voting concludes the exercise. The table leaders count the votes and finally a list is created of the participants' opinions about the five themes.

This method of working has big advantages because it activates as many people as possible. Everyone is encouraged to contribute suggestions and thoughts about the different themes and in the final stage everyone makes their voices heard by choosing their favourites from the suggestions. This is also a good way of obtaining new ideas and thoughts from the members, which can form the basis of future discussions and more in-depth analyses of the themes.

Our experience shows that the process must be steered so that the final result is not unrealistic or unfeasible. Not all issues are suitable for this model and our experience is that the themes to be taken up must be carefully chosen and formulated. A theme such as "Our future" can get many votes for suggestions such as "World peace" and "No poverty" – important objectives in themselves but hardly feasible for a Sami youth organisation in Sweden. A better-formulated theme could be "The future of Sami young people – what has happened in 20 years?" which can give discussions that

are of great benefit for our organisation. It is also important that each facilitator understands their task and their theme in order to make the model as successful as possible.

If this model works properly, it provides for powerful direct communication between the members and the organisation's leadership, and a much more active and engaged membership.

A clear example of Sáminuorra's members' participation in the work of the organisation is found in the project *Gákti Miellačájáhus – Demonstration against misuse of Sami culture* that took place in autumn 2008.

The aim of the project was to increase awareness of misuse of Sami culture. This misuse is particularly apparent in the Finnish tourism industry, but also occurs in Norway, Sweden and Russia. Typical misuse is where non-Sami make big profits out of what they call Sami culture, i.e. mass-produced fake copies of Sami hats and crafts, without this benefiting the Sami community in any way. This practice generates large profits for those who practice it, but it damages the Sami community by spreading an incorrect and, for the Sami, often humiliating picture of Sami culture and community.

The issue of misuse of Sami culture has been discussed in the Sáminuorra a number of times, and the members have also used the above model to raise the issue that the Sáminuorra should arrange a demonstration. With this in mind, the perfect opportunity arose when our sister organisation in Finland, *Suoma Sámi Nuorat* (SSN), proposed a joint demonstration in conjunction with the big Sami Conference that was to be held in November 2008 in Rovaniemi. The advantage was that the conference would gather several hundred Sami to an international conference where the main theme would be Sami cultural inheritance. With engagement amongst the members already established, and the timing of an event attracting many experts and stakeholders in Sami cultural issues, the prospects for the project were good.

The initial goal was to get 50 people to participate and that at least the local media in Rovaniemi should publicise the demonstration and so put the issue on the agenda. Thorough preparations made the project a success. Over 300 people took part in the demonstration, of which many were Sami Ting politicians and experts in legal issues. Media attention far exceeded expectations. In addition to all Sami media, all the major newspapers and television channels in Finland reported the demonstration, as did the national media in Norway. By highlighting the problem the demonstration brought results, as a number of Finnish tour operators decided to stop using the mass-produced copies of Sami clothes. Through the impact of media reporting, the demonstration increased awareness of the problems of misuse of Sami culture.

The project in itself was a success, but an important part of the success was that it showed the ability of young participants and the organisations behind the demonstration to exert influence. Issues that had been discussed

in the organisations were raised and appeared on the front pages. The media constantly reported that it was young people who arranged the demonstration, and representatives for different Sami organisations said in the media how impressed they were with the young people's engagement. Throughout, the project has succeeded in driving an important issue for young people, from initial discussions between individual members all the way to the media front pages and political agenda. For the Sáminuorra it was very important to be able to show that their viewpoints had been given a forum.

In the end, the success of a youth organisation is based on treating its members as individuals and having the confidence in them to allow them to make decisions and take responsibility. This requires a flat organisational structure and direct communication between the members and the board. In such an organisation, members' opinions and ideas can be heard, even though they are "only" children or young people.

5.2 Greenland: Two examples of how to examine children's perception of their own lives

By *Sabitha Jørgensen*, Attorney in the Ministry of Social Affairs, Greenland

5.2.1 Dialogue with children

In March 1992 Greenland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This was done as a part of the government's aim to improve and strengthen the living conditions of families, children and young people.

During the 1990s the initiatives that grew out of the Convention changed character. From being organised by adults, based on their notion of a good childhood, initiatives also began to be organised by children and young people.

Examples of this development were the conference in Sisimut in June 2008 for families with strong resources, and the postcard competition arranged by the voluntary organisation Meeqqat Inuunerissut/Bedre Børnelivs (Better Lives for Children) in January 2008.

Postcard competition – What constitutes a good life for children?

Meeqqat Inuunerissut/Bedre Børneliv (Better Lives for Children) sent a poster to all year 6 children asking the question: What is a good life for children?

All children were invited to enter the competition with ideas about how adults can ensure children a good life and childhood. The poster was followed up with TV commercials reminding children, teachers and parents of the competition.

Thirty-seven year 6 classes submitted drawings, poems, stories and cartoons. Many chose to first describe a poor life for children and then contrast it with the good life.

After receiving the entries, the organisation set up a discussion group comprising, for example a psychologist and a social worker. The group went through the entries and discussed how to categorise them. Eight motifs and quotes were chosen, and these were printed on postcards with a reference to the applicable article in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The conference in Sisimiut

In 2008 there was a political decision to focus on children's rights by including children and young people in a three-day conference in Sisimiut together with representatives from the political system, stakeholder and civil society organisations, and civil servants. The purpose of the conference was to create a framework within which children and young people could freely express their positions and opinions as well as contribute to the debate about a good childhood. The organisers therefore chose to divide the conference into two parts on the first two days, followed by a joint assembly and conclusion on the third day. However, the cultural elements and social gatherings were planned so that children, young people and adults could participate together.

Apart from the opportunity to express themselves, the children and young people took part in a course on children's rights according to the UN Convention. A number of selected themes in the County Council Ordinance about help for children and young people were presented.

The umbrella organisation, Sorlak, selected participants for the children's part of the conference. The conference was attended by twenty-five children and young people, aged 13–18, from various recreation and youth clubs throughout the country. All the participants were very active and prominent in their own clubs and had also shown interest in issues related to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Three facilitators were hired to help with the conference. They each had extensive experience of communicating and disseminating information to children and young people through radio programmes and so were well known as role models.

The conference began with a presentation about opportunities and challenges characterising the lives of children and young people today. The children then worked together with the facilitators using the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) method, where the focus is on:

- Discovery
- Dream
- Design
- Delivery / destiny

The method is based on people's strengths and experiences. The assumption is that everyone has competencies, resources and experiences from incidents or events where things have worked for them. The theory is that everyone is capable of dreaming up a scenario for the future. The method allows participants to verbalise dreams and actions, thereby helping them to visualise how to turn the dream into reality. By talking, painting and expressing themselves in pictures, dance and music, the children and young people could work through painful personal experiences and verbalise their hopes for the future. These hopes and visions were incorporated on the third day of the conference, where all participants gathered and the children could set the agenda for the themes in the day's workshops, thereby presenting their views on a good childhood to the adults.

The main themes were as follows:

- Boredom leads to vandalism
- Good friendships
- Parents should prioritise children more – ensure them a good childhood
- Violence should not be used against children
- The child has a right to play
- The municipalities and county councils have responsibilities and tasks in relation to children and young people

At the end of the conference, the children and young people handed over their recommendations to the county council representative and, in return, all participants were given a UN Children's Convention USB memory stick. The intention was that they would act as ambassadors for the Convention in their towns and villages and thereby ensure that the message was spread.

As for the outcome for the children and the young people , what have we learned, and how is this knowledge used?

Both activities were based on articles 12 and 13 of the Children's Convention, where focus is on participation in the society generally. The aim of the activities was to:

- Allow children to express themselves through various media
- Allow children to analyse their own situation and analyse how various decisions and actions influence their life conditions.
- Create sustainability by basing activities on the hopes and dreams of children and young people.
- Through participation, to lay the foundation for change in children as well as in their surroundings.

Evaluations of both activities showed that they boosted the confidence of participants, as they felt they were listened to and included in the debate about conditions that affect their lives. This has been shown by increased

attention to and interest in the work done in associations relating to children and young people. Specifically, the children's convention in Sisimiut broadened the participants' vision as they became aware of other children living in Greenland under similar conditions. The feeling that they were not alone helped create new friendships with people in other towns and villages.

Furthermore, the knowledge generated was used in the ongoing work on a report containing proposals for initiatives whose primary goal is to create better living conditions for children and young people. This work is taking place at ministerial level and does not directly include children and young people, just the organisations that are working for the interests of children and young people, such as Sorlak. The ambassador component has not yet been followed up so we do not know if the children and young people are acting as ambassadors in their own town and villages. In retrospect, follow-up could have been planned from the start, to ensure local engagement. For example, an agreement could have been made with the local after-school recreation centres whereby the participants give a talk about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and tell the other children and young people about the conference.

The postcard competition and the subsequent publication gave the children a visual sign that their views on better lives for children had spread to society around them. Furthermore the organisation will use the children's contributions in a future catalogue of inspiration that will form the foundation of initiatives to change attitudes. This will take place in 2010 and 2011. Here the children's words and pictures will help to create focus on children's terms, rights and needs. By creating something visible that attracts attention, the children will feel they are being taken seriously, thereby improving their self-esteem.

Collectively these two initiatives have led to increased focus on the rights of children and young people to participate in defining what constitutes a good life. Furthermore, organisations, government officials and politicians have been able to enter into direct dialogue with the people whose conditions they are trying to improve. This reciprocal arrangement forms the basis for future sustainability and the two initiatives described in this report are to be seen as trendsetters for work on involving children and young people in Greenland.

5.3 Finland: Case

Sastamala – An organisational structure to promote a channel through which young people can exert influence in the municipality

By *Jari Andersson* (head teacher and chairman) and *Anu Gretschel* (researcher)

5.3.1 Case Sastamala: Young people's influence in schools and in the municipality.

Changes to both municipal regulations and school curriculum in the town of Sastamala ensure that children and young people are always included as active participants and advocates (read: municipal residents). Elected representatives and officials devote a lot of their time and other municipal resources to meeting with children and young people and including them. There is no risk of this trend being reversed as time passes and people are replaced, because adults, children and young people are continually trained in taking and retaining their place at the end of the cables of interaction that the municipality has extended to its young inhabitants. In this article we examine Sastamala's channels for young people to exert influence. We also describe some areas in which young people exerted influence in 2009.

5.3.2 Young peoples' network of channels for exerting influence

Student councils and regional parliament

No other municipal body in the town has such a strong interface with young inhabitants from the first school year to upper secondary education as schools and educational institutions. In Sastamala the basic curriculum contains specific references to the involvement of children and young people and to student council activities. In 2009 for example, the student councils organised theme days and organised break-time activities that will encourage pupils to be more physically active. The student councils have also participated in planning of schools' building projects and playground environments. In the regional parliament, young people can influence municipal decision-making in their own residential areas: north, south and west. Regional parliament representatives are elected.

Youth Council and Youth Council/Student Council Cooperation Group

The Youth Council is an advocacy and activity channel for young people aged 13–18 that considers municipal issues from a young person's perspective. The members of the Youth Council are elected from the regional parliament's representatives, and the Council meets approximately

once a month. The Council also considers various themes in working groups. The Youth Council has its own budget, which in 2009 was EUR 27,000. From among its own members, the Council appoints representatives to the municipal council, municipal board and the various committees, in which the representatives have the right to attend and speak. In 2009 the Youth Council took an active position on cutbacks, defended funding to the libraries, put forward a proposal about transport grants for upper secondary students, formed regional networks and submitted proposals about youth clubs. Every student council chairman is entitled to attend the Youth Council meetings. Regular partnership groups are also arranged, comprising Youth Council members, student council representatives and the student council supervisory teachers. Issues that have been proposed by the student council representatives are discussed at these partnership meetings; if requested, the issues are then considered by the Youth Council.

5.3.3 Cables to adult decision-makers

Headteacher's coffee meetings and recruitment of new teachers

In schools, the student council board and the Headteacher participate in coffee meetings that are held at fixed times or whenever either party feels a need for such a meeting. In 2009 these meetings included discussions about the healthy snacks that the student councils organised, including the content and distribution of such snacks. The group has also jointly planned which projects and functions will be financed through profits from employment days. When a new teacher is to be recruited, one student representative is to be present at the interview and asks their own questions. The staff appointment is also made in consultation.

Question time with municipal decision-makers

Question times are arranged in the upper year groups of secondary schools, and in upper secondary institutions. These sessions last one or two hours and during this time the municipality's leading elected representatives and officials answer the students' questions. Before these meetings, attempts are made to study the basics of decision-making in the municipality. In the three final years of secondary school, this can be part of the social studies syllabus. The important thing about question times is continuity. At secondary school, at upper secondary school and in the occupational education programmes, these sessions are arranged annually. In the future the intention is also to arrange question times for the larger primary schools.

Youth Council representatives in municipal administration and meetings with decision-makers

When measures to increase involvement were started in 2000, changes also began in the structures. Changes were needed in the town administration regulations because the aim was to get children and young people represented

on the municipal council, municipal board and the different committees. However, there was also opposition to the innovation. In particular it was feared that young people would disturb the decision-making process in such a way that the work would take longer and the work burden would increase. Some also wished to use regulations around confidentiality as a barrier to young people's participation. The Swedish Local Government Act was not thought to allow young people's participation. There were only a few individual attitudes like this, but they were useful elements in the preparation. As a result, preparations became better and more precise. The young people came into close contact with the core of decision-making, their voices could be heard and they could hear what decisions were made. The strategy to make rapid changes in the permanent administrative structures was correct. This did not just involve representatives of the Youth Council being part of the administration, but the Youth Council as a whole also meets annually with the municipal council, municipal board and the committee chairmen and secretaries, and the officials that are part of the town's executive group. These joint meetings are arranged especially for this purpose. Under these arrangements the collaborative administration culture is built up through group work and discussions. The question times, where adults ask young people questions, are also considered to have been successful.

The municipality does not create participation itself. A strategy and continuous training is needed

An activity must have an objective in order to develop. It must have measurable goals so that young people's opportunity to exert influence can be assessed. This provides information about the municipality's effectiveness in this area, and the municipality's measures to improve participation can be developed. Evaluation of and engagement in these measures are key tasks for elected representatives and executive officials. When the administration works across boundaries, the roles of children and young people at different levels must be recorded, such as in regulations and in school plans and curricula. Sastamala's welfare strategy for children and young people and its youth strategy are also important policy documents for ensuring children's and young people's involvement. The former was adopted by the municipal council, while the latter is a strategy of the youth services that was adopted by the Recreation Committee. The voice of young people is always part of the development of strategies and the evaluation of their implementation[29].

The municipality is an adult-oriented organisation that naturally tries to attain functionality by using its adult decision-makers and professional staff, and reach a position where it can plan, decide and operate without the need for external parties. The municipality then produces – over the heads of children and young people – the type and quantity of services for children and young people that it itself deems fitting. It's easy to forget to include

[29] See Appendix 1

children and young people. Ongoing discussion of children's and young people's involvement and continuous training are also important. A training plan for each mandate period is required, containing a timetable, information about which groups need training, and training materials that can easily be updated.

The municipality will certainly be a better place to live and work in if everyone is happy there. Many aspects are better managed and services better arranged if young people are allowed to express their opinions and take positions. In terms of municipal democracy, it is sensible to open up the decision-making process at as early a stage as possible. This should be done on children's and young people's terms. One thing is certain: a person who has discovered for themselves how meaningful it is to be involved and to exert influence will also participate and take responsibility as a municipal inhabitant later on.

5.4 Norway: A study of the children's municipal council in Vennesla

By *Ingrid Guldvik*, researcher

5.4.1 Children's municipal council – a body for influence?[30]

Both the Norwegian Planning and Building Act and national political guidelines stipulate that municipalities must have structures in place to allow the active participation of children and young people when decisions are to be made regarding their local environment. This has led to a number of Norwegian municipalities testing one or more measures to promote participation by children and young people, while developing plans for children and young people to look after their interests. Arguments for participation by various groups are justified – all groups, children and young people included, must be able to participate and exert influence in local politics. Broad participation is also assumed to lead to more informed and better political decisions. In addition, participation can be regarded as training for democracy, i.e. positive for the individual citizen. The ideal for indirect participation or representative democracy is that democratic bodies should reflect the views of municipal inhabitants. At the same time, an invitation to participate creates expectations that the participants will be able to exert influence over everything. If the participation has no effect on decisions that are taken, the setting up of democratic bodies such as children's municipal councils can conflict with their original intention, and create a sense of frustration that engagement makes no difference. In 2000, we studied indirect participation in Vennesla municipality, where we saw

[30] The article is based on Guldvik, Ingrid (2000): Blant de få utvalgte? Økt deltakelse i lokalpolitikk fra barn, unge, innvandrere og kvinner. Oslo: Kommuneforlaget

how the arrangement with elected representatives in children's municipal council (BK) worked.

Vennesla – a regional culture undergoing change

When municipalities try to engage specific groups for participation, it is often because of local challenges, or a form of crisis management. This was the case in Vennesla. The background was that many studies showed shortcomings in the lives of adolescents and living conditions in the municipality. The municipality summarised the local community's problems in four points: 1) *Jante's Law*: "Don't think you're better than anyone else"; 2) Underestimation: "There are negative entry tickets to young people's environments (drinking, smoking)"; 3) Little initiative: "Equality is preferable to anyone getting ahead"; and 4) Unrealistic demands on the public sector: "Problem-solving is left to the public sector".

The aim of the project was that participation by children and young people would help to change attitudes and self-awareness in the longer term. Participation in democratic bodies like the children's municipal council should be a mouthpiece for children in the political environment.

Children's municipal council – appointment and organisation

In Vennesla the children's municipal council was planned in close collaboration between the children's spokesman in the municipality, the mayor, representatives from the eight student councils in secondary schools, the student council in the upper secondary school, and contact teachers. The questions that were up for discussion were: Who was the body for? How many representatives? How would the body be run?

The participants decided that they wanted a separate body just for secondary schools. Schools with children in years 1–7 would have two representatives, the continuation school would have three representatives and in the combined school, the children's level and youth level would have two representatives each, so a total of 19 representatives. The school bodies were central to the work of the children's municipal council. Student councils chose representatives for the children's municipal council. First the pupils raised and discussed issues in the class councils and student councils, and these were later taken up in the children's municipal council meetings. They discussed in advance what they wished to take up and which priorities they wanted to make. The results were discussed later. The meetings of the children's municipal council were led by the mayor, while the children's spokesman was secretary. The fact that the children's municipal council is led by people in key positions sent a signal that the municipality takes children's involvement seriously but, at the same time, it can lead to a high degree of adult steering.

Tasks

The tasks of the children's municipal council varied according to the challenges the municipality is facing. Like many other municipalities, Vennesla had delegated to the children's municipal council responsibility for distributing a pot of money (NOK 30,000). Many of the representatives felt this to be one of the most important tasks of the children's municipal council. There were major discussions about the principles for distribution. Should, for example, the money be divided between schools according to numbers of pupils, or should it go to rather bigger projects and, if so, to what?

The children's municipal council also considered the municipal plan for Vennesla. The secretary of the council prepared a simple and brief version of the plan so that the children could familiarise themselves with what it was all about. The children's contribution to the plans concerned, for example, the need for IT in schools, pupil involvement in schools, road safety, environmental measures such as rubbish bins on paths and reduction of temperature in all municipal buildings outside working hours. The student councils could also submit items to the children's municipal council. They were especially concerned with such issues as safety on roads near schools. The council got involved when there was a proposal in the municipal budget to close down the municipal after-school clubs, and its engagement may have helped to retain the clubs.

Did the children's municipal council exert influence?

We focused especially on three conditions that are important in an assessment of whether the children's municipal council could exert influence: influence on the agenda, authorisation to make decisions and changes to internal procedures in the municipality. The intention with broad participation is that individual participants are able to put forward their views and interests and thereby be able to influence the community of which they are part. The possibility to put things on the *agenda*, to bring things to the public debate, is significant for the type of influence the individual can exert through participation. Children's time horizons are limited and it can be difficult to motivate them to participate if they do not see results within a very short time. Their interest in participating in democratic processes is, for example, stimulated by *authorising* them to *decide* over how a certain sum of money is to be used. New democratic bodies require *changes to procedures* in the municipal organisation. The municipality must decide which items are to be presented for the children's municipal council, create procedures for how items are to be channelled through the bureaucracy and who is responsible for which tasks. If new procedures are not produced, participation and not least influence can be temporary and illusory.

Did the children's municipal council succeed in putting new things on the agenda? Representatives in the council felt that their biggest influence was in allocating the funds they had at their disposal. The decisions helped

to implement small measures at individual schools, such as a fence along a road and football goals, or more major measures like a skateboard ramp. One of the representatives on the municipal council suggested that the ramp would not have been built without the grant from the children's municipal council. Central representatives of the municipality said that the project's focus on children and young people was instrumental in convincing an overwhelming majority to vote for setting up a multi-activity centre for young people. As previously mentioned, the children's municipal council could also have had indirect influence on funding for after-school clubs being maintained. However, the initiatives to make school roads safer were unsuccessful; according to one of the representatives in the children's municipal council, this was because "We can't change the plans of the Highways Department".

Items considered by the children's municipal council were mainly initiated by the children's spokesman, who was also the executive officer of the body. It also transpired that children could influence the solutions that were chosen. The young boys that loved skateboarding presented powerful arguments for the skateboard ramp, both before and during the processing of the application in the children's municipal council. Furthermore, the children decided that the grant of NOK 25,000 from the County Public Health Officer should be used for fruit and vegetables, while the children's spokesman argued that the money should be used to prevent smoking.

Vennesla municipality authorised the children's municipal council to allocate a pot of money (NOK 30,000) to various projects for children and young people. The representatives had to prioritise between what they deemed to be good ideas at various places in the municipality. Furthermore, they had to argue their views on the allocation of the money. The educational effects of such processes were important for the individual representatives. One of the children expressed it like this: "Here, we have to say a lot about what we mean".

However, on this occasion setting up the children's municipal council did not bring about new procedures in the municipal organisation. The children's spokesman was responsible for taking up issues relevant to children in the municipality, and the chairman was responsible for introducing issues into the system. In a start-up phase, these informal arrangements worked satisfactorily, but in the longer term they are dependent on the individuals involved and may therefore be temporary.

In summary, we see that the children's municipal council in Vennesla had some influence on the agenda and outcome of individual issues. The ability to allocate a given sum of money had a rapid and tangible outcome for the participants. One positive effect of the work in the children's municipal council was that the participants used their skills in the negotiation processes. However, no new procedures were implemented to enable the children's municipal council to become part of the mainstream organisation. If responsibility for this is not delegated and resources are not

allocated to making the changes, participation and influence by the children's municipal council will weaken in the long term.

5.5 Sweden: Using the TYCKA model to increase young people's political impact

By *Anne Christine Lejon* with *Lena Lie* and *Rebecka Jakobsson* (Development Leaders for the Municipality of Umeå)

5.5.1 Dialog Unga Umeå

In 2008 the Municipality of Umeå was named Swedish Youth Municipality of the Year. This distinction is awarded each year by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, a government agency that works to ensure youth access to influence and welfare. The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs' comments on Umeå's award were as follows:

> "The winner of the Board's 2008 Youth Municipality of the Year distinction has worked for some time to develop youth policy initiatives. In particular, we wish to recognise initiatives focusing on youth influence, preventative activities and youth recreation."

How it all began

In 2006, a group of politicians and officials was given the task by the Umeå Municipal Executive Board to actively bring forward the formation of a municipal policy programme for young people aged 13–25. The objective was to create a continuous youth-oriented undertaking in the work of municipal departments and committees, to be reflected in their operational plans, with influence, dialogue and representation developed on young people's terms. This undertaking was entitled *Dialog Unga Umeå (Dialogue Young Umeå)*. In consultation with Umeå's young people, this commitment has been simultaneously implemented on two levels, both through physical meetings/discussions and through the continuous development of new methods for dialogue and influence.

The role of youth representatives

Umeå currently has three youth representatives. Together with student councils and youth councils, they have an important role with regard to youth participation in the discourse surrounding city development. A group comprising one supervisory politician, the City Manager, an administrative

manager and the department head for Umeå Fritid Unga (Youth Recreation) works with municipal youth representatives to coordinate Dialog Unga Umeå and TYCKA undertakings.

TYCKA – a model for youth influence

TYCKA, one component of Dialog Unga Umeå, is a model that has been developed to address the issue of how young people in Umeå would like to develop their city.

TYCKA helps young people in Umeå exert a direct influence on the operational plans of municipal committees and administrative units.

The first round of TYCKA was implemented in late 2006. The three youth representatives at that time were given the task of marketing TYCKA among young people via recreation centres, schools, universities, buses, local newspapers and elsewhere. The emphasis was on reaching the widest possible range of young respondents. To facilitate this, TYCKA was also made available at a website, which could be linked to from various online youth communities. The website was open to all young people in Umeå between the ages of 13 and 25.

In 2006, 800 viewpoints were submitted by young people on five different thematic areas: Safety and Health, Culture and Recreation, Work and Housing, School and Education, and Influence and Involvement. The young people could respond online through free-text response fields and also had the opportunity to submit contact information if they were interested in discussing these issues with politicians in Umeå. Requests came in for everything from better school food to a skate park in the town. The youth representatives then contacted the young people who had submitted contact information in order to coordinate their viewpoints and plan a meeting with governing politicians. The fact that the young people who responded to TYCKA were able to independently present their own and other's viewpoints to the politicians was an important component in the effort to involve more young people in decision-making processes.

The meeting took place in January 2007 and was held in Municipal Council chambers, where the normal roles were switched. The politicians sat in the gallery, and got to listen to what the city's young people wanted for Umeå's future, including their concrete proposals for implementation. After the presentation, the event concluded with refreshments and a discussion between the young people and the politicians.

The next stage in the process was SVARA (RESPOND). In this stage, each municipal department was responsible for providing a response as to what would actually be carried out. Responses were presented on the same website used for TYCKA. This enabled young people who had responded to TYCKA to follow which issues were being discussed and to see that their proposals were being taken seriously and implemented. To further the development of Dialog Unga Umeå, a "future workshop" was also arranged, at which 20 young people and 10 politicians and municipal officials worked

together on the issue of how young people could influence the municipality's future through dialogue and influence. Dialog Unga Umeå and TYCKA helps municipal officials and politicians find out what young people in Umeå want. The responsibility to do something with these results lies primarily with the municipality and is exemplified in the GÖRA (DO) stage of the process. Several decisions have been made, however, concerning the involvement of young people in various implementations. Here are some examples of proposals included in the municipal budget for 2008–2010:

- More summer jobs
- A youth park
- Development of activity and family parks
- Renovation of upper secondary school
- Development of Kulturverket, a culture school that initiates and runs artistic and cultural projects in which children and young people literally tell the professionals what to do
- Preventative projects for children, and
- Access to laptop computers with wireless Internet for all upper secondary school students

TYCKA 2008–2009

TYCKA was implemented for the second time during September – October 2008. The process was developed with the aid of the points that had emerged during the "future workshop" in 2007. Throughout the entire TYCKA process, the youth representatives had considerable responsibility for marketing the dialogue and for communication between young people and the municipal departments. One change concerned the marketing of TYCKA. It was marketed in several places, including the Swedish Public Employment Service and the Umeå youth clinic, in an attempt to increase the number of responses. This was successful, as young people recognised the marketing from 2006.

More than 1,000 viewpoints came in. Some of the opinions submitted may have been spam, but many others provided a good picture of how the municipality could work to make life better for young people. The results were somewhat varied, due to the anonymous nature of the Internet where anyone can write anything.

In December 2008, young people who had registered their interest during the dialogue were invited in to prioritise and present the points they considered important to leading politicians at Hamnmagasinet Youth Centre. The young people were given two hours to analyse and prioritise important points and then present them briefly. About twenty young people aged 15–21 and a similar number of politicians participated. The media showed great interest. A summary was sent to relevant politicians and thereafter compiled at executive level, with implementation delegated to the appropriate departments.

Continuation – a recurring dialogue in which all administrative units have a responsibility

The Municipal Council has decided that "all committees and departments will prepare proposals for measures that promote development for young people in Umeå." The Youth Policy Action Plan (KUPP) has been scrapped. Municipal politicians have chosen a new direction for "youth issues to be incorporated into executive activities", i.e. they will become a part of all committees' operational plans.

What has been accomplished so far has resulted in young people requesting a recurring dialogue as a direct channel to municipal decision-makers. It has been decided that there will be a sizeable TYCKA dialogue every other year.

There is unanimity that a central and basic prerequisite for creating a long-term and sustainable youth policy is to determine how young people acquire influence and how forums are created for meetings between decision-makers and young people. The following decisions have so far been taken:

1. A TYCKA dialogue with young people's viewpoints documented (2006 and 2008).
2. A commitment from the administrative units to base planning on a youth perspective. The objective of incorporating this perspective into the normal local planning process has been met.
3. Decisions on concrete investments and initiatives taken in committees and the Municipal Council.
4. The Young Centre in a new planning phase, housed in Hamnmagasinet for the next few years.
5. A continuous and vibrant process with the objective of forming a long-term and sustainable forum for youth influence, creativity and community.
6. Young people who have independently designed a number of concrete action plans for increased influence and initiative.
7. Young people who express that they are being listened to and now have expectations/hopes to contribute.

And finally...

TYCKA has led to the initiation of new work processes within municipal administrative units. These new working methods have been largely successful, but more can be done.

There are approximately 24,000 young people between the ages of 13 and 25 in Umeå and although 1,000 viewpoints is a lot, there is some speculation as to how representative the response group really is. One way to reach more young people is to also use the municipality's schools and university as a channel for TYCKA.

In the work with the TYCKA part of the process, it is important for each administrative unit to decide which viewpoints are going to be dealt with and in what way. It is important to show that something actually happens with the viewpoints submitted and that the young people feel that their thoughts and opinions will lead to something tangible.

The TYCKA model took time to develop and is still in a constant state of development. Young people have opinions about their daily lives and the municipality takes the view and skills of its young people seriously.

5.6 Denmark: Experiences from a youth council with a varied agenda

By *Ena Juhl*, Senior Consultant in Culture & Leisure, Ballerup municipality

5.6.1 Ballerup Youth Council – one council, one movement, one cultural body?

Historical overview and mission

Between 1958 and 1988, the Danish Government set up youth councils in 76 of the municipalities in Denmark. Ballerup Youth Council was set up in 1986 and has been active since then. The council operates under the Culture & Leisure Committee in Ballerup Municipality and its mission is as follows:

> The youth council will work to ensure that young people in the municipality are given more influence over matters that concern them.
>
> The youth council will also work to influence local politicians and municipal officials to improve young people's chances of being heard and taken seriously.

Election to the youth council

Elections to the youth council take place every four years. Voters have to be between 14 and 24 years old and live in the municipality. Each of the members is chosen by student councils in Ballerup, youth clubs or political youth organisation. However other members are simply young people who would like to work with youth politics. The latter simply get in touch with the youth council and express their interest in participating in the youth council. The youth council is then put together on the basis of four criteria:

- There has to be a mix of young and "old" members
- They have to live in different places in the municipality
- There has to be an even number of girls and boys
- There has to be a good age range

The youth council is advertised on the Internet, in local newspapers and other media. Perhaps most important is that the youth council visits schools and other educational institutions in the area and publicises the election.

At every election there are young people who do not get voted onto the youth council. However, everyone normally gets a chance to serve on the council, because young people frequently leave, for example they move to another municipality or start higher education, travel abroad, get enlisted into the army, fall in love or have other personal reasons for leaving.

Youth council gets its own premises – youth centre

In 1997 the youth council was given its own premises. The youth council's building (*Vognporten*) is central in Ballerup, near the city centre and the train and bus station. The youth council has overall responsibility for the building. The premises are open for all young people in the municipality between the ages of 15 and 22 and the centre has long opening hours.

The youth council has an annual budget of DKK 134,000; of this, DKK 57,000 has to be allocated to activities. Ballerup youth council has appointed and employs a general manager who also serves as secretary for the youth council. Youth council events are advertised on a website and via advertisements in the local papers. The latest innovation is a text service, to which around 500–600 young people in the municipality subscribe. They then receive text information about concerts, parties, youth council elections and other events.

The youth council building also houses the central secretariat for all the Ballerup student councils, as well as their umbrella organisation, BAFE, which has had an office there for many years. This inspires collaboration between the parties and also means that many students who have worked on student councils later join the youth council.

Cooperation between the municipality and Ballerup youth council

A few years ago the municipal council and administration stated that more people from the youth council should participate in its various committees and ad hoc working groups. Young people do not feel the same affiliation to working groups that adults have organised if there is not at least one other young person. It is difficult for a young person to sit alone with a group of middle-aged adults and participate in the discussion. The culture of the meeting often reflects the majority and those that have determined the meeting's agenda. Young people often feel that they do not make any difference at these meetings, they therefore do not take ownership of the choices, and often soon stop attending. However, Ballerup municipality has had many positive experiences of working with the youth council in other ways.

Good examples of how the municipality has recently worked together with the youth council are:

- Formulation of the municipality's youth policy. Over the years, the municipality has had two youth policies, both of which were formulated in close corporation with the youth council.
- Various projects involving local residents. In recent years the municipality has consistently included the youth council when working with projects that involve local residents.
- The most recent new project is a mock election for 15–17 year olds, held in parallel with the local elections in November 2009. The election is IT-based, and young people can vote via text or a PC. The mock election was initiated in a request from the youth council to the municipal council. Incidentally, a total of 30 municipalities in Denmark are organising mock elections.

Examples of larger projects are the "Vision debate" about the identity Ballerup should have in the year 2020. The youth council decided to build a video box that young people could physically enter and record their opinion directly on camera. The youth council then set up the box in places frequented by young people: in a pedestrianised area, in schools and other educational institutions and by the youth building. The municipality received many young people's opinions in this way, and the youth council could promote itself at the same time.

Another example is when the municipality hosted the world's largest drama festival: the Children's Festival was organised jointly with the Ministry of Culture. The festival lasted a week, and about 24,000 tickets were distributed. The youth council was an excellent partner for this event. From the beginning, the youth council had a representative in the festival planning group. All the tasks relating to the festival were to be delegated, and the youth council chose to be involved in decorating the café for the festival, social rooms, etc. and also help to construct scenography around Ballerup. Furthermore the youth council became an action group during the festival; it was called upon when materials needed to be moved, stages needed to be built, items needed to be bought. The youth group was also responsible for the final clearing up when the festival was over. Recently the Ballerup Music Festival was held, a local music festival that takes place every two years. For this event the youth council provided not only inspiration but the workforce, both males and females. The youth council participated in the overall project group responsible for developing the music festival. They built, for example, a central stage for young people, where a number of youth bands performed, and the council also served as stage technicians, removal crew and general labour during the music festival.

Four strong reasons why the Ballerup youth council still exists

Considering how many other youth councils in Denmark have been wound up due to lack of interest from young people, we believe that the reasons

behind the continued existence of the youth council in Ballerup are as follows:

- *Youth building***.** The youth council has its own physical place. It is important that young people can create their own identity, their own culture. Being "guests" in a room at the town hall or somewhere similar is not conducive for self-expression.
- *Money*. It is important that the youth council has its own budget that it can administer itself without involvement from the municipal administration. The youth council has also established a youth fund of DKK 50,000 a year. The pot of money is managed by a committee comprising the youth council and other young people from the youth centre. Young people in the municipality can apply for grants, with the only condition being that activities must be for and arranged by young people.
- *Secretary*. It is important that the youth council has a secretary, who can prepare agendas for the meetings, take minutes and monitor matters between meetings. The majority of the youth council attend school or go to work and so lack the time it takes to administer the youth council.
- *Use of the youth council.* It is important that the youth council believes it is needed by administrators and politicians. The council should therefore be included in major activities and projects where it can make a difference, and it must be involved from the start. There is no point in just using them just as runners; they won't do this for long.
- *Municipal political consolidation* of the Ballerup youth council

During the past eight years young people who were involved in the youth council have stood as candidates in the municipal election. Two young people have been elected as representatives for the social democratic and the conservative parties.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that two of the 25 politicians in today's municipal board were once active in the Ballerup Youth Council. Some young people want to work in municipal politics after they have worked with democracy, influence and co-determination in another setting, even if some people argue that the work of the youth council is far removed from what is normally considered political work. But there can be no doubt that the experience in Ballerup municipality shows that the road to municipal involvement is very diverse.

5.7 Finland: Finnish Children's Parliament – a local and national channel of influence for children aged 7 to 12.

By *Rauna Nerelli* (Coordinator of the Rights of the Child for the Finnish Children's Parliament) and *Miia Nivala* (youth worker)

The Finnish Children's Parliament promotes the involvement and influence of primary school children on a national level and works to spread awareness about children's rights. This national consultation system for children, which was established in 2007 and which primarily works over the Internet, is a way to make children's opinions on issues affecting them heard in Parliament, ministries and other decision-making public institutions.

In addition to the national Finnish Children's Parliament, there are also 15 local and independent Children's Parliaments located throughout the country. Tampere is a pioneer among local parliaments for children. The Children's Parliament in Tampere was established on the initiative of students at the Annala primary school as a result of the city's interest in children's influence. Initiated in 2001, the LOVE project had the task of developing an independent channel of influence for children that would promote involvement and opportunities to influence. In 2004, the Children's Parliament in Tampere became an established component of the Tampere Youth Service. Parliamentary activities are aimed at primary school children aged 7–12.

The Children's Parliament in Tampere has had its own budget of EUR 10,000 since 2003. This budget, the initiation of the student councils, the fall in school rolls, and the skate park project are issues that the Children's Parliament has considered. Initiatives grow out of the children's discussions, including those emerging twice a year during the general meetings with school representatives. Contact persons from each municipal executive committee help to drive the initiatives. Twice a year, representatives from the children and youth service committee meet. At this meeting, the committee presents a current overview of the Children's Parliament's activities and initiatives.

Representatives from all primary schools convene in municipal council chambers for general meetings twice a year to decide on issues affecting the Children's Parliament. Positions are also taken on relevant issues and a Steering Committee is chosen for the following two years. The Steering Committee functions as a representative body for the Children's Parliament in Tampere. It prepares the Children's Parliament budget and operational plan as well as the agenda for the general meeting. The Steering Committee functions as a mouthpiece for the children of Tampere. Committee members participate in various work groups, take stands on issues and prepare initiatives. The Steering Committee can make more extensive inquiries with the school student councils to support its decisions.

The Children's Parliament in Tampere welcomes all of Tampere's children. Access to the general meetings and the Steering Committee is gained through participation in school student councils. However, any child aged 7–12 may be elected to the local committees that meet at various locations throughout Tampere. These committees aim to influence child-related issues in residential districts and to inspire children there to take an interest in their local environment by participating in its development. The Children's Parliament in Tampere works in collaboration with the boards of student councils for all of Tampere's primary schools and with their supervising teachers. One of the things they contribute to is the production of subject matter for student council activities.

The city's youth leaders arrange training for the student councils and supervising teachers and lead the student council activities and committees. The task of the youth leaders is to create channels for further consideration of various issues while simultaneously fostering involvement in the city's cultural activities. The Children's Parliament in Tampere cooperates with the other local children's parliaments in Finland. The city's Ombudsman for Children and the nationwide Ombudsmen for Children are also important collaborative partners.

The municipal executive board elects the 9–13-year-old representatives for the Children's Parliament in Finland for a two-year term. The electoral process is decided by the municipalities. It was hoped that the children would participate in the electoral process. In practice, this has entailed for example linking the student councils to the electoral process. Each municipality can elect a regular representative and a substitute. The hope is that this substitute will be in contact with the rest of the children in the area via the student councils, etc.

The representatives work in a closed online parliament by participating in discussions in various discussion forums, weekly committee chats, etc. The discussions are led by the children. Committee chat themes concern the environment, recreation/leisure time, children's rights, health, communication, school, international issues and the future. The subjects of the children's discourse vary widely and include everything from health care for the elderly to climate changes.

In the online parliament, voting is carried out in plenary sessions. In other cases, differences of opinion are handled through discussion. Because the children's message is conveyed to decision-makers not only in the form of approved initiatives, but also as summaries of the most frequent communication, it is not necessary to be in agreement on all issues. In terms of societal influence, the fact that children are conducting their own discussion is in itself relevant. Even when the children do not have new proposals to present, they can still convey their own priorities and viewpoints on things.

Online plenary sessions are held twice a year and at these sessions, all representatives prepare initiatives together for two weeks. Decisions are

made during the actual plenary session. Initiatives are voted on in a 2D hall reminiscent of a Parliamentary chamber. The representatives see each other as actual figures and can follow the person speaking and the progress of the agenda. Each autumn, hundreds of representatives convene in a physical plenary session to discuss current issues and learn how to exert influence. It is of course also important during these meetings to make new friends.

Decision-making meetings are also arranged for the representatives, where the emphasis is on dialogue between adults and influential children. These provide both children and adults with the opportunity to see things from different perspectives. The meetings not only teach children about democratic decision-making and influence, but also allow them to function as experts in issues related to children. The Ombudsman for Children has actually even officially asked the Finnish Children's Parliament to function as its expert and used the online parliament as a channel for gathering children's views. The expert role becomes visible for example by allowing children to speak out increasingly often in discussions and publications and in meetings with adult experts. The children have had the chance to speak with the EU Health Commissioner, government ministers, Parliament officials, and other officials and representatives.

The aim of the Finnish Children's Parliament is to promote opportunities for all children in Finland to exert influence. The online portal, www.valto.fi is open to all and contains material on children's influence and an Initiative Channel directed at children. All children can submit their own ideas or initiatives on children's issues through this channel. If they receive adequate support from other children in the public online arena, these initiatives are discussed in the Children's Parliament.

The task of the adults is to ensure that the children are informed of the reception of their proposals and of any decisions made as a result of their initiatives. The Children's Parliament Office supports the Children's Parliament by participating in chat discussions and by training children in various roles. In practice, this support entails things like moderator-assisted preparation or guidance via private messages during chat discussions. This helps make it easier for the child to lead discussions, to offer everyone who wishes to speak the opportunity to do so, to handle decision-making situations and to follow the chat discussions. The adults contribute with adequate background information to the discussions and handle follow-up of the resolutions. The children can also invite experts into a discussion, but are careful to ensure that the adults don't dictate what opinions they should have. The peer support the children give one another is just as important. The older children act as mentors for new representatives and advise them on how the online parliament functions. They also share their own experiences of influence.

The support given to children's influence by the community and decision-makers is important. The Children's Parliament delegation, in which each governmental parliamentary party is represented, annually

accepts a report and the resolutions from the children. Based on the children's initiatives, Parliament members have submitted a motion to the Finnish Parliament on nationwide measures to combat bullying in schools. From the start, the Finnish Children's Parliament has received strong support from its primary financier, the Finnish Ministry of Education, but also from other ministries, the Finnish Parliament, the Ombudsman for Children, the Association of Local and Regional Authorities, organisations and universities.

5.8 Discussion: Political participation

The articles extend over a broad spectrum of political participation. As we have seen, the two Finnish reports describe comprehensive systems for the participation of children and young people at municipal and national levels, while the Swedish TYCKA model describes involvement in municipal administration. The descriptions of the youth councils in Denmark and Norway illustrate very different frameworks for involvement. The same is shown by the two articles about young people in Greenland and Sami youth in Sweden. While the involvement of young Sami people who arrange a demonstration to increase awareness of misuse of the Sami culture is grounded in a project and a 50–year-old organisation, the young people in Greenland have more limited opportunities for exerting influence.

In some of the projects described, children and young people are primarily consultants, while in other projects they are included at all levels. The quality of involvement seems to depend more on the content than the organisation, and the extent of children's impact also seems to depend a lot on whether many bodies are receptive to change. The political arena is rarely set up for children and young people to exert influence. When two different cultures with different languages meet, the parties in the dialogue must adapt to one another. If children's involvement is to be promoted, it is important to make preparations to ensure that the dialogue takes place on children's terms, and that children can be involved in influencing the terms. The aim must be to prevent young people's opportunity to exert influence depending on the degree to which those that are older than them are willing to relinquish power[31].

Such youth councils can have many different functions. They can serve as stakeholder groups, press groups, mouthpieces, arrangers, consultative bodies, decision-makers, dialogue partners, cooperation partners, and they can serve as watchdogs and be corrective[32]. There are many possibilities but, at the same time, evaluations often show that the involvement of children and young people often has limited effect. Children can be, for example, alibis, and their function then is then to legitimise decisions that

[31] See authors such as Engelstad and Ødegård 2003: 7
[32] BLD 2009: 105

adults have taken. If the involvement can be linked to making decisions about how to use a small sum of money, it veers towards a very limited form of involvement. Another problem may be that organisations that are initiated by adults can often be criticised because they only include an exclusive and small group of children. Such selective recruitment of young people, especially if they are meant to have crucial positions, can be inhibiting and unfortunate.[33]

Several of the articles illustrate the importance of ensuring that channels other than the traditional ones can be used. Structural changes can be needed, and likewise there is a need to formalise the influence. At municipal level, it could mean comprehensive changes in municipal procedures. At the same time, there is a continual need for training, as there are constantly new children and young people. Fixed structures and strong models will be a start for getting results and support for such projects.

[33] Vestel et al 2003

6. Children with unique experiences

By children with unique experiences, we mean children and young people who have a relationship with the welfare support system, and whose experiences differ from those of most children. As a rule, involvement here means participation in decisions that concern them directly. These children face major challenges, and research has shown that children who come into contact with child welfare services have rarely been listened to, informed, or involved in decision-making processes[34]. The reasons for this have often been explained by shortage of available resources, weak organisational structures and guidelines, lack of knowledge about whether children can be included, and conflicts experienced between protecting children and allowing them to take responsibility[35].

At the same time, research has also shown that involvement of users of the state support system is crucial so that those concerned can clearly express their needs and what type of help they require. If this is not done, the consequences may be a feeling of disempowerment, which can lead to passivity.[36] Research into coping and motivation has shown that it is very important for a person to have control and influence in life. People who can exert influence over the conditions under which they live are better equipped to handle setbacks, and it also improves their ability to resolve challenges.

The projects we have selected here show examples of how work can be done to include children with unique experiences in decision-making and empowerment processes.

[34] Skivenes and Strandbu 2005: 23
[35] Skivenes and Strandbu 2005: 24-25
[36] Thrana 2008: 25

6.1 Denmark: Creating frameworks so that children with disabilities can participate in discussions about their lives

By *Signe Højsteen* and *Kirsten Plambech*, Consultants in Disabled Peoples Organisations Denmark (DPOD)

"Treat me as a human being"
"If you could see me
Through my eyes
You could see so much more
But you don't look
Maybe you're afraid?
Break down the wall
See what happens!"

This poem is only one of the many products from the project called "Disabled children and young people give their point of view". Many adults talk about disabled children and young people – including disabled people's organisations – but there is not much experience of these children talking about their attitudes and hopes for their lives. Furthermore, there is little experience of how to include disabled young people's points of view.

Therefore the Disabled Peoples Organisations Denmark (DPOD) initiated a project with focus on young people's own attitudes to living with an impairment. The purpose was also to develop and implement methods to gather information and viewpoints from children and young people with very different types of impairment.

6.1.1 Diversity

The project included inviting children and young people, aged 14–18, with varied impairments to weekend seminars and allowing them to talk on their own terms. The impairments represented in the group were as follows: cerebral palsy, autism, brittle bones, congenital brain damage, acquired brain damage, developmental disorder, epilepsy, ADHD, learning delays, sight and hearing impairments, Aspergers syndrome, muscular dystrophy, motor impairments.

Planning is vital for creating the right framework for a very varied group of children and young people. Everyone must feel comfortable and that they can be themselves. The physical set-up needs to be accommodating, so that everyone can participate regardless of impairment. Advance knowledge about the young people's impairments and needs for help/support during the seminars is vital. The seminars were supposed to encourage complete freedom of speech, so parents and other close contact persons were not welcome. Instead a whole team of adults was present, equipped for roles as interviewers, process mediators and contact persons.

Finding participants for the project turned out to be far more difficult than anticipated. Despite extensive efforts to get in touch with young people

through organisations, disabled persons sports, continuation schools for teenagers (a special Danish type school where teenagers can choose to spend one, two or three years to finish their basic education), local newspapers, and elsewhere, it was a struggle to find enough participants.

In some cases, contact with the young person was made more difficult because the adult carer did not feel "their" child or young person was sufficiently robust or competent to participate. One of the participants came from a continuation school that had rejected the project. The participant had heard of the project elsewhere. An experience that gives cause for reflection – adults decide in advance what a person with an impairment is capable of participating in.

6.1.2 Creative methods – a necessity

The challenge was to create activities so that all the participants could have their say. Different impairments created different challenges. For example, some young people were unable to use their arms or legs fully, while others could not hear or see. Some had reduced cognitive skills and others could not be with other people for long periods.

A wide variety of forms of expression was therefore necessary so that the participants could express themselves in different ways. The following activities were included in the project: icebreaking activities, role play, group discussions, 2–2 discussions, personal discussions, music, painting and writing workshops. More information about the different activities is available in the project's method toolbox.

Naturally, the methods used for such a seminar are not necessarily confined to the inclusion of disabled children and young people They can be used in many settings on the basis of actual conditions and possibilities. Work with disabled children and young people may seem slow, difficult or alien, but this is no excuse for not doing it. There is no doubt that these young people have informed views about their own situation but, for various reasons, they may find it difficult to express them.

6.1.3 A good experience

Both during and after the seminars, many of the participants expressed the view that they had, all in all, found it a very positive experience. This was in spite of being asked many questions and their impairment attracting a lot of attention. Some mentioned that they could now accept themselves as they were. Others said they were no longer frightened of participating in social events because of their positive experience at the seminars. Many formed long-lasting friendships and some felt they had broken out of what they experienced as tremendous loneliness.

In addition to the evaluation after the seminars, the participants answered a questionnaire about, for example, how they experienced the various

activities at the seminars. Finally, a follow-up day was arranged for all the participants, where the results from the project were presented and discussed. The participants were positive about the activities used. Both discussions and workshops worked really well, according to the participants' evaluations. Some were surprised at how well they could express themselves through art.

> "I was very surprised that I could get my feelings down on a piece of paper. I would never have believed that. And when it was read aloud to the other people, it really struck home how I felt. I thought it was great to go home with a feeling that you really got to say what you wanted and that nothing was held back". Quote from a participant.

At the concluding conference of the project, the young people were impressive. They took on the roles of key characters and talked about their participation in the project and their own lives.

In conclusion the project was a positive experience with wonderfully engaged young people. Initially, there was scepticism about bringing children and young people with very different impairments together and getting a productive and constructive process out of it. But in this context it worked really well.

6.1.4 Citizen's perspective

In summary, the participants' experience was that they had been too protected and limited, and they had not been sufficiently listened to or consulted on the most radical and personal decisions and measures. This approach, where their wishes, views and competencies are not used, results in a gradual and systematic acceptance of a situation where others decide for them – that their own opinions don't count. They are not challenged to formulate their own attitudes and express their opinions. There is therefore a risk that they will become passive instead of active citizens, who are capable of saying yes or no. There is a risk that disabled children and young people are conditioned to a passive adult existence, where their self-image only extends to a life of early retirement. Consequently, a fundamental change is needed in the way of thinking and attitudes about how children and young people with impairments can and will be included and contribute. Disabled children and young people should be viewed as actively engaged individuals with resources, competencies and experiences that society needs. Everyone needs to be seen and heard as a unique and participating person. Only when we manage this can we really start to talk about a society that includes people. It begins with the children...

6.2 Norway: DUE – a model for creating better service to vulnerable children through dialogue and cooperation

By *Joachim Bjerkvik*, Manager, DUE initiative

6.2.1 DUE – Where young people are

The DUE programme is a housing and local environment project in Bergen municipality, run jointly with Husbanken and the Norwegian Directorate of Health. The outreach services in Bergen are responsible for the day-to-day running of the project. In cooperation with the child welfare services and social services, the programme will help give vulnerable young people aged 16–25 more flexible and accessible services in the local neighbourhood and improve referral between different municipal services and between state and municipal services.

Working model

After application from the child welfare or social services, a project is set up for each young person. The project is run by a coordinator, working closely with the young person and the department that made the application. The project is based on systematically working through the young person's action plan, any individual plan and using the core group.

The coordinators have appropriate training and experience from working with the target group. They are responsible for mapping, planning and coordinating the measures as well as developing good working relationships with the young people. They are recruited from various parts of the social service system, from municipal, state and private institutions and bodies, and are purchased, initially for eight hours a week, from their normal place of work. This makes it possible to match the coordinator to the young person, and promotes sharing of experiences and expertise between the various work places. In cases where a young person needs special resources, an assessment is made of whether the number of coordinator hours should be increased or whether it would be better to have a counsellor involved too.

Method

Each project in the DUE programme is planned according to the young person's individual situation. The focus is on knowledge, skills and attitudes that develop and promote social competency. Basic social skills, coping experiences and the ability to take action are key aspects of the programme. The approach to implementation of the programme is eclectic and each coordinator's professional expertise and experience are essential in the work to bring about change in the young person. This promotes a flexibility that allows the programme to assist a differentiated target group.

Voluntary support programme

The young people themselves choose whether they wish to participate in the programme, an aspect that makes it easier for the parties to make demands on each other. Many applicants have long experience from various institutions and programmes and are often ambivalent to committing themselves to a new programme. One young person currently participating in the DUE programme said at the first meeting:

> "It's not my idea to be here today – it's hardly through choice. It's also being run by child welfare services and I want to do it myself."

Consequently we take time to introduce the programme and discuss hopes and expectations. We make it clear it is their choice and something they should think through. Some people ponder for a while, but most of them want to start as soon as possible.

Active involvement

Those people wishing to join the programme understand that they are expected to participate actively right from the start and help to make decisions that affect their future in various ways. The feedback coming from young people is that they want to help plan and influence their own programme. It promotes ownership of the project and gives the individual a feeling of being seen and taken seriously. Practical involvement in decision-making gives the young person a sense of responsibility and is an important step in empowerment.

> "At the institution they fixed most of it for me. Nothing much happened and I couldn't be bothered. Now I'm a bit like a boss – well... together with Endre [the coordinator, Ed.]. It is up to me to take responsibility and that's fine – I'll manage!"

Matching

The choice of coordinator is brought up and discussed with the young person. If the young person requests someone, and it seems to be a good solution professionally, the DUE programme contacts the coordinator to see if such a project might be of interest. The young person's involvement in choice of coordinator promotes a good working relationship between them. In the DUE programme this is considered to be a key factor for progress in the individual youth project. A young person responded as follows to a question about whether there was anyone he would like as a coordinator:

> "I do have one. He was the main contact for me (at the child welfare institution, Ed). He understood how things were and then it was ok to trust him – but I doubt that he'd want anything more to do with me. I've burned a lot of bridges. (*pause*) Can you ask him?"

The working relationship

A good relationship is characterised by mutual trust and respect, and forms the basis for building a constructive working relationship between young person and coordinator. Engagement, flexibility, availability and the ability to listen and create positive dialogue with the young person are of key significance. If the potential in the good relationship is to be realised, there must be mutual agreement on and understanding of the goals of the project. Similarly the young person, the coordinator and any other people involved must acknowledge each other's tasks and roles. In the DUE programme the goals and the delegation of tasks must be clear and realistic and defined together with the young person, and then recorded in the individual's action plan and possible individual plan. In order to retain the necessary trust, it is very important that the parties follow up their tasks and that plans are put into action within the set deadlines.

> "It hasn't often happened in my life that I can remember; they keep their promises and we find out and agree – that's really important."

A key feature is that the plan must be an effective working tool that is regularly evaluated and adjusted in collaboration with the young person. This gives the young person a greater feeling of ownership as regards the individual action plan, and experience has shown that this will lead to even greater participation in the attainment of goals.

Good availability

The coordinator is responsible for allocating working time in response to the young person's needs, so working hours are flexible. The needs are often greatest at the start of a new project and in transitional phases. In addition, the coordinator is on call during a project so they can be contacted by mobile phone 24 hours a day. An agreement is also in place with the Child Care Watch service, which is informed about the young people in the project and is available to the individuals in the event of an emergency and the coordinator cannot be contacted. When the coordinator needs advice or guidance, the programme leaders are also available both in and outside normal working hours. The flexibility in working hours as well as the on-call service forms a strong basis for good access.

The degree to which the on-call service is used varies. Some people call or text their coordinator several times a day and, if necessary, during the evening and night, while others are more reluctant to make contact. The feedback from the young people generally is that it means a lot to them that there is someone who knows them and their situation and who can be reached at any time of the day and night. One girl expressed it like this at her first core group meeting:

> "I can call when I actually want to and, you know what, she can actually be bothered to listen to me when I'm down".

Many also report that the security of knowing that they can reach their coordinator when needed actually reduces the need for contact.

Setting up their own accommodation

In the beginning, the young people's chance of moving into their own accommodation and becoming more independent is a key motivational factor. For many young people, living at home is no longer an option. An acute shortage of municipal accommodation means that the coordinator and young person often spend a lot of effort and time looking for private accommodation. This process helps the young person take more responsibility for their own accommodation and put in the effort necessary to keep it. The chance to influence the choice of accommodation and location turns out to be very important in how living conditions develop. It has often been seen that when a young person moves into their own accommodation, this has a positive effect on previously strained family relationships.

Watched but not supervised

Most of the young people need to be surrounded by vigilant, but not supervisory, adults. It is important that the coordinator has some overview of where the young person is, what they are doing and, not least, who they are with. However, this knowledge is difficult to attain without supervision and, often, excessive control will conflict with the programme intention, leading to suspicion, poor communication and literally a distance between the coordinator and the young person. What we know about the young person's leisure time tends to come from what they themselves choose to tell us and not from watching them. Once again, a good relationship characterised by mutual trust is absolutely essential. By giving regular affirmation, listening to and showing genuine interest in what they are doing, the coordinator is in a good position to get a real insight into the young person's life.

> "She can be a bit pushy, ask a lot about how I am today and who I hang with and stuff. But it's cool."

Results

By developing the DUE programme, the city of Bergen has shown that it takes seriously that every young person is unique and has unique needs. The young people in the DUE programme have different experiences and backgrounds, different problems and face different challenges. However, the youth projects and goals are individual and even if progress varies and some need more time than others, the programme is designed so that everyone has a good chance to develop. This promotes more competent behaviour and is a driver to continuing improvement after the programme ends. The great interest shown by the child welfare services and social services is also a sign of a clear need for support in this area.

6.3 Denmark: Orøstrand School and Treatment Centre: children's council and influence

By *Karsten Christoffersen*, Director, Orøstrand

Orøstrand's educational and theoretical approach is built on the "complete process". This means that we actively try to involve the children in the:

- *Decision-making phase*: They participate in deciding whether a work task is to be done.
- *Planning phase*: They participate in finding out how a target is to be reached.
- *Implementation phase*: They participate in assessing what is to be done in order to reach the target.
- *Evaluation phase*: They participate in evaluating whether the target has been reached and whether the result is satisfactory.

Children should always be included, not only as part of a training process but as a right.

Student influence will always be something relative, but the intention is that the children are included to the maximum in issues relating to everyday activities, not only on a personal level but also in relation to other members of the group.

It is important to point out that inclusion should always be based on the children's maturity so that they are not exposed to challenges that will not strengthen them. The basic idea is that all children should be included in the decision-making phase, planning phase, implementation phase and the acknowledgement phase. In our experience, involvement strengthens children's confidence and self-worth and they are better equipped to tackle the challenges facing them in life.

One of the many tools used to reach the target and involve the children is the work with the Children's Council. The work with the Children's Council is one of the ways to reach our goal on "the complete process". Apart from the formal activities relating to the Children's Council, the work is in an ongoing process of expansion, continually finding new areas where the children can be involved in decision-making. When we have included children in a democratic process in this way, it has been based on the view that "all children have the right to be involved in decision-making and exert influence" and that "children and young people can cope with being involved in the decision-making and exerting influence".

The Children's Council was set up in 1995. The guiding principles are that it will have genuine influence and participate in decision-making, which is why it was important to define the council's status, power, influence and right of disposal over finance.

Status: The Director holds meetings with the children at which everyone is clear on who is the lead person, with an agreement that this cannot be altered.

Power: All decisions made at the Children's Council meetings are valid. If there is any conflict between what the Children's Council decides and other decisions in the organisation, the final decision is postponed until the disagreements have been resolved. A decision comes into effect 8 days after it was passed at the Children's Council.

Influence: The Children's Council exerts influence as it is entitled to consider and have an opinion on all matters concerning the institution.

Economy: The Children's Council manages a fines fund, and the council sets the levels of fines. Grants awarded to children are also managed by the council. The Children's Council is consulted on all matters involving purchases for children's activities.

In practical terms, the Children's Council functions as a forum. Before the meetings, children have been given discussion subjects and proposals by their classmates. This takes place at department meetings and the department representative then takes the suggestions to the Children's Council. Approximately 15–20 Council meetings are held annually (one fixed meeting per month and ad hoc meetings). All problems and subjects are up for discussion at the Children's Council. Examples are rules relating to violence and bullying, rules for using bicycles, football, other ball games, computer, trampoline, and fines for smoking and cycling on the trampoline.

These fines go in the Children's Council fines fund. The Children's Council has decided that no child can be fined more than the equivalent of four weeks' allowances (vandalism and theft). For instance we have a "vandalism account", where the funds in the account are transferred to the Children's Council. The costs of vandalism are now considerably less than before this system came into place. If a child is fined or must pay compensation, the child is entitled to work in order to earn the money back. The decisions taken are unanimous and are recorded in the minutes. If there are decisions that need to be presented to the adults, the Director does this.

The following minutes from a Children's Council meeting illustrates the types of practical cases the council considers:

Current matters:

We went through the minutes and agreed that the Director should take up the following with the adults:

- How do we progress with the playground?
- The football pitch needs to be marked out, slightly larger goals should be considered.
- Swingball tennis equipment needs to be purchased and other items for outdoors sports.

- The Children's Council wants the hollow by the barbecue to be filled in on a work day.
- Unanimous agreement that Children's Council members should be role models.

Items for today's meeting from the departments.

Decisions: Frequency of the Children's Council meetings; Children' Council cupboard by the entrance; thefts from the kitchen; windows in the gym; door bells/alarm; collection trips; rules on smoking; rules on use of sports clothes; play ground; Contact 2 rules.

New elections: Children's Council election to be held on 6 October. This will be followed by a meeting of the new Children's Council to decide who will work with what.

Frequency of Children's Council meetings: A proposal is that the Children's Council will have specific meeting dates as well as extra meetings. There is a long time between meetings. The Director will look into this.

The Children's Council's cupboard by the entrance: A suggestion is that the cupboard by the entrance is kept more up-to-date, and more useful for minutes from the meetings, agenda, good ideas, etc. The Director will ensure that it will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Thefts from the kitchen: Meeting agrees that it is not a good idea to steal from the kitchen or anywhere else. It has to be up to the department itself if you can run for election again if you've been in trouble for theft, etc. The adults in the department will have to manage the debate for the election on the 6th of October about this.

The windows in the gym: Suggestion to cover the windows in the gym to avoid breakage, e.g. bars or something similar. The Director will look into this.

Collection trips: Kahytten department is very unhappy that collection trips are made during school hours. It is difficult if children get behind with homework and try to make friends. It is difficult when adults on one hand think you should go to outdoor school and, on the other, you cannot get to the start and they insist that you have to go on the collection trips.

Rules on smoking: Discussion that the rules on smoking are too tough. The majority feels that the rule is fine as it is and Karsten points out that there is also a law stating that you are not allowed to smoke at Orøstrand.

Rules on use of sports clothes: Sports clothes are only for sports and the Children's Council feels there should be a consequence if you wear sports clothes on a normal day, if it is not for sports.

You should help wash and fold the clothes and make sure they are ready to be used. Karsten will discuss this with the adults and the laundry.

Playground: The new Children's Council needs to make a plan about how to develop our playground/play area. Both younger and older children need to be considered, as well as the appearance of the area. In addition, we

need to look at the suggestions from the last Children's Council and how we might be able to apply for external funds for this.

Significance

Over the years we have realised how valuable the Children's Council is in the everyday work. We see how children who would previously react with either verbal or physical aggression now choose instead to take problems to the Children's Council. We feel that children and young people in the Council have improved self-esteem and confidence, and they can also stand up and argue their case and explain things. We see children and young people clearly lay foundations for their education. We see that children and young people there take responsibility and look after things. The children in the Children's Council that has been presented in this article say the following:

> "It's good to be in the Children's Council because then you are part of the decision-making". (Boy, 9 years)
>
> "I learn how democracy works and that we can use it in school". (Boy, 9 years)
>
> "Democracy is what we do in the Children's Council". (Girl, 12 years)
>
> "I would like us to have more money in the Children's Council, because then we could decide more". (Boy, 9 years)

6.4 Finland: An example of how a client can become an expert through working in a network

By *Johanna Barkman*, Development Manager in the Centre of Expertise and Welfare.

6.4.1 The Survivors group and development of child welfare foster care

> "1½ years have now passed, and the time can briefly be described with the words "interesting" and "marvellous". At the start I didn't have the slightest idea about what to expect or even what I had got myself into, but during the "journey" things have become clearer and I've realised what a great thing I've been involved in. The new friends, the channel for dialogue and exchange of experiences. The additional benefit that we can influence and present the views of other children and young people on shortcomings in child welfare. All this has encouraged me and given me so much."

The Survivors is a development group formed in conjunction with a project run by the Finnish Centre of Expertise and Welfare, "Window to their own lives – young people in child welfare foster care". The group comprises six young women, all of whom have experience of child welfare foster care. They have lived in foster families and child welfare institutions, some of

them since they were very young and others for a few years. Their experiences of foster care are varied: some lived in the same foster family throughout their childhood and adolescence, while others were forced to alternate between homes and institutions. The group was put together partly by social workers, while some of the young people joined on their own initiative after an Internet advertisement.

A central aim of the Centre of Expertise and Welfare project is to actively include the placed young people in work to develop child welfare foster care and formulate new approaches. The Survivors group was given the task of discussing difficult issues related to child welfare. Young people that have spent time in the child welfare system were abused in childhood and, sadly, they have often suffered oppression. They contribute to development work by expressing views based on their own experiences. Their views have been challenged time and time again, and they have learned to survive in the most diverse ways. The young people have a lot to say about child welfare, but also about their own rights and obligations. Their unusual backgrounds guarantee that the development work considers many aspects of child welfare foster care. In addition to their own experiences, these young people contribute to development work by relating messages from others.

From reference group to development group

In the autumn of 2009 the Survivors group had been active for nearly two years, meeting approximately once a month in half-day sessions. Between the meetings, discussions were held via e-mail and an Internet forum. Since the start, the group had gone through four very different development stages. Via these stages – introductory, maturing, brainstorming and musketeer stages – the group has grown from being a reference group to a development group.

The group's first meetings comprised the introductory stage, during which the young people intensively shared their experiences, expressing feelings and telling their life stories. It was important to create a trusting, stress-free, positive and open atmosphere in the meetings so that the young people would dare to talk about their thoughts and listen to each other's experiences. When discussing experiences, the group used "Know the types" cards, which depict various feelings. The group designed the cards to match their own needs before the cards were finally refined for use with other young people. The introductory stage can be very powerful in such a group and once the stage has been completed, the participants can then start to examine and work with child welfare approaches. What was remarkable about the introductory stage was the reference support the group's members gave each other when processing painful experiences:

> "You get to know someone and realise that the other person listens to you. It's interesting to listen in some ways, because the first placement was different for everyone, and not everyone had it so good. It's also interesting to hear how people have got through it. Or how people have come to terms with it all and got on with

> their lives so that they're here today. Sure, I've been wondering all my life about these things …"

The introductory stage was followed by the group's maturing stage. The group tested and worked with various tools that the Centre of Expertise and Welfare had developed, such as the "Irritated" compendium, which was developed into an aid for expressing hatred, and the poker game, "Signs of Survival", which is a tool for considering survival methods in various situations. The working atmosphere in the group was positive, even if the tasks brought out difficult feelings and did not fully satisfy the girls' needs:

> "We worked a lot and I was pretty tired after the meetings. We didn't understand why we had to go through all those things. We'd much rather have talked about our own experiences."

The group underwent a process by which it grew from a reference support group into a development group. In the maturing stage, the group's supervisor took well-considered risks, trusting that creative and innovative ideas would arise at some stage. By testing alternative approaches, a core could be found that hadn't even been considered earlier, i.e. the spark that will drive the group's activities forward. The Survivors group's own spark was ignited when the group was assigned to comment on Mikko Oranen's report "Asiaa lastensuojelusta". This gave the group the idea of making its own statement: "10 facts about child and youth welfare". This took the group forward to the brainstorming stage.

In this stage the group members worked unhindered but with a clear focus on various child welfare themes on the basis of their own ten "facts". The young people's own experiences and their group reflections resulted in a statement of ten points on critical aspects of child welfare. The young people took a strong attitude to parenthood, the adults' responsibility, feelings of guilt, loneliness and violent treatment. They emphasised that young people should not be ashamed because they are clients of child welfare services or because they ask for help or receive it. Children and young people must be given help and support when they need it. The work led to a multimedia presentation on the Internet[37] and a poster showing "10 facts about child and youth welfare".

The Internet presentation was produced jointly with the band Negative, who gave the group the right to use its song "Won't Let Go". On the posters, the group presented the ten facts with associated statements to stimulate thoughts about what they meant. They also wanted to include a list of links in the material so that children and young people would know where to look for help.

The ten facts became a tool for the group's influence on society. The message has several target groups: children, young people and families,

[37] The English version of the presentation is available at the address http://snap.fi/services/pesapuu/10faktaa/en.php

decision-makers and adults generally. The group received a very positive response to its material, and the publicity exceeded all expectations. It astounded the young people but at the same time drove the group forward in terms of development. Now it was time for the musketeer stage with a strong "One for all and all for one" mentality. The young people glowed with enthusiasm and self-esteem. They received praise even though they were clients of child welfare services. Their work was appreciated and, as experts, they were able to influence the general public's perception of child welfare. The group has since cooperated with the Children's Ombudsman, Maria Kaisa Aula, extending and deepening their experience of expert knowledge. The young people have grown into a development group in child welfare foster care.

What the group has learnt

The Survivors group's activity exceeded all the expectations that were present in the introduction phase. The group has given the young people strength:

> "It's taught me to look critically at things and notice when things are wrong and do something about them. The group has also taught me that age is not important if you want to be involved and influence things. I am bolder today and also believe you can get a lot of positives out of your own experiences, even negative experiences. And if you use them in the right way they can also be a resource in life. The Survivors has given me confidence, and showed me that there are actually adults who want to work in the best interests of children and who keep their promises."

The young people really appreciated the adults who were bold enough to act as inspiration to a development group like this, who really want to listen to children and young people and who appreciate their experiences. However adults should be prepared for the fact that young people initially want to talk about their own experiences and process their feelings around these. Only then can opportunities arise to develop something tangible. The road from client to expert is long and emotional.

The group also encouraged other young people to accept the role of developer of child welfare:

> "Take a risk! Be brave! You hold an unbelievable amount of valuable information and you have your own experiences of child welfare. You know what works and what should be done differently. You are experts in these issues! As well as getting the chance to influence things, you can get new, wonderful friends through the group. You also get the chance to process your own experiences, even if the group is not really a reference group. But I warn you about something: the group can bring about a change in you. You can experience a strong need to defend children and young people that are badly treated, you can get angry about the authorities that have acted wrongly, and it can shake your life up so that wounds are opened when things are processed. Anyway, all that is normal and with my own experiences in my baggage, everything here brings so much that is positive, both personally and in the larger arena."

6.5 Norway: How disadvantaged young people can help others through participation and be strengthened in the process.

By *Marit Sanner*, Director of ChangeFactory

6.5.1 The Child Welfare Pros

The Child Welfare Pros are 24 young people aged 14–19 with extensive experience in Norwegian child welfare services. They were given this name because they have been in many institutions (an average of 7 per child) and have a lot of experience of child welfare services. In this project they describe their good and bad experiences and provide advice on what they think should be changed in the Norwegian child welfare system. The results were first launched on 28 May 2009 in Oslo. The project was developed and managed by ChangeFactory and financed by the Norwegian Foundation for Health and Rehabilitation.

Objectives

The primary objectives were to ensure that children and young people in child welfare services receive better assistance through the implementation of advice. In addition the project had several intermediate goals:

- Give professionals insight into how children in child welfare services want to be approached and what they think is helpful.
- Give the media insight into how to put focus on resources for young people in child welfare services.
- Give young people in the project training and experience in participation and presenting the message to professionals and the media.
- Give young people in difficult situations the opportunity to focus on their own strengths, resources and possibilities.
- Set public examples for working in a non-stigmatising way with children and young people in difficult life situations.
- Make an important contribution to increased user-involvement in child welfare services
- Contribute to fulfilling the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The project was strongly linked to Article 12 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The fundamental principle of the child's right to be heard was an important motivation for the project's implementation.

Target groups

The target groups for the project were employees in Norwegian municipal and state child welfare services, employees in regional offices, professional

groups for children, youth and family agencies, those working with preventative policies, county committees for social services, the Child, Youth and Family Directorate, the Ministry of Children and Equality and other ministries. The target groups are also politicians – at local, regional and national levels. The media is also an important target group. We believe this project will provide the media with new angles and perspectives for reporting experiences and ideas from children and young people in challenging life situations.

The methodology of change

According to many of the young people we meet, they have already encountered far too many adults and have had to tell their stories far too many times. This has made them sceptical of adults and they can therefore seem rather unmotivated when it comes to relating experiences from child welfare services. Another challenge we have encountered is that young people feel that the responses they were asked to contribute would most probably not lead to direct improvements in their lives. Why should they contribute? This presented considerable challenges.

Over the past year, ChangeFactory has been working intensively to develop methodology for inspiring children and young people to want to contribute their own life experiences. The methodology had to be exciting and engaging because we are working with challenging, difficult and negative experiences and with children and young people who are weary of sharing their stories. This has led to the development of Change Methodology, which has been tested in cooperation with young people and professionals in various sectors. It is a clear alternative to questionnaires, as many children and young people in child welfare services say that they have participated in too many of these. The Change Methodology is based on engaging visual tasks intended to create the motivation and commitment for open and truthful discourse. The beginning of the process, with leaders and motivators, is important to create a safe and trustworthy environment. This is followed by a mapping phase with descriptions of real-life experiences. Depending on the objective, there then follows a method for developing ideas, action planning and giving feedback. Change Methodology takes its inspiration from Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), used and evaluated in social planning and other development work across the world.

The Child Welfare Pros were invited to gatherings in different cities throughout the country and the young people each took part in 1–3 gatherings. They were invited by public and private institutions and all participation was voluntary. The gatherings were always based on a certain guiding theme. The issues were open so it was up to the participants to bring forth the most important. The focus was all the time on their experience, understanding and perception of the themes – and their ideas and wishes for change.

Experiences

Building on feedback from the young people after the Child Welfare Pros project, we know some of the factors that made it successful.

The approach made them "pros"

Most of the young people who were invited into the project agreed to participate. Many of them have later explained that this had a great deal to do with the roles they were given. Several expressed that they had never before experienced being looked upon as a counsellor and the feeling of being able to act in this role made a strong impression. Hard-earned experiences became transformed into something positive and it became important for them to contribute in the best possible way.

Important themes on the agenda

The themes in the project were chosen in collaboration by five young people and professionals. The feedback from the young people was that it felt really good to contribute with responses to important questions.

Clear parameters for involvement

The parameters for involvement became very clear for the young people. They knew that the results could make a small contribution towards changing their reality and everyday life in child welfare services. Furthermore, they realised from the beginning that this project gave them the opportunity to really convey their experiences and insight to the directors of child welfare services in Norway.

The results

We wanted to go into depth and then create a small selection of the young people's experiences and understanding of some themes. The responses were organised systematically and the responses that recurred frequently became a part of the resulting material. This way we gained the "emphasis" in the responses. The results were not interpreted by adults.

The experiences and understandings of the young people after having lived in a number of child welfare institutions whilst growing up have many similarities. We believe therefore that the responses from the 24 participants, who together have a great deal of experience from various child welfare institutions, have considerable transference value.

The responses were summarised and grouped in different themes:

- Be heard
- Who will live where
- Adults
- Rotation
- Boundaries & locking
- Drinking

- Moving
- Case management
- School
- The dream institution

The themes that engaged the most people got the most space in the results document.

The results were presented in the "Child Welfare Pros" magazine and handed over to national authorities and politicians responsible for child welfare services in Norway.

A sample from the results based on the theme "Be heard"

The Child Welfare Pros stated that they have far too little experience of being asked about their thoughts about what is most important for improving their lives. They have also rarely been asked about what kind of place they think would be good for them – to get the support they need so that they could be happy there. They have also experienced that it is always adults who decide who the adult contact will be and that young people are not asked who they would like as adult support. For most young people, it is essential to talk to an adult they like and who they feel likes them. If they don't get that, it takes a lot before they feel talking to an adult does any good. They all agreed that they should be involved in deciding who their adult contact should be.

Examples of quotes about being heard:

> "To be able say what is best for me is surely not that much to ask for. This place is here to help me. I am 16 years old. It's about time it worked that way."

> "I feel that what I say isn't worth much, because it doesn't help. They don't listen. It's better to not just say anything. No point using up thoughts and feelings for no purpose."

The Child Welfare Pros advise the child welfare agencies and the employees at the institutions to listen more to young people. They are the ones who will live in the institutions and get help there. It is the only chance they have. Even if the young people do stupid things, are cheeky, difficult, get drunk or other things, the institutions exist for them. That is why adults need to listen carefully. They do believe that in some places the adults are very good at listening to young people and they listen in a way that enables young people to slowly but surely trust adults again. They regain the feeling of being worth something. These institutions should be mentors for others, said the Child Welfare Pros.

How to move forward

The Child Welfare Pros presented the results from the project through several national media channels in connection with the launch. This work is

still going on. In the autumn, they will also present the results at national conventions and at the Child, Youth and Family Directorate's regional conferences in several cities around the country. Many of the young people are still in regular contact to find out what is happening and to get new assignments. They say that they feel they have contributed to something important and they want to help more. As one of the Child Welfare Pros expressed it, "It's good to be able to give something back to the child welfare services. They gave me a lot. And it's good to be able to use some of my far too many stupid experiences to make it better for someone else."

6.6 Discussion: Children with unique experiences

The DUE project shows the importance of involvement to those people needing services from the public sector, and how important it is that staff listen and care. This applies to both motivation and development of the most constructive practice.

The Children's Council at Orøstrand School and Treatment Centre has created a clear structure for involving children in decision-making and allowing them to influence the agenda at meetings by taking up subjects significant for their everyday lives. It can be seen as a democratic learning process. Its significance for the children depends on the impact and the adults' attitudes through the process.

The texts about the Survivors group and Child Welfare Pros describe how disadvantaged young people can take on the role of experts and be given the opportunity to pass on advice to others. The process of creating unique knowledge entails a move from one position to another. Through the social relationships, an empowerment process also takes place, not least when they are consulted about improving working methods relating to disadvantaged children and young people. Such a process can also have a certain therapeutic effect where participants are encouraged to re-examine and re-evaluate their experiences and thereby take a look at themselves. The rights perspective is also clear here, especially in demanding rights on the basis of their needs.

The project about participation for disabled children and young people has a completely different target group with other challenges. The actual process is the objective and this is a good example of starting with a different goal than to climb up Shier's ladder.

The articles above show how important it is for decision-makers to listen to the experiences of disadvantaged children and young people, who find themselves in a vulnerable position in relation to those who are to make decisions on their behalf. This will ensure that the child feels that he or she is being listened to, and that their version is taken into account in later discussions and decisions. This applies not least in environments such as in child welfare institutions, that children experience as strange, and where the

child, perhaps unwillingly, has become a case for child welfare services. Taking children seriously does not necessarily mean that they need not adapt themselves to certain organisational structures and relations.

The projects do not necessarily fit in with a hierarchical involvement model (Shier) where the ultimate goal is to share power and responsibility. The important thing is that children are consulted, and that their views are taken into account. In various ways they are incorporated in decision-making processes and make important contributions to the planning of measures and services. At the same time the actual process is very important, and this social participation clearly means a lot for those involved. Common to these projects is that, through participation, an empowerment process seems to take place that helps build identity. This occurs because social networks are created, children become conscious of their rights and their experiences, and realise that contributing can help others. Children become aware that they are experiencing something unique and that their experiences are important. The need for structures and adults to lean on comes out clearly in all projects.

7. Concluding reflections

The articles illustrate that what we call involvement embraces very different participation processes. What type of involvement is most appropriate depends on the objective of the organisation, but the actual participation can be both a goal and an agent, and content, form and relevance are important for mobilisation. If children and young people are to feel that involvement is meaningful, the influence must be genuine, regardless of its level.

How the involvement works in practice determines what the youngest children get out of it. Here the attitudes to children of those who are to work with them are very important and, not least, *how* they include children. In the projects that are described, it is also clear that involvement processes require a firm and precise framework. The goals must be defined, and the working methods must be understandable.

Those people planning to involve children must have a conscious relationship to what can be attained in order to avoid creating unrealistic expectations. Furthermore, who is to be consulted should also be reflected upon, as well as the method that is most appropriate. There are many indications that it is an advantage with small groups[38]. Relevant information and pre-knowledge are important, both about possibilities and limitations. Not unexpectedly, it was shown that children's motivation to become involved in decision-making is improved by engagement in their activities and if they are enjoying themselves.

The biggest obstacle to involvement of children and young people in practical decisions, when this is desirable, is that those people who are to share power question children's competency and maturity. There are a number of reasons for this attitude. They may wish to protect the child, involving children is time-consuming, and it requires a lot of work. Furthermore, such a division of power necessarily means that those with the power must release some control. The child has to qualify, and it is the adult who decides whether the child has this maturity. When the power balance is weighted from the start, then the strong party must be sensitive and responsive, and must be really committed to the task. The fact that age and maturity determines status is problematic. There is a risk that young people can be rejected on the grounds that, if they think differently to adults, they lack the insight necessary to make their view worth listening to. If access to information is limited, there is a risk of inaccurate information, and consequently the child cannot get an overview of the consequences.

Stimulating involvement is a way of strengthening children's social and cultural capital. The grounds for involving children in decisions that concern

[38] Save the Children, Sweden

them are important, and they are on several levels. Practical participation will improve the quality of decision-making processes, and thereby improve activities and opportunities so that they correspond better with what young people need and wish for. It will also promote protection of children, empower them, and promote children's self-esteem[39]. By ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Nordic countries and the self-governing territories have undertaken to prepare the way for young people's broad participation. It means that this group in the population can also benefit from the development and strengthening of the true democratic society.

[39] Thomas 2007: 200

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