

## Part 3

# CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: STUDIES IN DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

## INTRODUCTION

The qualitative in-depth Children study presented in this section is the third empirical effort carried out in WP2 in 2018-2019, involving children in pre- and primary school settings and informal after-school contexts in areas characterized by high cultural diversity and social inequality in eight European countries: the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, and, in a later time, The Netherlands. The study was designed to complement the quantitative survey and the qualitative study involving parents, to enable a better understanding of the experiences, perceptions and opinions of young children from native-born low-income families and families with ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds regarding inclusion and well-being at school.

The ISOTIS Children Study aimed at exploring children's perspectives on inclusion and well-being at school and identifying facilitating positive elements at school within social, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, what children identified as quality indicators of school inclusiveness and their suggestions to make school more welcoming and inclusive. The study elicited children's views on inclusion and well-being at school and, beyond this, the study explored a form of education through democracy, examining how a supportive democratic learning environment can be created.

The study intended to provide new perspectives and valuable ideas to inform policy-makers, as well as methodological suggestions to make research with and for children, to enhance inclusive environments through the active participation of children and to empower children in their roles as democratic citizens (e.g., Dürr, 2005; Himmelmann, 2001; Johnny, 2005; Osler, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 2006).

A Technical Report was delivered when the data analysis (and in some countries also the data collection) was still on-going. The Report illustrates the theoretical framework, the aims and research questions, the methodology and the ethical guidelines applied in detail and includes the first partial versions of the country reports (see D2.4 Technical report on the Child Interview study. Children's views on inclusion at school – Isotis web source [http://www.isotis.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/D2.4\\_Technical-Report-on-the-Child-interview-study.pdf](http://www.isotis.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/D2.4_Technical-Report-on-the-Child-interview-study.pdf)).

In this final report, the theoretical and methodological framework (Chapter 3.1) will be synthetically presented, followed by an updated presentation of the study conducted in the eight countries involved, with the additional contribution of the Dutch team that joined the study at a later time. Chapter 3.2 is composed of lengthy abstracts of the 8 country case reports, while the full Country reports (except for the Dutch study) will be provided as Appendixes at the ISOTIS website ([www.isotis.org](http://www.isotis.org)).

In Chapter 3.3, a cross-country analysis on the main results illustrates what children identified as the main factors promoting well-being and inclusion, the main factors undermining well-being and inclusion and the transformative factors proposed by children. Following are some reflections on the main ethical and methodological challenges and complexities, the limitations of the international research, the content suggested by children and the educational and formative impact of the study on children and teachers. Recommendations for practice and policy conclude the document.

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### 3.1 THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY 'FEEL GOOD. CHILDREN VIEWS ON INCLUSION AT SCHOOL'

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#### THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that guided the conceptualization of the study design relied on a number of pillars: (1) **Children's Rights** and the paradigm of the «Research With and For Children»; (2) the **Participatory Research Framework** in connection to **Education Through Democracy** and the **Active Citizenship Framework**; (3) **Social Inclusion and Well-Being** as key topics regarding children's participation.

- **Children's rights and the paradigm of the research *with* and *for* children** - The relevance of children's perspectives in the field of research has become well established in the field of the human sciences due to relevant cultural and scientific developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shedding new light on the image of the Child and Childhood. The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) established the inviolable rights granted to children of any age, gender, origin and social status, and among others the right to participate and the right to freedom of expression (art. 12 and 13). Academic contribution came from: (1) Socio-Constructivist Early Childhood Pedagogy that promoted a new concept of the 'competent child' actively engaged in cognitive and socio-emotional learning experiences, but also in decision making and participation; (2) the Anthropology and Sociology of Childhood that has long recognized children as competent actors and reliable informants on their life (O'Keane, 2008); (3) Students'/Children's Voice Theory that acknowledges how children's perspectives are essential to understand their unique viewpoint in educational and school contexts where they represent one of the main groups of stakeholders. In these fields of research, there has been an important shift from a research paradigm focusing almost exclusively on children as mere research objects to a research paradigm that involves children as collaborators. Childhood studies have claimed the capacity for children to be researchers, and children have evolved from being 'positioned' as mere objects, or, at most, subjects of research, to being research partners that can actively and meaningfully cooperate and co-construct along with researchers (Bessell, 2015). The paradigm shift requires not only an idea of research with children, but also specific attention to the educational impact and the priority of children's well-being in participating in research. Therefore, not only is there talk of "research with" children, but also of a "research for children" (Mayall, 2003; Mortari, 2009).
- **The participatory research framework in connection to the education through democracy and active citizenship framework** - To truly listen to children's perspectives and to allow children to have meaningful experience within research, giving voice to children is not enough (Mortari & Mazzoni, 2010; Sarcinelli, 2015: p.6). It is essential to take their ideas into account and let them experience how their voices can influence the contexts they live in. Four separate factors require consideration: (1) **Space**: 'creating an opportunity for involvement – a space in which children are encouraged to express their views' (Welty & Lundy, 2013:2); (2) **Voice**: recognizing children's many languages and using as many ways of listening as possible (Moskal & Tyrrell, 2015); (3) **Audience**: ensuring children that their views are listened to by adults; (4) **Influence**: ensuring that children's views are not only heard, but that they are taken seriously and, whenever possible, acted upon. The participatory and transformative research integrates listening to opinions and a phase of constructive work, proactive and that transforms the context or object under consideration. This model becomes an opportunity for the research participants to be actively and meaningfully engaged, experience citizenship, agency and, to all effects, it can represent a democratic education experience, according to the threefold

definition of democratic education<sup>38</sup>.

Beyond giving 'voice' (namely eliciting children's views on inclusion and well-being at school), this study was meant to explore how the research could result in a form of **education through democracy**, allowing children to collaborate in decision making. In contexts of social distress and marginalization, such an approach could be an important catalyst for social inclusion – 'social inclusion' intended as 'making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society' (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003:VIII). In line with this theoretical framework, the ISOTIS study explored children's ideas on how inclusion, acceptance and respect for differences manifest in their classrooms and schools. Children's proposals about what could be done to make their school (more) welcoming and inclusive for each child were elicited and some of their ideas were implemented, so that the children could have a tangible experience of democratic life (Welty & Lundy, 2013) and develop their skills and awareness as knowledgeable, responsible and active citizens in their communities (UN, 1989).

- **Social inclusion & well-being as key topics to involve children's participation** - The study focused on children's ideas and proposals for change on inclusion and well-being in the school context. Inclusion and well-being are two closely interconnected concepts in theoretical models. Inclusion has been conceptualized as a four-step process including well-being (Rosenthal and Levy, 2010): (1) **Inclusion as acknowledging differences**: a precondition for promoting inclusion is recognizing and drawing attention to social and cultural differences; (2) **Inclusion as valuing differences**: diversity should not only be recognized, but also appreciated as a value (Salamanca Statement; UNESCO, 1994); (3) **Inclusion as acceptance**: only when differences are recognized and valued, all forms of social and cultural diversity can be accepted; (4) **Inclusion as well-being**: the recognition, appreciation, valorization, and acceptance of diversity are key preconditions for promoting well-being. The concept of well-being has been defined as **the opportunity to feel that "one's perceptions and experiences do matter"** (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007:45) and individuals have a sense of purpose, feel able to achieve important personal goals and participate in society. It is enhanced by conditions that include supportive personal relationships [and] strong and inclusive communities (see also ISOTIS Deliverables 4.1. and 4.2).

The value of eliciting children's viewpoints on such topics and their active involvement is particularly meaningful for several reasons.

**At a basic but paramount level**, though such topics are delicate and require an attentive ethical consideration when dealing with children. It has been acknowledged that they affect children's personal experience within the school, the family, the neighborhood they live in, and the wider society, starting from the early years (Rayna & Brougère, 2014).

**At the research level**, this study offers an interesting contribution in a seldom-explored field<sup>39</sup> with respect to how to talk with children about these issues. The aim is to enter children's 'direct experience', in order to reflect with children on what they consider to be factors of well-being or discomfort in the school context.

**At a policy level**, it can be observed that children are still not enough involved and allowed to express their viewpoints on social inclusion. Social inclusion has become a key issue in the academic debate across disciplines and an inescapable priority for the worldwide political agenda, especially in the field of education

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<sup>38</sup> The three dimensions of the definition are (1) education about democracy regards deep understanding of what democracy is and what it requires from each citizen; (2) education for democracy is to learn how to participate and exercise one's democratic rights; (3) education through democracy takes place in supportive, democratic learning environments (Gollob et. al., 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Very few studies have encompassed young children's perspectives on and understandings of inclusion (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009; Mahbub, 2008).

(UNESCO 2005, 2013, 2014; OECD 2018a, 2018b). Research on the impact of exclusion and discrimination on children and childhood demonstrates that *'the challenge of future inequalities can only be met through child policies for social inclusion'* (Cook et al., 2018:16). Children are attributed a central role in the social inclusion policy agenda, yet most initiatives to implement this agenda *'were and are still designed, delivered and evaluated by adults'* (Hill et al., 2004).

This has been highlighted in recent studies such as the one commissioned by the European Commission to the European Social Policy Network (ESPN, 2017), on the national policies of 35 states regarding the implementation of the Recommendation on *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (EC 2013). The Recommendation, that sets out to define a common European Framework for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and for promoting child well-being, includes three main pillars. The third one relates to policies to support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sports and cultural activities, and *to promote children's participation in decision-making in areas that affect their lives*. Overall, the study demonstrated there has been little change in most countries since 2013.

Against this background, the ISOTIS Child study, recognizing this gap, aimed at eliciting children's voices on inclusion and well-being in reference to the school context.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodological framework and the selected research strategies and instruments refers to two main approaches: a participatory methodology (O'Kane, 2008) and a multi-method approach (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Children were involved in the research process as co-constructors and co-researchers in reflecting on the quality of their (pre)school contexts, on well-being at (pre)school and in proposing innovations. The methodological proposal was meant to: (1) promote a safe environment where children were encouraged to express their views, feeling that they were being heard and never judged; (2) recognize children's many languages, adopting a multi-method approach that used many ways of listening and enabled diverse opportunities for expression; (3) give voice to children's experiences, and let them be (pro)active. In this regard, a critical and reflective stance (Flewitt, 2005) was adopted, considering both children's participation in the research and the implementation of their proposals. Specific attention was dedicated to balancing children's right to participate with the need to ensure a worthwhile and positive experience, adjusting the adult's and children's roles according to children's ages and competences. We asked all of the children (in various age groups and contexts) their suggestions to make their school more welcoming and implemented the most feasible proposals. Finally, while the initial construction of the research-partnership with the children was mainly an ethnographic participant observation, many different methods and techniques were proposed, such as focus groups, circle-time discussions, art-based and manipulative activities, virtual photo tours and digital product making. This choice not only met the need for triangulation, but also provided a richer and more comprehensive picture of children's viewpoints, recognizing children's many languages (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998) and ensuring that each child had the opportunity to explore and represent their perspective in their own terms. The study had to adopt a common framework and a common set of strategies and instruments needed for a cross-cultural study and comparison, yet they were proposed as flexible and adaptable based on the specific: (1) objectives of National teams given the presence of different target groups (e.g. Roma, Low-Income, Moroccan); (2) culture of schooling and inclusion in each country; (3) culture of childhood in the different target groups and the different developmental stages of the children and contexts involved (formal and informal). The mainstays of the proposed methodological approach were similar across the different age groups and countries for both formal and informal contexts, in terms of methods, languages, and tools. We provided national teams with a manual with general guidelines and specific research techniques and activities for each of the three contexts (preschool; primary school and informal contexts), inviting them to adapt and customize activities or parts of them to better take into

account the peculiarities of each site and to investigate specific topics and themes most relevant to their context/target group. The research protocol adopted in the three contexts to explore four different dimensions: (1) identity; (2) children’s views and experiences on inclusion; (3) well-being at school; (4) children’s proposals.)

### THE MAIN DIMENSION, RESEARCH STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

To The research protocol adopted aimed at exploring four different dimensions:

1. identity;
2. children’s views and experiences on inclusion;
3. well-being at school;
4. children’s proposals.

A manual with general guidelines and specific research techniques and activities was provided for each of the three contexts (preschool, primary school, informal after-school contexts). The format provided was meant to be adapted and customized by each national team taking into account the peculiarities of each site, in order to address the most relevant themes/topics for the specific target group or given the specific characteristics of the context. Further steps could also be added by national teams based on their specific objectives and target groups, while maintaining certain common elements in order to guarantee cross-country comparability.

Table 1 gives an overview of the research protocol in the three contexts. We will then illustrate in detail the research protocol for each context.

Table 1. *Research protocol*

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION OF THE DIMENSION	ACTIVITIES WHICH ADDRESSED THE DIMENSIONS		
		FORMAL 9-10	FORMAL 3-6	INFORMAL
<b>Identity</b>	Cultural, linguistic, social and somatic identity of each child	Identity card	Identity card	Icebreaker activity; Autobiography
<b>Children’s views and experiences on inclusion</b>	If/how the school supported inclusion, acknowledging and valuing diversity at different levels: a) cultural diversity; b) linguistic diversity; c) social inequalities	Focus-group	Circle-time or Child-led tour	Video-cued focus group; Autobiography
<b>Well-being at school</b>	a) Elements that contributed to making children ‘feel good’, accepted and included at	Suns and clouds	Suns and clouds	Video-cued focus group; Autobiography

	school; b) Elements that undermined children's well-being at school
<b>Proposals</b>	Children's proposals to make their school more inclusive and welcoming for each child 'Inclusion first aid kit' 'Inclusion first aid kit' Message to the authorities

The selected strategies and tools were proposed into steps, that could have been adjusted to specific local requests. The national teams were encouraged to adapt the activities and/or methodologies to the characteristics of the children and the specific contexts. A detailed description is provided in the Technical Report D2.5 (Chapter 3)

The preliminary step required before getting started with the activities consisted of at least one day of field observations to allow children to get to know researchers and to understand how the researchers' role differed from the teachers' role; to present the work and ask children to sign the informed consent and explain the importance to audio recording; to allow researchers to know the context better and gather some relevant information about children, teaching methods and inclusion strategies already implemented. This step consisted of observing the context without interfering too much (non-participant observation), whereas the option was left open for interacting with children (participant observation):

A letter from a researcher in another country was proposed as a trigger for focus group conversations, to engage children in reflecting on and discussing their school experience regarding inclusion, well-being, and acknowledging and respecting differences. The letter was meant to activate children both at cognitive (their opinions and ideas about inclusion at school) and socio-emotional levels (their experience of inclusion at school), offering an engaging story, real situations raising indirect questions, characters and situations that children could relate to, and authenticity (the sender was a true researcher).

Especially for the preschoolers, a different option consisted in an audio-recorded child-led tour rather than in a circle-time discussion, asking children to take the researchers on a tour in their preschool to collect some information/materials to present their school to newcomers (Clark, 2017).

Especially for the informal contexts, it was suggested also to use a short clip used as stimulus or indirect question to provoke a dialogue among the children on the topic considered most relevant by the national team in their context.

The identity card was based on the pretext of the letter whose sender expressed interest in knowing more about their experience, and was meant to involve the children in introducing themselves and their school, investigating more deeply what children think and how they represent their identity, as well as to get some information about their aspirations.

The Sun & Clouds activity focused on children's experience at school and specifically on what made them feel good (suns) or not (clouds) at school.

Especially for the informal contexts, a different option was proposed, inviting children to focus on their school experience as a whole and create their school-autobiography or photo-story supported by the researchers and the professionals in the informal context.

The 'Inclusion first aid kit' activity consisted in involving students in eliciting some proposals to make their school (more) welcoming for each child. Researchers were invited to make different materials and tools (e.g.,

cameras, video-cameras, tablets, billboards...) available to children to support the elaboration of children's ideas.

Especially the primary schools and in the informal contexts, it was also suggested to invite children to prepare a message for the authorities (school principal or the local authorities, or the mayor...) with a list of proposals, choosing the form of the message (a letter, a song, a video clip, a drawing, a photo-story etc.), and whether the message was produced individually, in pairs or in a small group.

It was suggested that the researchers invite the teachers to organize follow-up activities after the research was completed (e.g. children could present and propose their inclusion kit to other classes); return to the school to present the results of the international research, some of the experiences shared and the messages produced by children in other contexts; or even twin some contexts so that children could send each other comments on the messages produced by the other group of children.

### **DATA COLLECTION, CODING AND ANALYSIS**

National teams were be asked to transcribe (verbatim in the original language and only the most significant excerpts translated into English) children's verbalizations, written comments/productions and discussions during circle-time, focus groups, one-to-one conversations, dialogues during everyday interactions with children and between children relevant to the research.

During all activities that consisted of drawing and realizing artefacts, researchers were invited to systematically ask the children to describe their products (especially young children who were not able to write), to take note and/or record their explanations.

Coding and analysis were focused only on verbal data, while visual data could be used to support and document the analysis.

At the international comparative level, the analysis of verbal data was realized through a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis 1998; Braun and Clarke 2006).

Two main levels of the data analysis were considered:

national level: each country team analyzed the national data set as a single case and provided thematic analysis, contextualizing the data analysis within the specific characteristics of the setting/s where the research was conducted, preserving the ecological validity of the data interpretation and analysis.

international level: a comparative analysis was performed by target groups, settings and children's age after national analyses have been completed, focusing on three main findings: what children indicated as factors promoting or undermining well-being and inclusion at school and what children proposed to make the school more welcoming and inclusive.

A preliminary phase to thematic analysis is data coding.

In order to connect the first national level and the second international level of analysis, a common coding system was created, instead of separate coding trees for each country. Starting from common points based on the research questions, the coding tree was made of four types of codes as illustrated in the table below.

Table 2. *Typologies of codes*

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>TYPE OF CODES</b>
<b>Preliminary codes</b>	T. TARGET GROUP
<b>Thematic codes</b>	D. DIVERSITY
	SR. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
	I. IDENTITY
	SO. SCHOOL ORGANIZATION
<b>Over codes</b>	F. FACTORS INFLUENCING INCLUSION & WELL-BEING
	R. REPRESENTATIONS
<b>Complementary codes</b>	CC. COMPLEMENTARY CODES

Main codes were detailed in several sub-codes reaching a number of 37 codes. The coding tree resulted as in the Figure 1 and in the Table 3 below.

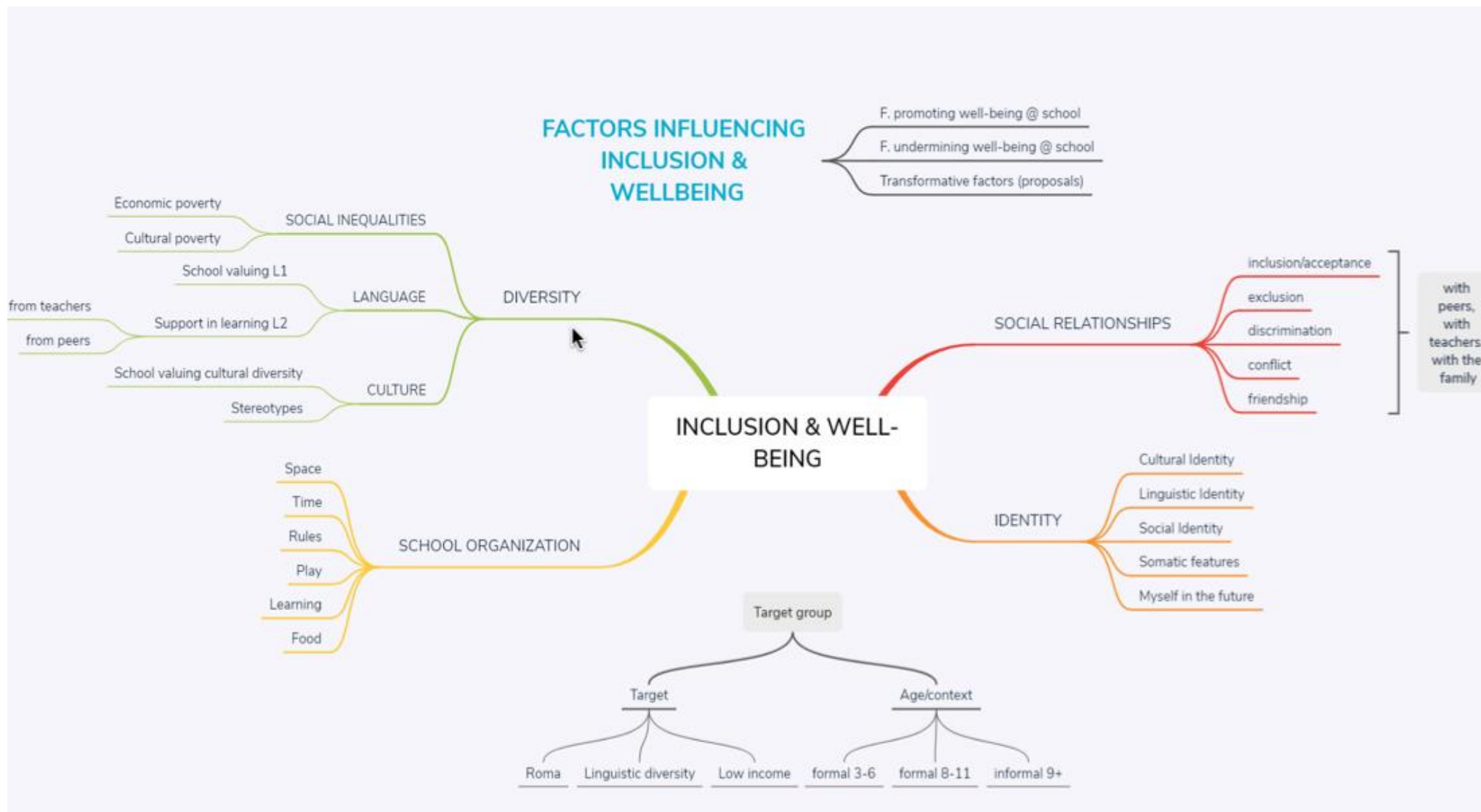


Figure 1. Coding tree

Table 3. *International table of codes*

TABLE OF THE CODES		
<b>PRELIMINARY CODES (TARGET GROUPS)</b>	T1. Roma	
	T2. Linguistic diversity	
	T3. Low income	
	T4. Formal 3-6	
	T5. Formal 8-11	
	T6. Informal 9+	
<b>THEMATIC CODES</b>	<b>D. DIVERSITY</b>	D1. Social inequalities
		D2. Language
		D3. Culture
	<b>SR. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>	SR1. Inclusion/acceptance
		SR2. Discrimination
		SR3. Conflict
		SR4. Friendship
		SR5. Behavior
		SR6. Emotional support/empathy
	<b>IDENTITY</b>	I1. Cultural identity
		I2. Linguistic identity
		I3. Social identity
		I4. Somatic features
		I5. Myself in the future
	<b>SO. SCHOOL ORGANIZATION</b>	SO1. Space
		SO2. Time
		SO3. Rules
		SO4. Play
		SO5. Learning
		SO6. Teaching approach
	<b>OVER-CODES</b>	<b>F. FACTORS INFLUENCING INCLUSION &amp; WELL-BEING</b>
F2. Factors undermining well-being at school		

		F3. Transformative factors (proposals and wishes)
	<b>R. REPRESENTATIONS</b>	R1. Image of the child/student
		R2. Image of the teacher
		R3. Image of the school
		R4. Image of the society
<b>COMPLEMENTARY CODES</b>	CC1. Peers	
	CC2. Teachers/school	
	CC3. Family	

The coding system was meant to be a common scheme of themes open to variations and additional sub-codes proposed by the partners to address particular, locally emerging themes (only one sub-codes was added in the Dutch study in School Organization, 'Transition to school'). Moreover, with regard to the different target groups (low income, Romani and immigrant children), not all of the codes were meant to be used by all the teams.

The four main thematic codes (diversity, school organization, social relationships, identity) and their sub-codes were applied in combination with preliminary codes, Over codes and Complementary codes as well as with thematic codes.

At the national level, partners<sup>40</sup> carried out a thematic analysis combining the qualitative interpretation of the verbal materials (transcripts and observation notes) collected during the field work with the quantitative analysis of the codes's distribution, mainly focusing on the co-occurrences of the thematic codes with the over-codes, namely Factors promoting well-being and inclusion, Factors undermining well-being and inclusion and Transformative Factors (children's proposals and wishes to change the school), in relation to the age and the setting. The quantitative code analysis was meant just to support the qualitative analysis, to increase the understanding of the relevance of the topics addressed by children.

The international analysis followed the same procedure and built on the national analysis provided by almost all countries, combining the qualitative interpretation of the results provided by each partner in the country report with the quantitative analysis of the codes' distribution in reference to the entire sample (overall) and per age and setting (school 3-5, school 9-11 and afterschool informal context 9+).

Findings of the international analysis are presented in the last chapter.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The national teams were asked to guarantee respect of (1) the European General Data Protection Regulation (Reg. EU 2016/679); (2) relevant national legal and ethical requirements; (3) that the standards described in the ISOTIS data management were fully met during this task. In reference to the involvement of young children as research participants and the delicate topics addressed by the study, four main levels of

<sup>40</sup> Few exceptions should be noted: the English study applied different codes fitting in the specific features and purposes of the research conducted UK; the Czech team provided the co-occurrence table of just site 1; the Polish team had serious challenges in collecting data and was allowed to take only field notes. The notes were coded but a precise quantification of the codes was considered inappropriate, while the researchers preferred to make a distinction between predominant and non predominant topics.

ethics were addressed and cautiously considered: (1) Aims and benefits; (2) Informed consent; (3) Privacy and confidentiality; (4) Data collection, storage and use of the data.

The impact that participation in the research may have had on children in terms of potential harm and possible benefits was considered. The questions of children's participation and the notion of children's voices have been critically addressed and deconstructed (Komulainen, 2007; Lewis, 2010). Research with children, especially with very young ones, gives rise to major ethical concerns, highlighting the inherent risks of oversimplification, hypocrisy, manipulation, or of practices that are more formal than substantive (Palaiologou, 2012, 2014). Notwithstanding that children's voices need to find a way to be expressed and heard, these issues were taken into account, especially considering the very delicate issues addressed by the study such as inclusiveness, well-being and respect for diversity (Bittencourt Ribeiro, 2017). The ethical questions that we addressed in designing the research methods regarded (1) the positive involvement of young children in exploring and discussing inclusion/exclusion in school contexts characterized by cultural diversity and social inequalities; (2) the addressing of these issues in a sensitive yet meaningful way to children and the alignment of the research questions and methodology with the children's competence, motivations and interests.

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### 3.2 THE NATIONAL STUDIES

Eight countries participated in the Children Study: The Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, and Poland, and an additional study in the Netherlands came at a later time. Each study is presented in this chapter in the format of an extended abstract, while full country reports are provided in the appendix (except for the Dutch study). The studies follow the same order of the list of the beneficiaries:

- The Netherlands
- England
- Norway
- Germany
- Italy
- Greece
- Poland
- The Czech Republic

### 3.2.1 THE NETHERLANDS

Christel Eijkholt and Paul Leseman

#### Short abstract

The insights presented below are the result of activities conducted as part of a case-study aiming to contribute to a pedagogy of child rights-based democratic citizenship of young children in care and education services (ECEC) in The Netherlands, while at the same time fitting into the ISOTIS project, WP2 Task 2.5 exploring children's perspectives on well-being and inclusion. This qualitative study was specifically designed to include the views of (very young) children aged 3 to 6 years old through participatory pedagogical practices, and by conducting open and semi-structured interviews with children through a mosaic of visualizations. This resulted in comprehensive and in-depth information from children themselves in pre-school and afterschool care centers, and a record of their perspectives on inclusion and belonging/well-being in pedagogical settings. This study provides an overview of influential factors contributing to understanding what makes children "feel good", or not, in care settings, across the organization's pedagogy, and in particular related to strategies to promote inclusion of less advantaged families/communities in The Netherlands. Gender, age range ("younger, same or older to me"), family (siblings) and group identity are the most determining factors when asked about how and with whom children play, and related to what children tell about their wellbeing and inclusion. Also, for this group of young children, there appeared to be no clear division between "me" and "the other". In this respect, children's own identity, their social relationships and the various contexts in which children are situated during the day, are not delineated and seem to merge smoothly. This notion could be of influence when considering policy measures aiming to support the inclusion of all in a pedagogical environment.

**Keywords:** Child rights, diversity, inclusion, well-being, democratic citizenship, identity, children's views, child participation

#### Research sites and participants

The empirical setting for this research project is the neighbourhood Ondiep in the city of Utrecht in The Netherlands. This neighbourhood has a substantial native low SES-population, and a large migrant population with very mixed cultural and ethnical backgrounds. The neighbourhood is dealing with various urban issues related to - amongst others – migration and an increasingly diverse population, changes in social structures and individualisation. During the last ten years, Ondiep was one of five neighbourhoods in Utrecht that received special attention and financial support by the city council through a specific 'neighbourhood approach' ("krachtwijk"), such as additional investments in communication, empowerment of vulnerable groups, citizen's participation, and attention for special places or themes symbolizing improvements in the neighbourhood<sup>41</sup>.

Starting point for site selection was the Utrecht-based organization Ludens Foundation. Ludens is a specialized organization for day- and afterschool care and education<sup>42</sup>, and part of the national umbrella of

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/fileadmin/uploads/documenten/bestuur-en-organisatie/publicaties/onderzoek-en-cijfers/Rapport-Leren-van-wijkaanpak-2018-06.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> In The Netherlands, children between 0-4 yrs have access to (a form of) day care, subsidized if both parents are working/studying or from 2,5 yrs onwards when toddlers are identified with a risk of developmental delays. The latter group has currently access to 10 hrs of Preschool Education focussing on language support (this will be 16 hrs as from August 2020). On paper, these provisions do overlap. However, in practice, both provisions seem to cater for different populations (dual income, middle and high SES families in day care centres vs low SES and migrant background families in preschools), leading to segregation in the education system. Since 2018, the Preschool system is integrated in the child care system. The government is recently taking steps to further integrate both

foundations for day and afterschool care Kindwijzer – whose members jointly invest in pedagogical quality. Ludens’ main pedagogical approach "The Growth Chart" (Ludens, 2011) is applicable for all children in their child centres from birth onwards. The pedagogy is based on a whole child approach, and aiming at the gradual transfer of responsibilities to children. The classes and centres are considered a democratic community in which children feel heard and seen, are given a voice, and in which children learn to make decisions together, to take responsibility for themselves and their environment, and to learn to solve problems and conflicts together. Respect for diversity is a central pedagogical value<sup>43</sup>.

The child care system in The Netherlands is organized in such a way, that composition of the groups differs from weekday to weekday. The research activities were planned accordingly, to ensure that the research groups were most diverse and more or less reflecting the population context in Ondiep – with regards to migrant populations (Moroccan), native low SES-category, and other cultural backgrounds. In the afterschool care, a number of children are enrolled from the special Language-school where recently arrived migrant children receive special catch-up education with emphasis on learning the Dutch language, socio-emotional support and integration in the mainstream school system. This concerns refugee children from Syria, and, for example, children from labour migrants from Eastern Europe, South Asia and Latin-Amerika.

Table 1: Overview of context, sites and participants

Context and site information				Participants	
City / Area	Background Characteristics	Formal context	Age group	Group	Child interviews
Utrecht, Ondiep	Mixed, immigrant and native low-income SES	Child centre, Pre-school care	3 years	12	11 individual 1x4 group
		Child centre After school care	4-6 years	24	9 individual 1x4 group

## Methodology

For this study, we used the methodology defined for ISOTIS by Pastori, Pagani, Sarcinelli (2018) as a base<sup>44</sup>. However, we adjusted the tools to the evolving capacities of the young child (Landsdown, 2005; Clarke, 2005). We found that the tools provided needed to be short, concrete, functional, colourful, tangible, flexible and adaptive to the context and setting. Verbal and written consent from teachers and parents, and even more so from children interested to participate, is key. For very young children, this is best visualised on one page only. It takes a long time to collect parental consent forms; not all parents are necessarily closely involved with the centre, and it is not easy to get their attention in such a way that the overall goal of the study and their children’s role could be sufficiently explicated. Approaching parents in person and explain the process verbally, appeared to be effective.

To work with children individually and group-wise towards an aggregated and collective end-product during the course of the project, was very stimulating and inspiring for the children. It concretized the direct

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provisions.

The Dutch education system provides for 8 years of primary education: 2 years of universal kindergarten - groups 1 and 2 - for children aged 4-6, and 6 years of primary education (groups 3-8) for children aged 6-12 years old. Children from working parents have access to subsidized afterschool services.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.samengoedvoorlater.nl/wp-content/uploads/We-zijn-allemaal-anders.pdf>. The project ‘Together for the Future’ (‘Samen goed voor Later’ in Dutch) was implemented in all Kindwijzer child centers from 2011 onwards. Kindwijzer, represents about 15 per cent of all day care centers in The Netherlands.

<sup>44</sup> This study is part of the international research project ‘Children’s views on inclusion at school’ within the European project ISOTIS (see D.2.5.: Pastori G., Pagani V., Sarcinelli S., Technical report on the Child Interview study. Children’s views on inclusion at school’-digital source available on [www.isotis.org](http://www.isotis.org))

and overarching goals of the research, and instructions for the assignments. We suggested to make a ‘group-book’ with all the visualisations as an introduction for new children in their group; i.e. children who are not familiar to them or the child centre, and may not speak the language yet. We gave the book an overall recognizable (group)symbol. This way, the products and the end-product worked as a stimulus for the verbalizations among children themselves as well.

Table 2: Overview of Activities

Child Study: Phases and activities		
Phase	Activities	Dimensions
-1	Identification of research sites Explanations (staff, parents, children) Preparations (consent forms)	Recognition of children as valuable resource of information about issues related to their day-to-day experiences
0	Field observations	Children in their context
1	Child-led Tour	Views and experiences of children
2	Identity Cards / Passports	Individual identity
3	Suns and Clouds	Children’s wellbeing
4	Picture book	Group identity and experiences of children in their context
5	Group Compilation Book	Defining individual and group-identity, as well as aiming at welcoming new children for their wellbeing and inclusion

### Coding and analysis

Country-specific to this case-study, and in addition to the general framework, we used:

1) Additional background documentation: literature on the Mosaic approach<sup>45</sup>, Ludens pedagogical policy, vreedzameschool.nl, Samengedvoortlater.nl, reports Utrecht city council.

2) Apart from general observations during the research period (May-July 2019), four divergent moments were selected for close observations in the two selected groups/sites. These were carefully documented and analysed, with focus on:

- 1) Interactions between children during free play
- 2) Interactions between children during a structured activity (meal time)
- 3) Interactions between staff and children
- 4) Methods of conflict-resolution.

3) One open group-interview with staff (location leader, teachers) was held in June<sup>46</sup>. Although managers, teachers and supporting staff were not the focus of this research, their understanding of the details of the research, consent for, and cooperation with the activities was important to be able to conduct research activities with children effectively and meaningfully. Also, they provided details and specifics of the context, location and group climate.

4) The activities with the children themselves led to discussions and open, sometimes in-depth, conversations

<sup>45</sup> Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to Young Children – The Mosaic Approach*. National Children’s Bureau; and Clark, A. (2017). *Listening to Young Children, Expanded Third Edition: A Guide to Understanding and Using the Mosaic Approach*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

<sup>46</sup> Discussion with staff, June 11, 2019

with two focus groups (2 x 4 children) and 20 individual children. The outputs of the children (drawings, pictures, polaroids) were used as incentives; children's verbalizations were coded according to four main characteristics of inclusion and wellbeing (and various sub-characteristics). These were divided in factors promoting and factors undermining well-being. Transformative factors as such were not identified from the verbalisations of children directly. Questions in the direction of 'Proposals' ("what would you suggest, how would you.., what would happen if..") require a certain level of abstract thinking that appeared to be not applicable to this age-group. However, transformative factors were analysed combining all applied tools as per the Mosaic-approach.

### Main Findings

As can be found in table 3, children responded generally positive, when asked about, and encouraged to voice their experiences in day- or afterschool care. Many expressions came spontaneously, other verbalizations were in response to questions about what children do like, or not, in preschool or care, what they like to do, what is their favourite place, whom do they like to play with, and how they welcome new children. The figures in the co-occurrence table provide an overview of how many times each specific code recurs in the voiced and recorded data. However, these categories may not necessarily be the most significant or substantial ones.

The categories most frequently mentioned by children in relation to both promoting and undermining wellbeing and inclusion in preschool and care, were Organizational factors followed by factors relating to Social relationships and Identity. Among this group of young children, the category Diversity was hardly recognized as a factor of influence, positive nor negative. Among the Organizational factors, most frequently mentioned in relation to promoting Wellbeing, were by far factors related to Play and Space. For example, preschool children indicated frequently they like the open-door policy during free play and the possibility to go beyond their 'official boundaries' and explore without restrictions. This was followed on a distance by – notably – factors related to the future transition to primary school among the group of 3- year olds. Undermining organizational factors mentioned, were related to Time and Space – mainly afterschool care children indicated they did not like restrictions in this regard during free play, for example interruptions for fixed mealtimes or playing outside at certain time-slots.

The second most frequently mentioned category were factors relating to Social relationships; with the highest occurrence of undermining factors relative to factors promoting Wellbeing. Issues related to friendship, exclusion and conflict were most frequented as negative to Wellbeing. Children mentioned, for example, that they did not like to participate on days that their friends are not attending – some even indicated that on those days without friends, they felt lost and excluded. On the other hand, this was opposed to issues related to friendship, inclusion and acceptance as promoting Wellbeing at preschool and care: children really like to come and play with their friends. Children with siblings in the child centre, indicated this was very important to them (younger as well as older siblings). Factors related to the sub-code Social identity were also often mentioned as positive and supportive to Wellbeing: children increasingly learn to define themselves in relation to others.

Table 3: Table of co-occurrence of coded content (children’s verbalizations)

Codes applied	Subcodes identified	Target group: Formal 3-6 years Well-being at preschool and care	
		Factors promoting	Factors undermining
<b>Diversity</b>	Social inequalities	0	1
	Language	0	0
	Culture	0	0
<b>Identity</b>	Somatic features	4	0
	Social identity	30	1
	Myself in the future	9	0
	Linguistic identity	0	0
	Cultural identity	0	0
<b>Organization</b>	Transition to school	8	1
	Time	7	6
	Teachers	0	0
	Space	42	6
	Rules	4	2
	Play	45	5
	Participation	1	0
	Learning	4	2
	Food	0	1
<b>Social relationships</b>	Inclusion, acceptance	20	2
	Friendship	32	6
	Exclusion	5	5
	Discrimination	1	0
	Conflict	7	5

In addition, the study confirmed that it is not necessarily about what is literally expressed by children, but also about the process of interaction during the project. This process of interaction supports the development of the child’s capacity to negotiate it’s agency. The simple fact that young children are invited to talk, to lead a tour through the centre, to give their opinion and ideas, is a great explorative discovery and stimulation for children. It is important to reflect on what children tell, either by researchers or staff, to make sure children are understood, to show them they are heard, to clarify how this information is useful, and explain how it can be implemented or cannot be acted upon (responsive feedback-loop).

Transformative factors were identified as the recognition of the importance of individual preferences and spaces (f.e. regarding ‘Identity’: a name-tagged basket with personal belongings/toys for each child), as well as overarching bonding group symbols and working towards an aggregate an collective product recognizing both individuality and collectiveness – like the ‘group book’.

### Main ethical and methodological challenges

Due to the semi-formal character of the afterschool-care service and the fact that there is a less clearly defined structure as per the organization’s policy, we found the afterschool-care context (children 4-6 years old) not an ideal setting to implement a study assessing child voices . Children are “floating” after a day in school through their assigned spaces in the centre. Children are focused on their peers and are hard to mobilize to participate in a structured activity with many distractions around. However, it was found possible and useful to record their voices, after activities were shortened, concrete, and adjusted to fit children’s attention span according to their age and particular context. Making visualisations appeared to be very effective and appropriate. However especially for the younger children these tools can work as a distraction as well. In more than one occasion, the means became an end in itself and children started playing with the tools or gave their own meaning to the tools during the course of the activity.

In the formal (pre-school) care setting for 3 to 4 year old children, the project was implemented more effectively: structure in time and activities during the day made it easier to decide on the best time-slot for research-activities. Also, groups were smaller with higher staff-child ratios. A restful and quiet environment caused less distractions, resulting in more focus (and pleasure, it seemed) from these younger children. Also, some children really enjoyed the individual attention and the one-to-one character of some activities, stretching time to the limit not willing to end the activity (for example with the Child-led tour and the Suns and clouds-activity).

### **Discussion: Limitations, main lessons and recommendations for practice and policy**

Summarizing children's verbal input, and what they articulate as promoting or undermining their 'feeling good', inclusion and participation during day to day experiences in day- or afterschool care, most prominently features that none of the respondents referred to "the other" as being culturally or ethnically different. A "new child" was always associated with a child reaching the minimum age to enter their group, and a "child not speaking the language" with a child too young or too shy to talk. Gender, age range ("younger, same or older to me"), family (siblings) and group identity are the most determining factors when asked about how and whom children play with, and related to what children tell about their wellbeing and inclusion. In general, girls are more talkative. Therefore, most of the references are from interviews with girls – even when both sexes were equally represented in activities, and were given the same opportunity and open floor to provide input<sup>47</sup>. Another finding is that, for very young children, there is no clear division between "me" and "the other". In that respect, the preschool and care environment, seems to be the appropriate place to expose children to as much diversity as possible, reflected in an inclusive environment and based on equal opportunities and a democratic organization.

The good news is, that many of the references of young children relate to Organizational factors – which are the most direct accessible to influence for policy makers, a care provider or school. This particular group of children identified many positive organizational factors promoting wellbeing and inclusion – mostly related to play and space, some of which may be even further improved. Some organizational issues related to time and space may be undermining children's feeling good at the provision and can be further looked at.

Children's own identity, their social relationships and the various contexts in which children are situated during the day, are not delineated and seem to merge smoothly. This notion could be of influence when considering policy measures aiming to support the inclusion of all. On one hand this is a substantiation of the argument to start with early interventions as children are most open and receptive at a young age. However, on the other hand, this places an enormous responsibility on organizations and services for young children. They have to ensure that factors promoting inclusion and wellbeing, citizenship and equal opportunity are consistently reflected in policy, organization, pedagogy and practices. If not, there is a risk that societal imbalances are implicitly transmitted to, and absorbed by a new generation.

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<sup>47</sup> For example, during the 'Child-led tour' the number of participating boys-girls was 50-50; however, the number of references coded was 49-119.

### 3.2.2 ENGLAND

Pinar Kolançali

#### Short abstract

This qualitative child study is carried out as part of the Task 2.5 of the ISOTIS project to investigate the influences of everyday experiences of ethnic-minority children on their language behaviour, identity and well-being. The children came from families with differing socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds within the Turkish community in London. In total 25 children being raised in bilingual environments (Turkish and English) between the ages of 4 and 6 have taken part in the semi-structured interviews carried out in the home environment of children. During the interviews, the children were asked to identify their feelings when speaking their home language (Turkish) and the language of the school environment (English) in different situations by using a facial expression card. Following the initial answers of children, the researcher posed supporting questions to enhance the information provided by the interviewees. The findings suggest that older children are more competent in talking about their linguistic and cultural identities. Many children connected their identity-related experiences or feelings to particular individuals or locations. Some children expressed more profound feelings towards their linguistic or cultural identities, which are also linked to their language attitudes. These feelings are, in most cases, triggered by discussions at home or encounters at school. Negative feelings towards the home culture or language (Turkish) or the school language (English) are related to attempts to refrain from using the language and children's experiences of discomfort in using Turkish or English in some situations. The report provides more in-depth information on the methodology, the results and the discussion of the study. The implementation of the research is discussed in relation to ethical issues and limitations encountered during the fieldwork.

**Keywords:** minority children, bilingualism, cultural and linguistic identities of children, interviewing young pupils, England, ISOTIS project

#### Research sites and participants



London was chosen as the main research site of this study as, in many aspects, it is different to the rest of the UK and approximately 90% of the population with Turkish background living in the UK lives in London, particularly the North and North-East of London. Turkish is one of the six largest language groups in London. Furthermore, London has been one of the main research sites for the ISOTIS project, where the research connections have already been made. The study focuses on a sample of four- to six-years old Turkish-English speaking bilingual/bicultural children, who were born in the UK. The families were mostly from low-income backgrounds with years of education varying from 5 to 18 years. The languages spoken at home were similar although the language skills of parents differ. The majority of the parents use Turkish in their daily life (~90%), whereas a minority of the parents use English in their daily life (~10%).

#### Methodology

Children were interviewed using semi-structured interview method involving open-ended questions with the support of visual materials and multiple-choice questions using a facial expression card depicting three emotions (happy, sad, neutral). Interviews were carried out during the second home visit that was part of the doctoral project. Children were interviewed on their language behaviour and attitudes in three different contexts (school, home, playground) with different actors (scenario 1: home – mother, scenario 2: school –

teacher, scenario 3: playground – (1) Turkish and (2) English peer). See Table 1 below for more detail.

Table 1. *Interview summary*

INTERVIEW SUMMARY		
HOME VISITS	<b>Introduction of the study</b>	<p>Step 1 Target child is introduced to the “games” they play with the researcher through a Zoe card. In the beginning of the home visit the language assessments are completed for the doctoral work of the author. At the end of the assessment, researcher asks the child if they are interested in talking about their life at home and school with the researcher.</p> <p>Step 2. Researcher prepares the interview materials and sets up the voice recorder and explains the child the purpose of the materials.</p>
	<b>Picture cards</b>	<p>Step 1. Researcher presents the first picture (see Picture 1) depicting the child at home with their mother and asks in which languages they speak to each other and how the child feels about it. Facial expression card (see Picture 2) and prompt questions follow up to support the interview.</p> <p>Picture 1.</p>  <p>Picture 2.</p>  <p>Step 2. Researcher presents the second picture depicting the child at school with their friends and asks in which languages they speak to each other and how the child feels about it. Prompt questions follow up to support the interview.</p> <p>Step 3. Researcher presents the third picture depicting the child at school with their teacher and asks in which languages they speak to each other and how the child feels about it. Prompt questions follow up to support the interview.</p> <p>Step 4. Researcher ask the child if they want to add anything else and thanks the child once the interview ends.</p>

## Coding and analysis

As the aim of the current study was adjusted for the doctoral work of the author in line with the coding manual provided by the leading team. The coding strategy focused on the four main themes in the coding manual that would suit the aim of the study (children's language attitudes and preference). Following the coding exercise provided by the leading team the interviews were coded under the following themes and sub-themes that relate to children's language behaviour and attitudes: identity (linguistic, cultural, somatic, social), social relationships (family, friends, teachers), well-being (factors promoting well-being, factors undermining well-being, transformative factors), and school context (teaching approach, learning, rules, play) using NVivo 11.

## Main Findings

The findings provide evidence on how children's language use and preferences interact with their perceived identity, social-relationships, well-being and school context. See the frequency table for more information on the occurrences of themes and sub-themes.

Table 2. Co-occurrence table of Factors influence children's language use and preference

Themes	Sub-themes	Re-occurrences	Overall re-occurrence
<b>Identity</b>	<i>Linguistic</i>	19	% 14
	<i>Cultural</i>	14	% 10
	<i>Somatic</i>	3	% 1.5
	<i>Social</i>	23	% 17
<b>Total</b>		59	%43
<b>Social Relationships</b>	<i>Family</i>	13	% 10
	<i>Friends</i>	27	% 20
	<i>Teacher</i>	8	% 6
<b>Total</b>		48	%35
<b>Well-being</b>	<i>Factors promoting well-being</i>	8	% 6
	<i>Factors undermining well-being</i>	3	% 1.5
	<i>Transformative factors</i>	3	% 1.5
<b>Total</b>		14	% 10
<b>School Context</b>	<i>Teaching Approach</i>	2	% 1.5
	<i>Learning</i>	4	% 3
	<i>Rules</i>	4	% 3
	<i>Play</i>	5	% 3.7

<b>Total</b>	15	% 11
<b>Overall</b>	136	

Preliminary findings of the study show that many children expressed difficulties with speaking English and described themselves as new learners, while a number of children mentioned losing their heritage language skills and experiencing confusion with maintaining conversations in only one language. In many cases, children depreciated Turkish while favouring English over Turkish. Only a few children talked highly of Turkish and expressed joy in being bilingual. Another frequently emerging theme was social relationships. Children explained their preference over one language in relation to different characters in their social environments. Similarly, their positive attitudes towards a language mostly stemmed from constructive experiences with their family and friends. The majority of children explained their preference in one language with the prevalence of people speaking it in their family or social environment. Again, many children expressed their preference for English over Turkish. For the maintenance of Turkish home environment played an important role. Most of the children expressed their affection for their parents or language skills of parents in explaining their preference in speaking Turkish. Parents' active involvement in Turkish maintenance also supported children's Turkish use.

### Main ethical and methodological challenges

One of the important methodological challenges faced in this study was the content validity of the answers provided by children. In order to ensure this, initial questions on children's attitudes towards a language answered through the facial expression card were compared with the answers given to the open-ended questions. On ethical issues, a few instances raised concern during fieldwork, although, the ethical codes have been followed (CUREC 2018). In some cases, children have had hard time separating from the researcher or had difficulties with answering the questions and continuing the interview. In order to minimise the effects of such instances, the researcher made sure to be attentive to children's needs and ensured that the children enjoy their time with the researcher by regularly checking how they feel and reminding that they can stop the task at any time. Similarly, the participating children were informed on the procedures in the beginning of each day and their parents were provided detailed information on the study and the researcher to prepare their children before the home visits.

### Discussion: Limitations, main lessons and recommendations for practice and policy

The findings of this study show the importance of early childhood experiences in language acquisition and identity construction of children growing up with a heritage culture. The salient themes suggest that children are profoundly influenced by their social environments, although the outcomes of these interactions depend on the content of the influencer. While constructive experiences at home and at school bolster the coexistence of children's dual identity, negative experiences may impede the embracement of one or the other.

Drawing on the findings of this study, two recommendations can be made for institutions (e.g. schools) and organisations (e.g. community centres) working with minority families. For institutions, it is of the utmost importance to acknowledge diversity in learning environments to initiate healthy interactions between children from different backgrounds and to recognise negative experiences of minority-children in order to protect their well-being. For organisations, it is crucial to support family social skills to build cultural awareness within the family and provide tools for parents to support their children's dual identity.

### 3.2.3 NORWAY

Kari Anne Jørgensen-Vittersø, Geir Winje, Thomas Moser, & Helga Norheim

#### Short abstract

The activities in this case study took place in one pre-school and one primary school in the same municipality. The pre-school institution is a municipal Kindergarten<sup>48</sup> for 106 children aged 0–5 years organized in six units. Six children in three units were target children in this study. About 30 employees are working in the institution that has a high proportion of children with migrant background (>75%). The Primary school (grades 1-7) has around 500 pupils (aged 6-14) organized in classes of 20-30 pupils and about 80 employees. The proportion of pupils with migration background is larger than 75%. The target class (5th grade) has 20 pupils of which 18 participated in the study. Data collection took place in May and June 2019. The findings emphasize the prominence of friendship in both pre-school and primary school. In pre-school, play turned out to be a key factor for children's experience of well-being. The pre-school children considered inclusion in play, places for play both indoors and outdoors and material support as important prerequisites for the well-being of “new” children that are non-native speakers. The pre-schoolers also emphasized the importance of support in language learning and everyday routines. In addition to friendship, respecting and expressing respect for each other was an important element for the primary school students. The pupils had many and varying proposals on how to welcome a new child, covering suggestions for teachers, teaching and learning, extra attention and care, emotional and social support as well as environmental and contextual conditions. In addition, “normalization” was addressed, i.e. the importance of not to overload the new child based on assumption about his/her needs.

**Keywords:** pre-school; primary school; child-interview; children’s views on inclusion; ISOTIS-project; Norway;

#### Research sites and participants

The selected pre-school and school are located in a multicultural area with a population of mixed sociocultural and ethnic backgrounds in an urban municipality in south-eastern Norway. The availability and agreement from the leaders in the municipality and high experience and competence in the schools has been decisive for this choice, as well as convenience for the researchers in terms of distance from the university. The 106 children in the public pre-school are between 1 and 5 years of age and organized in six departments. Departments consists of groups of children aged 0-2 and 3-5. The primary school (grades 1-7 in the Norwegian system) has about 500 pupils (aged 6 to 14 years), organized in classes of 20 to 30 pupils. The school has about 80 employees. In both pre-school and school over three quarters of the children/pupils have migrant background.

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<sup>48</sup> The term “Kindergarten” denotes in Norway an optional pedagogical provision for children aged 0-5 years. Children, aged 1-5 are entitled to get a (full time) place in kindergarten (EURYDICE, 10.12.2018). Children start primary school the year they turn six.

Table 1. Overview of the sites and participants involved

Sites				Participants		
Name	Context type	Age	City/area	Number of professionals involved	Number and age of children involved	Division in groups
Public preschool	Formal	0/1-5	Urban	4	6 (4-5 years old)	3 departments (2 children pr. department)
Public primary school	Formal	6-14	Urban	1	18 (11-12 years old)	1 class

## Methodology

Data collection took place in May and June 2019 in both pre-school and primary school and substantially complied with the recommendations in the technical report (D2.4, Pastori, Pagani & Sarcinelli, 2019). However, in phase 4, the children in pre-school labelled places and material with Smileys (smiles and dislikes) not suns and clouds. This adjustment to the Norwegian context was necessary, as it was challenging for the children to relate sun and rain to like and dislike, i.e. to what is positive and negative. Children in Norwegian pre-schools are used to play outdoors in all kind of weather conditions and rain is not automatically connected to negativity. Table 2 provides an overview over phases and activities.

Table 2. Summary: days and phases of fieldwork and data collection in pre- and primary school.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Pre-school	Informing headmaster of the pre-school and the leaders of departments	Informing all staff and discussing the study design and methods	Meeting with assisting headmaster and members of staff	“First aid kit”; Phase 1: Conversations walk and talk inside; Phase 2: Group-walk outdoors-preferred play areas	“First aid kit”; Phase 3: Drawing identity cards Phase 4: Labelling Smileys on places and materials (likes and dislikes)
Primary school	Meeting with headmaster	Meeting with main teacher Meeting with pupils	Phase 1: “Letter form a foreign country” Focus group interviews	Phase 2: Drawing self-portraits, writing about one self (“ID-cards”) Phase 3: “Suns & clouds”	Phase 4: Pupils had meetings to prepare next phase Phase 5: Each group presented their demands

## Coding and analysis

Data analysis has been undertaken based on transcriptions of the recordings from group- and individual conversations at day 3 (only primary school), 4 and 5. A student assistant and the researcher who has collected the data have partly conducted the transcription. The data analysis is mainly based on transcriptions of the recordings from group- and individual conversations. We applied a manual coding system. In the first step of the analyses, the common coding references provided for this study were used (labelled with different colours). In second step specific themes has been identified. The researcher that has collected data also did the coding.

In addition to the recordings, in pre-school the children’s drawings and their photos of places and talks, their considerations about places they liked and disliked as well as field notes are part of the empirical material that has been analysed. Altogether, transcripts and documents consist of about 200 pages of documents (80 from pre-school and 120 from school), including researcher notes, pupil’s notes, pictures and id-cards. There are also parts of the recordings where children in pre-school are on the move, drawing or playing with and in puddles. To some extent this is included in the transcripts, as it may have influenced the children’s conversations notably. Parts of the material from primary school consist of drawings (“self-

portraits”) and symbols (“suns and clouds”). When it comes to the pupils, we partly combined this material with transcribed commentaries and explanations. As such, the pupils, to some degree, participated in the interpretation of their own texts.

## Findings

As a main overall finding, we identified friendship as a key prerequisite for wellbeing in both pre-school and primary school. The findings revealed slightly different patterns between the responses in preschool and primary school (see table 3).

In the pre-school group the conversations and walk and talk in groups brought to light a number of common aspects regarding the children’s’ considerations about facilitators of well-being. The pre-schoolers strongly connected inclusion in play to materiality and use of places both indoors and outdoors.

The tape recording of the conversations in the pre-school were not sufficient to grasp all the communication. There were also a substantial number of non-verbal expressions such as nodding, pointing, mimics and leading. To take these observations of non-verbal aspects into account, notes has been added to the transcripts, as we considered them as important for understanding children’s voices and expressions of meaning. For instance, children wanted to show activities in the pillow room, and took the researcher by the hand and led her to the room to tell her what they liked to do and what new children should be prepared to participate in.

The pre-schoolers addressed language barriers as a potential factor that could undermine well-being for new children. The use of practical tools for communication with non-native speakers, such as posters with drawings to learn words for everyday activities, was pointed out as factors for promoting well-being and inclusion. Limited access to spaces and materials has been frequently stated as a factor undermining well-being. Weather and clothing were addressed by some children, emphasizing that a lack of appropriate clothing might be a cause for getting wet or freezing, which should be specifically emphasized when welcoming new children.

Pupils in primary school also considered friendship and respect as crucial for well-being and welcoming new pupils in class. For the participants in this study, the school itself seems to promote well-being as they describe school as an important and positive factor in their lives. The pupils focused on a number of different aspects regarding new pupils starting in the class; however, the dominating subjects were in accordance with the topics introduced in the letter from Valentina, namely language, Ramadan and fast, and poverty.

The pupils’ utterances reflect faith in their teachers’ proposals and understandings, possibly as an expression of good teacher-pupil relations. The pupils seemingly cooperate quite well with their teachers, and accepted, and to some degree internalize, their opinions to consider friendship as a main solution for almost all possible challenges related to diverse classrooms. Along with this, a highly important codex for life in school are human rights, respect and non-discrimination.

However, when the teachers were absent, the pupils occasionally mentioned issues they found difficult to accept in this discourse. They were very proud about all the languages they could use, but disappointed because nobody showed interest in them as resources for the school. Sometimes, according to their experiences, they were even not allowed to use any other language than Norwegian, which they perceived as insulting.

Another issue frequently addressed was religious holidays. The pupils found it somewhat absurd that on all main Christian holidays the school was closed, while on Muslim holidays school was going on as ordinary. Some used the word discriminating, when they explained how this impede them to follow up the school’s strategy for reaching higher academic levels. They miss ordinary lessons because of absence from school

when their families celebrated e.g. id, and they lose the opportunity of reaching the others level because they had to take a break when the Christians celebrated their holidays.

Violence in the schoolyard was pointed out as a factor undermining well-being at school. Concretely the pupils addressed an episode of violence in the schoolyard shortly before the researchers visit. For some of the pupils, this episode made it clear that 'friendship' and 'human rights' were not as evident as they had learned. Also in this case the pupils sounded less critical when discussing this with their teacher than when discussing it alone (with only researchers present). Consequently, when the pupils addressed the school's teachers and leadership in their proposals, the focus was mostly on friendship and other positive means of strengthening well-being at school, while the more complicated and negative points were not mentioned (except for some references to religious holidays).

### 3.2.4 GERMANY

Itala Ballaschk and Yvonne Anders

#### Short abstract

The present study aims to examine the perspectives of children as to how they can facilitate elements (resilience factors) to feel comfortable in their differences at school. The aim was to enable children to express their perspective on what they think about their differences (cultural, somatic, linguistic, socio-economic, etc. level), about their social and cultural identity and about their school context in relation to integration, as well as what they identify as quality indicators of integration into school and what they propose to make their school more welcoming and inclusive. The present case study took place from 12.02.-15.02.2019 in a day care setting with a high proportion of children and families with an immigrant background. The day care setting is located in a Berlin district with a high proportion of families with an immigrant background. Eight out of 10 children participating in the study had a migration background. As factors that influence wellbeing described the children that there is a selection of freely accessible play possibilities and materials for creative design. In addition, the children are always very enthusiastic about the outdoor facilities and the freely accessible movement space.

**Keywords:** wellbeing; cultural background; family languages; play possibilities; movement space

#### Research sites and participants

The present case study took place from 12.02.-15.02.2019 in an ECEC setting with a high proportion of children and families with an immigrant background. Ten children between the ages of 4 and 6 years old with different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds participated. There were two children with a Turkish background, one child with an Arabic background, one child with a French background, one child with a Japanese background, one child with an English background and three children with a German background. Not least of all, there was one Syrian child with escape experience (5 years old, female) who spoke German very well. According to the head teacher, most of the children in the setting come from families with a low socio-economic status. For the study, we tried to recruit children with an immigration background and a low socio-economic status.

Table 1. *Overview of the target group, site and contexts involved*

COUNTRY	TARGET GROUP	CONTEXT TYPE	AGE	SITE		PARTICIPANTS	
				CITY/AREA	NUMBER OF PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED	NUMBER AND AGE OF CHILDREN INVOLVED	DIVISION IN GROUPS (IF ANY)
Germany	Immigrant background	Formal, Preschool	1-6	Berlin	1 (+1)	10 (4-6 years old)	No

#### Methodology

The case study was designed as an investigation with methodological triangulation ("between-method" design) (Denzin, 1970; Flick, 2011) to give children as many options as possible to express their thoughts, feelings and perceptions. In total, the focus was on four dimensions of content: identity, dealing with diversity, well-being and demands on good child day care. These dimensions were reflected in the individual

instruments “circle time” (Pastori, Pagani & Sarcinelli, 2019), “Inclusion first aid kit” (Pastori et al., 2019), “identity card” (Pastori et al., 2019) and “Sun & clouds” (Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). All specifications for the sequence were met with one exception. The activities "Inclusion first aid kit/brainstorming" and "Inclusion first aid kit/implementation" were divided into two days.

Table 2. *Interview summary*

<b>PRESCHOOL</b>		
<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Introduction of the study</b>	<p>Step 1 The researchers introduced themselves and explained the goal of the visit.</p> <p>To get to know the children better, the researchers played with them. After a while, the researchers gave information concerning the documentation of the activities within the study and agreed upon the rules of involvement in the activities.</p>
<b>Day 2</b>	<p><b>Circle time</b></p> <p><b>Inclusion first aid kit/brainstorming</b></p>	<p>Step 1 Together with the ten participating children, a morning circle ("Circle-time", Pastori et al., 2019) was held in a creative and relaxation room, in which the study, the role of the researchers (a research assistant and a student assistant) and the children were discussed again in a playful way.</p> <p>Step 2 Following the morning circle, the children were asked what they would do if a new child with a different cultural and/or social family background came to the setting and how they would help this child to feel comfortable in the centre ("Inclusion first aid kit/brainstorming", Pastori et al., 2019). The ideas were collected and it was decided in the group that the children wanted to make a doll ("human being") to comfort the new child. Together a list was made of all the materials the children wanted to use to make this doll.</p>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Inclusion first aid kit/implementation</b>	<p>Step 1 On the third day, the children and researcher met again in the same room and discussed the collection of ideas and materials from the day before. One researcher read the list of materials again and together with the children, they thought about who could collect which material and which part of the doll could be made. The researchers divided themselves among the groups and talked to the children about their ideas and thoughts when making the doll ("Inclusion first aid kit").</p>
<b>Day 4</b>	<p><b>Identity Card</b></p> <p><b>Sun &amp; clouds</b></p>	<p>Step 1 On the fourth and last day, the children and researchers met again in the creative room. Researchers presented their own ID card and explained the activity. The children could draw their favourite toy, their own portrait, their boyfriend/girlfriend on the ID card.</p> <p>Step 2 During the activity the researchers encouraged children to talk about their ID cards and to document their work.</p> <p>Step 1 Afterwards, researchers explained the second activity, “Sun &amp; clouds” (Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). Researchers encouraged children to paint what they like at their setting on the suns and what they do not like or what they miss on the clouds. Here, too, the researchers always asked about the children's motives for their drawings and thoughts.</p>

## Coding and analysis

Although different data were collected from different sources, it was required that the individual countries evaluate only verbal data, i.e. transcripts of the audio recordings. In addition, ethnographic field notes (Sanjek, 1990; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Breidenstein, Hirschauer, Kalthoff & Nieswand, 2013) were evaluated as part of the present case study. The audio recordings were transcribed literally and in the original language. Both the observation protocols and the transcripts were evaluated using the qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010). In order to work more deeply with the material, inductively won categories were created in addition to the predefined analysis categories (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, 2013). With regard to ethical challenges, attention was paid to compliance with current standards.

## Main Findings

The table shows the subcodes used, which are factors that promote children's well-being and inclusion. Subsequently, factors are presented that inhibit children's well-being and inclusive pedagogy. Following on from this, implications for better practice are derived.

Table 3. *Co-occurrence table of Factors promoting well-being and inclusion*

Codes	Subcodes	Target 1 - Formal 3-6
<b>Identity</b>	cultural	5
	Social	7
	Somatic features	4
<b>School Organization</b>	Space	6
	Time	4
	Rules	3
	Play	6
<b>Social relationship</b>	Inclusion/acceptance	7
	Friendship	2
	Emotional support	4
<b>Complementary Codes</b>	Family	9
		Tot. 57

One of the factors promoting well-being and inclusion seems to be identity, especially with regard to culture, social relationships and somatic features. It could be found, that children do not seem to define themselves primarily through their cultural backgrounds or family languages. The children also discussed the preparation of food with relatives. Here references to the importance of involving family within the pedagogical everyday life could be found. Stories about eating and/or cooking with relatives seem to have been thematized for reasons of relationship experience. Children reported decorating a cake together with

their sister or dyeing the cake glaze with their grandmother. Even more often the children talked about their "Papa" and their "Mama", with whom they "baked pizza in the forest" or "fried marshmallows" together. A child with an Arab background reported: "We had guests before, then they ate everything and my father, mum and I ate nothing, only the guests ate something". This quotation could point to a reference to the cultural background of the child with a view to hospitality in large Arab families and could be interpreted as an orientation towards culturally coded rules and customs. In general, social relationships seems to be an important factor promoting well-being and inclusion. It has been shown that the children interviewed present themselves as a social group and seem to perceive themselves as a community within their setting. This became clear, among other things, with regard to text passages in which the children spoke of the "we". For example, they set out with the investigators to find the individual materials to make a "human being": "Look, and we still have glittering stones! The "we" can also indicate that this child identifies with the setting by evaluating the things it finds there as its own and by feeling emotionally comfortable in the group of children and possibly in the setting as a whole. All in all, the data show that diversity was not explicitly raised by the children as a topic. Rather, it seems that they have a need to be able to move freely in space and to perceive themselves as part of a community. With regard to the question of what promotes the well-being of the children, it became clear how important participation in the pedagogical everyday life is for the children. Aspects that the children repeatedly describe as important for them are not only freely accessible play possibilities and materials for creative design, but also co-determination in the use of rooms and a daily routine that largely responds to individual needs. Corresponding text passages were assigned to the categories of freely accessible play options, materials for individual design and individual use of space. For example, the relevance of freely accessible materials becomes clear, among other things, in how enthusiastically the children report on all the utensils they are allowed to find and use in the room as they go through the list of materials for making "human beings".

As can be seen in the table, only a few factors have been identified that seem to inhibit well-being and inclusion from the children's perspective.

Table 4. *Co-occurrence table of Factors undermining well-being and inclusion*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Subcodes</b>	<b>Target 1 - Formal 3-6</b>
<b>School Organization</b>	Space	4
	Time	2
<b>Social relationship</b>	Inclusion/acceptance	5
		Tot. 11

The school organization seems to be important for promoting well-being and inclusion as well as for undermining it. Children feel restricted in their well-being if there is not enough room for individual play. They want to use rooms the way they need them in spontaneous fantasy. The importance of self-determination in the use of rooms for the children interviewed was demonstrated by the example of two children who, on the first day of the survey, were observed trying to furnish an apartment in the movement room with blankets and a box as well as a few utensils from the children's kitchen. They were reminded by preschool teacher that this room was a space for movement and thus were restricted in their need for self-determination. The children finished the game and went outside. This also includes the time factor. Children

want to have a say in their daily routine and also want to play a game longer than expected. Social relationships also play an important role. Children want to perceive themselves as competent, not only in dealing with things, but also with regard to conflict resolution. If a child is perceived as difficult and a specialist does not help them sufficiently in conflict resolution, the children describe this as disturbing.

### **Main ethical and methodological challenges**

With regard to ethical challenges, attention was paid to compliance with current standards (Technical Report). During the study, head teacher, educators, parents and children were informed in advance. The accessibility of the consent form for all parents was ensured. This means that we ensured that parents fully understood what the study was about and what happened to the data before they signed it. For illiterate people, we gave consent in the form of an audio recording instead of a written consent. In addition, the anonymity of each participant had to be guaranteed. Methodological challenges in researching with children is in not being able to use video recordings. Additional field notes were made, which were then included in the analysis.

### **Discussion: Limitations, main lessons and recommendations for practice and policy**

The present study makes it clear that participation, inclusion and well-being should be core aspects of a high-quality ECEC setting. The findings show, that it is important for children to belong to a community and to feel valued in their own individuality. In this case study, the children seemed to identify emotionally with their ECEC setting and, for example, evaluate material things as their own. Another result is that children need a self-determined handling of materials and spaces. Here, too, it became clear that children need to experience themselves as competent. Among other things, children experience themselves as competent when they are allowed to move freely and expansively and when they can show outsiders that they know their setting well. With regard to the question of how children deal with diversity, it can be interpreted that it seems less important for them to address social and/or cultural differences among themselves. Rather, it seems that they feel a need to be accepted in their individuality as part of a community and to be perceived as competent members. These results coincide with the findings of Sheridan and Samuelsson (2001), who found in their study with 39 children that it is important for them to be able to play without constant interruption, but at the same time also to get inspiration from professionals and access to materials and activities. Einarsdottir (2005) also showed that children's social relationships and peer interactions seem to be special needs. For the discussion on the quality and quality development of child day care, this leads to the demand to focus even more strongly on the opportunities for children to help shape pedagogical spaces. This applies both to the material design and to opportunities for co-determination in the design of the daily routine. The aim is to sharpen the awareness of the importance of participation for the well-being of children and to allow it to flow into the educational policy discussion on inclusion as well as questions of the quality of child day care in general. With a view to the quality of the study, non-verbal data should be included even more strongly in the next study design, which could, for example, be captured via video recordings. Implications for research arise on the one hand from the need for further testing of approaches that offer children a framework for individual forms of expression. Innovative approaches with potential for further development have already been presented in this article ("Inclusion first aid kit"). On the other hand, the competence of the researchers should above all else be understood as an essential condition for the success of research situations with children and should be considered and reflected upon more closely in the course of the study (Brooker, 2007).

### 3.2.5 ITALY

Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, Valentina Pagani, & Giulia Pastori

#### Abstract

The present chapter focuses on the qualitative Children Study conducted in Italy as part of the ISOTIS cross-cultural study. The main aims of the Children Study were to explore children's views on inclusion, well-being at school and to elicit children's proposals to make their school (more) inclusive. In Italy, the fieldwork was carried out in two preschool classes, one primary school class, and in an after-school educational program run by Save the Children Italy. High levels of cultural and social diversity characterized all the three sites. This chapter will provide an overview of the characteristics of each site, the participants and the research procedure in the all three contexts, but the initial tentative data analysis will focus only on the study conducted with preschool children. The preschoolers were highly engaged in the research and advanced several proposals to make their school more inclusive and welcoming. Some of those proposals were actually implemented, showing children that their voices were taken into account seriously, and contributing to give visibility to multilingualism in their preschool context. Besides this educational impact, the study had also a formative impact on the teachers involved, who became more aware of children's competencies and experienced the value of participatory methodologies.

**Keywords:** children's voice; participatory research; well-being; inclusion; multilingualism; preschool

#### Research Sites and Participants

In Italy, the Children Study was conducted in three highly culturally diverse settings in the city of Milan (the biggest city in the North of Italy): one preschool (two groups, respectively, of 4- and 5-year-old children), one primary school (one group of 10- to 11-year-old children) (which took also part to the WP3.4, WP4.4, and WP5.4 VLE intervention) and an after-school educational program (two groups, respectively, one with 10 9- to 10-year-old children and the other with 21 10- to 14-year-old children).

The Institute hosting the preschool and the primary school have significant percentage of disadvantaged immigrant families (mainly Arabic and North African families, but not exclusively; see Table 1) and very few middle-class Italian families.

Table 1. *Istituto Compresivo demographic data - School Year 2018/19*

	N. OF CHILDREN ENROLLED	N. OF NON-ITALOPHONE CHILDREN	% OF NON-ITALOPHONE CHILDREN	MAIN NATIONAL ORIGINS
<b>Preschool</b>	113	69	61%	Egypt, Philippines, Peru
<b>Primary school</b>	525	372	62%	Egypt, Philippines, Morocco

The informal context is an educational center Fuoriclasse (literally “Out-of-school”) created by Save the Children Italy and located in a very poor and multi-cultural neighborhood in the suburbs of Milan.

Table 2. *Fuoriclasse* demographic data - School Year 2018/19

	<b>N. of children enrolled</b>	<b>N. of non-italophone children</b>	<b>% of non-italophone children</b>	<b>Main national origins</b>
<b>Informal context</b>	31	28	87%	Morocco, Egypt

Two female preschool teachers participated in the study, both of them with over 20 years of teaching experience: the first teacher was the main teacher of the Orange Class, with 23 children (13 4-year-olds and 10 5-year-olds). Three female primary school teachers participated in the study: the main teacher in the class who taught Italian, History and Geography who resigned in April 2019 due to contrasts and tensions with the School Director; a special education teacher, friendly and supportive to the children; the Religion in the class who was the teacher responsible for welcoming newly arrived pupils, especially those with culturally diverse backgrounds. The professionals at the informal context were: 2 young educational workers trained in pedagogy and social services and one volunteer, a retired lady.

### Methodology

In order to present the aims of the Children Study, the methodological framework and the activities planned, we shared the Manual we discussed the proposal during a specific meeting with the professional of the preschool and primary school and the operators of the after-school center. The professionals suggested introducing some changes and adaptations to the methodology, described in the table below. Some of the adaptations were decided beforehand (for instance, preschool teachers and professionals of the afterschool center suggested conducting two parallel studies). Others adaptations were negotiated step-by-step, to better follow children’s ideas and proposals.

All the activities (that were audio and video recorded) were co-conducted in order to lessen any possible intimidating effect of our presence as ‘strangers’ and to ensure children a familiar environment, with trusted adults, where they would feel at ease and free to express their opinions.

Table 3. Overview of the workflow in the preschool context

PRESCHOOL		
Day 1	<b>Introduction to the study</b>	We spent a few days in the classroom with the children, to let them familiarize and feel at ease with us. We presented our role as researchers and the aims of the Children Study, using simple words they could understand. Each child signed a digital informed consent form that was presented through the ISOTIS VLE.
	<b>First focus group</b>	<p>Step 1. We involved all 33 children participating in the study in a circle-time discussion about how to welcome new children who would start preschool the following year. We invited the children to consider that the newcomers would not know their new teachers, classmates and the spaces at the school, and that some of them would not even speak Italian.</p> <p>Step 2. Following the children’s leads, the researchers asked them what they proposed and what materials they could prepare to welcome the new children and make them feel comfortable in their school. Step 3. Two separate circle-time discussions were conducted, respectively with the 4-year-old group and with the 5-year-olds, in order to deepen the content that emerged during the first plenary discussion. From this point forward, the two groups of children followed ‘parted ways’.</p>
Day 2	<b>ID cards</b>	<p><b>4-year-old children</b> In the circle-time discussions, among other themes, the children suggested that it could be important for the newcomers to have some friends at the new school and to know its spaces and its rules. Hence, with this group, the study continued with the creation of the ID Card. We added the section “My favorite game/toy at preschool” which was proposed by the teacher, who thought it was more concrete and related to the welcoming framework proposed rather than asking them about what they wanted to be when they grew up). . During circle-time, children were asked how they would present themselves to the newcomers. Step 2 Each child completed their ID Card and presented it (their verbalizations were collected).</p> <p><b>5-year-old children</b> During the circle-time discussions, the children suggested many ways to welcome the newcomers.</p>
Day 3	<b>Sun&amp;Clouds</b>	<p>Step 1. Since the children had suggested that it would be important for the newcomers to know the new school and its rules, the teachers proposed customizing the Sun &amp; Cloud activity, focusing on the school environment. Pictures of the various rooms/spaces taken by the teachers were projected on a whiteboard one by one, and the children engaged in a group discussion on each of them.</p> <p>Step 2, Children were asked what they liked/disliked in each space and why, and the rules for each space were elicited.</p> <p>Step 3. Large pictures of the spaces were printed and placed on the floor, and the children were asked to indicate their favorite and least favorite ones using emoticons (happy or sad faces) cut from cardboard.</p>

	<b>Inclusion first-aid kit</b>	<p><b>4-year-old children</b> The ‘inclusion first-aid kit’ (to make the new children feel comfortable and welcome in their school consisted of a multilingual, digital mixed-media (visual and audio) tour of their school to present the different spaces/rooms and the rules to the newcomers. Following the children’s proposals, their parents were actively involved the realization of this artifact.</p> <p><b>5-year-old children</b> Step 1. The teachers told us that one of the infant-toddler centers in the neighborhood planned to visit their school with a group of 10 2-to 3-year-old children who would start preschool the next year. They thought that this occasion could represent a unique, interesting opportunity to make the activities proposed to the class ‘real and concrete’. The 5-year-old children welcomed the younger ones and they made use of the artifacts produced in the previous step.</p> <p>Step 2. A final circle-time discussion was used to reflect on this experience with the children.</p>
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Table 4. Overview of the workflow in the primary school

SITE: PRIMARY SCHOOL		
<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Letter from Martine</b>	<p>Step 1. The researcher’s letter was presented through a PowToon animation. The sender of the letter was a researcher from the Netherlands and all the examples were adapted according to cultural references from the Netherlands;</p> <p>Step 2. Each child received in their personal VLE space a part of the letter and some questions to answer individually on the VLE using the “Answer a question” tool, choosing whether to answer through a video or audio message, with a written text or with a drawing realized on the VLE;</p> <p>Step 3. Children with the same topic were invited to work together in small groups and asked to provide a group answer to the researcher who wrote the letter. The answer could take the form of a video, audio, written text or drawing. All answers were then posted on the VLE, watched together and discussed through a focus group discussion with all class members.</p>
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Sun&amp;Clouds</b>	<p>Step 1. The evaluation of the school was realized on the VLE through the “Answer a question” tool. In this case, children worked in pairs. The activity was presented in the computer lab, but the children were then free to choose where to plan and compose their answers according to the language they chose (video, audio etc.);</p> <p>Step 2. All of the answers were presented to the class in a plenary session.</p>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Inclusion first-aid kit</b>	<p>Step 1. The children were asked to think about suggestions on how to make their school more welcoming and inclusive, in order to</p>

		<p>inform the Dutch researcher who would be collecting suggestions from children in different European countries in order to send them to the European Union to improve school inclusiveness in Europe;</p> <p>Step 2. The researchers asked the children to make concrete proposals that could be directly implemented in their own school;</p> <p>Step 3. After giving a concrete example of a letter written by another class of 9-year-old children from another neighborhood on the outskirts of Milan (these children wrote a letter to the Mayor of the city who answered the letter and implemented one of the children's proposals in the following months). children were asked to prepare proposals on how to make their school (more) welcoming and inclusive. Children were free to form small groups (2-6 members) and choose the form their proposal would take.</p> <p>Step 4. The outputs of this activity were: posters, letters to the School Director, video clips and video interviews of other children in the class, short video clips where the children acted or simulated an information campaign, video messages to the teachers, a protocol on how to welcome newly-arrived students.</p>
<b>Day 4</b>	<b>Digital, multi-religious calendar</b>	<p>Step 1. The last phase of work lead to the implementation of one of the students' proposals after negotiation with all the teachers of the class. In continuity with a video prepared by one of the groups on different religions, the children opted to create an awareness-raising project about religious diversity in the school. To do so, the class made a digital, multi-religious calendar on the VLE to be posted on the school website: the calendar contained videos, information, pictures and explanations collected among the school personnel and the families regarding special dates and celebrations for different religions.</p>

Table 5. *Overview of the work flow in the informal context*

<b>INFORMAL AFTER SCHOOL SITE</b>		
<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Introduction to the study (Dec, 2018)</b>	<p>Step 1. The researchers participated in a workshop organized by Save the Children and attended by the research participants. During this session, the researchers introduced themselves to the children, letting them familiarize and feel at ease with them. They presented themselves, their roles as researchers and the aims of the Children Study using simple words they could understand (not only age-appropriate language, but also easy to understand because of the high number of non-native speakers not always at ease with Italian).</p> <p>Step 2. Each child signed an informed consent form and was given a consent form for their parents.</p>
	<b>Video-cued focus</b>	<p>Step 1. Both groups were involved in the activity called "Something about me</p>

	<b>group (Jan, 2019)</b>	<p>that you don't know": in a circle, each child was asked to go to the center, say the sentence "Something about me that you don't know is...", complete it and then go and touch another group member.</p> <p>Step 2. A video-cued focus group was carried out in both groups: two clips were used as stimuli for the video-cued focus group: the first focusing on newly-arrived students unable to speak the national language ('Immersion' (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6Y0HAjLKYI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6Y0HAjLKYI</a>)), the second focusing on the exclusion of second generation immigrants because of the inability to speak their parents' mother tongue (an extract of the movie "Almanya. My family goes to Germany").</p> <p>For the <b>primary school group</b>, free discussion was held after watching both clips. For the <b>middle school group</b>, after each clip children were asked to write their impressions and personal experiences related to the topic raised by the clip on a post-it. The children were asked to share what they wrote on the post-it afterwards.</p>
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>My school autobiography (Jan, 2019)</b>	<p><b>Primary school group:</b> we adapted the ID card template from the formal research protocol, creating different sheets, each exploring a specific aspect of their school biography (e.g. the first day at school what made them feel good at school, etc.). Children were invited to fill out sheets that they could choose and verbalizations were collected by audio or video recording an interview on this topic. <b>Middle school group,</b> Step 1. The researcher drew a line on the floor and explained to the students that they would hear a number of statements about things that they themselves might have experienced at school to some degree. Participants (both children and adults taking part in the activity) were asked to get closer to the line the more the statement matched their own experiences (e.g. on the line if they had experienced exactly the same situation, very far from the line if they had not experienced it at all). The statements were meant to help children reflect on their school experience. Step 2. the autobiography was created as suggested in the manual<sup>49</sup>, but participants could also carry out an audio or video interview.</p>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>A message to the authorities (Jan, 2019)</b>	<p><b>Primary school group:</b> all of the children contributed their ideas on how to make school (more) welcoming and inclusive on a big poster with drawings, collage and writings. <b>Middle school group:</b> each child created a message in a different way (drawings, videos, letters, etc.).</p>
	<b>Final party (Feb, 2019)</b>	<p>In both groups, the research process ended with a small celebration, following the suggestions made by some of the participants who had underlined how food was a form of socialization that brings people together. A video clip of the results of each of the two research journeys was edited by the research team and presented to the children who then decided whether they wanted to present it in their own school.</p>

<sup>49</sup> See D2.4 Technical Report, paragraph 3.4.3) available at [http://www.isotis.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/D2.4\\_Technical-Report-on-the-Child-interview-study.pdf](http://www.isotis.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/D2.4_Technical-Report-on-the-Child-interview-study.pdf).

<b>Day 4</b>	<b>A trip to the university (June, 2019)</b>	<p>A further meeting for restitution of the research results took place in the beginning of June and was held at the University of Milan-Bicocca:</p> <p>Step 1. The children visited Hangar Bicocca, a contemporary art institution connected to the Department;</p> <p>Step 2. The researchers and the groups shared lunch in the university canteen;</p> <p>Step 3. The researcher showed the children the results and outputs of the research conducted in other contexts and countries and discussed them with the children;</p> <p>Step 4. A guided visit of the Department and the library was conducted.</p>
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### Coding and analysis methodology

The analysis of the data was carried out using the international procedure described in Chapter 1. To carry out the data analysis, the texts of the children's outputs and the video-audio recordings of the focus groups and the conversations that took place during the experience were used. All the audio-recordings were integrally transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were coded according to the common coding procedure and codebook. All the transcripts were imported into the CAQDA (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) software NVivo 12, that supported the analysis of the data set. During the coding process, it proved necessary to create extra sub-codes to better capture the viewpoints of the participants and thus analyze the data (specifically, data gathered in the primary school and in the informal context). The analysis focused on the most recurring or salient themes, presented in the following sections divided by age group.

### Main findings

To provide an initial overview of the main issues faced by children, we present a table that illustrates the occurrences of the thematic codes used for the analysis:

Table 6. Occurrence of thematic codes in the 3 contexts

Site typology	Formal 3-6	Formal 8-11	Informal 9+	Total
<b>Codes</b>				
<b>Diversity</b>				
Social inequalities	0	1	1	2
Language	48	6	22	76
Culture	0	25	10	35
<b>Representations</b>				
Images of the child-student	0	1	4	5
Image of the teacher	0	3	36	39

Image of the school	0	1	27	<b>28</b>
Image of the family	0	5	4	<b>9</b>
<b>Identity</b>				
Cultural i.	0	7	5	<b>12</b>
Linguistic i.	23	12	4	<b>35</b>
Social i.	0	1	6	<b>7</b>
Somatic features	0	9	2	<b>11</b>
Myself in the future	0	0	6	<b>6</b>
<b>School Organization</b>				
Space	2	5	12	<b>19</b>
Time	6	0	13	<b>19</b>
Rules	6	4	4	<b>14</b>
Play	5	0	10	<b>15</b>
Food	1	2	8	<b>11</b>
Learning	1	2	26	<b>29</b>
Teaching approach	2	7	21	<b>30</b>
<b>Social relationship</b>				
Inclusion-acceptance	4	11	47	<b>62</b>
Discrimination	0	13	11	<b>24</b>
Conflict	0	3	10	<b>13</b>
Friendship	6	6	27	<b>39</b>
Behaviour	1	19	16	<b>36</b>
Emotional support/Empathy	11	0	35	<b>46</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>622</b>

As seen in Table 6, the most common category of codes in the set of 3 contexts were language (coded 76 times), followed by inclusion/acceptance (coded 62 times) and emotional support/empathy (coded 46 times). The most recurrent category of codes for preschool concerned diversity and identity, in particular with reference to the linguistic dimension. The most recurrent category in the codes for primary school

concerned diversity in the cultural dimension and social relationships. As far as informal context was concerned, the most common codes were inclusion/acceptance (coded 47 times), followed by image of the teachers and emotional support/empathy (coded respectively 36 and 35 times). In the following paragraphs, we will focus on the three main codes (namely factors influencing well-being at school, factors undermining well-being at school and transformative factors/proposals), analysing their co-occurrence with the other codes, as we report in table 7.

Table 7. Co-occurrence of the thematic codes for the 3 contexts

Over-codes	FACTORS PROMOTING WELL-BEING AND INCLUSION				FACTORS UNDERMINING WELL-BEING AND INCLUSION				TRANSFORMATIVE FACTORS			
	School 3-6	School 8-11	Informal 9+	Tot.	School 3-6	School 8-11	Informal 9+	Tot.	School 3-6	School 8-11	Informal 9+	Tot.
<b>DIVERSITY</b>												
Social inequalities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Language	1	1	2	4	0	0	14	14	20	0	14	34
Culture	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	4
<b>REPRESENTATIONS</b>												
Images of the child-student	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	1
Image of the teacher	0	0	4	4	0	0	6	6	0	0	25	25
Image of the school	0	0	6	6	0	0	5	5	0	0	12	12
Image of the family	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
<b>IDENTITY</b>												
Cultural i.	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Linguistic i.	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	2	8	0	0	8
Social i.	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0

Somatic features	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Myself in the future	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>SCHOOL ORGANIZATION</b>												
Space	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	9
Time	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	11	11
Rules	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	4	8
Play	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	6	8
Food	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	7	8
Learning	0	0	1	1	1	0	3	4	0	0	13	13
Teaching approach	0	0	1	1	0	0	6	6	0	0	16	16
<b>SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>												
Inclusion-acceptance	1	7	6	14	0	0	16	16	2	1	17	20
Discrimination	0	1	1	2	0	0	6	6	0	0	1	1
Conflict	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	0
Friendship	5	2	8	15	1	0	9	10	0	1	2	3
Behaviour	0	2	2	4	1	1	3	5	0	0	5	5
Emotional support/Empathy	7	0	6	13	0	0	5	5	3	0	14	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>208</b>

In general, the co-occurrences were concentrated in the **proposal factors** with 164/208 co-occurrences versus 75/208 in **factors promoting well-being** and 94/208 in **factors undermining it**. Within **factors promoting well-being**, the codes that appeared the most were "Friendship" (15/75 co-occurrences), "Inclusion-acceptance" (14/75 co-occurrences) and "Emotional support/Empathy" (13/75 co-occurrences). Within the **factors undermining well-being**, the codes that appeared the most were "Inclusion-acceptance" (16/94 co-occurrences), "Language" (14/94 occurrences) and "Friendship" (10/94 co-occurrences). As for transforming factors, the codes that appeared the most were "Language" (34/164 co-occurrences), "Image

of the teacher" (25/164) and "Inclusion-acceptance" (20/164 co-occurrences).

Concerning the **factors promoting well-being at school**, in the **preschool**, the co-occurrences between 17 factors positively influenced well-being at school while 4 undermined it and 38 for the proposals. The social and relational dimensions therefore played an important role for preschool children in ensuring well-being at school. In fact, the main co-occurrences among the factors promoting well-being and inclusion were Emotional support/Empathy (7 co-occurrences) and Friendship (5 co-occurrences). Children, in fact, talking about well-being at school, often tended to refer to the themes of friendship and emotional support. In **primary school**, there were 16 co-occurrences between the factors influencing well-being at school, a total absence of factors undermining it and 6 for the proposals. The main co-occurrence for the factors promoting well-being and inclusion was Inclusion-acceptance (7 co-occurrences), which concerned in particular the reception of newcomers from Italy and abroad, the enhancement of languages and cultures present in the context. The importance of the relational dimension for the children was striking. The relationship with classmates was an essential element. The role of the teachers was also considered a factor in promoting well-being, in fact they helped to resolve conflicts when they arose and taught the students to respect each other. In the **informal context**, by far the most cited factor promoting well-being fell in the category of "Social relationships" (32 co-occurrences out of 42) in particular in the sub-codes "Friendship" (8/42 co-occurrences), "Emotional support-empathy" (6/42 co-occurrences) and "Inclusion-acceptance" (6/42 co-occurrences). Participants cited their classmates and friendships as factors of well-being at school, which they also identified as important factors for newcomers. However, empathy and inclusion on the part of teachers was also considered an important factor for well-being, particularly for newcomers. At the same time, the school model was identified as an important factor: one is comfortable in a school that offers less "traditional" school activities and teaching models not only through books, but also through trips, activities in the garden, in the gym and that promote being together.

Concerning the **factors undermining well-being at school**, the children from the **preschool** spoke little about this factor (4 co-occurrences), perhaps also because of the approach of teachers and researchers in focusing in particular on positive and transformative factors. Undermining factors did not focus on a single aspect, but were codified as "play", "learning"; "friendship" and "behavior". Also in the **primary school**, few factors undermining well-being (1 co-occurrence) emerged as it concerned a negative attitude that hindered well-being could come from both classmates and teachers. **The most common themes that emerged were: bullying and racism**, some teachers' behaviors and dirty and chaotic spaces. **The second factor** indicated as an obstacle to well-being was **the prohibition to speak in one's own language of origin**.

**The third obstacle to well-being highlighted some of the teachers' attitudes:** favorites, homework that was excessive or a punishment. In the **informal context**, the main co-occurrences were found in the macro-section Social relationships (43/89 co-occurrences), in particular in the sub-code "**Inclusion/acceptance**" (16/89 co-occurrences) followed by **Friendship** which was an important factor both as an element of well-being and lack of well-being. Another of the most cited factors among those undermining the well-being at school were **language barriers** (language has 14/89 co-occurrences). These three aspects are linked: in fact, inclusion is understood as the school's ability to welcome newcomers both from the linguistic point of view (looking for channels of communication to overcome the language barriers) and from the relational point of view (friendly attitudes towards newcomers).

For what it concerns the **transformative factors**, despite their young age, the **preschool children** were able to take on a different point of view from their own. They contributed a great deal of proposals (38 co-occurrences), a lot more than the co-occurrence for the factors promoting and undermining well-being. Their proposals were mainly about the **linguistic aspects of the school experience** (20 occurrences in language and 8 in linguistic identity). Some children raised the issue **about how to comfort the newcomers or explain the classroom rules** to them if they could not speak Italian. Secondly, they pointed out that the new children would not be aware of the **rules** of the class/school and, consequently, remarked on the need to teach them

those rules. **Primary school** children made interesting, albeit limited (6 co-occurrences), contributions to increasing the level of well-being at school. The most interesting aspects had to do **with friendship and inclusion**, as well as with school organization, spaces, rules and food. The main initiatives concerned the reception of new arrivals and linguistic support offered to them. Finally, activities were proposed to raise awareness on the theme of religious diversity and discrimination. The children themselves created tools for this purpose (see Activity 5). The children thought of these concrete proposals to be implemented at school and delivered them to the School Director by means of mini-videos and letters published on the platform, on the created specifically group ("La 5<sup>^</sup>C incontra il Dirigente ") to put the students in contact with the Director, who read the proposals and responded to the entire class. In the **informal context**, transformative factors were the most applied over-code with 164 co-occurrences with the various thematic codes. The proposals were divided into **two main sections**, one concerning the **school/teaching approach** (sub-codes "teaching approach" 16 co-occurrences, "image of the teacher" 25 co-occurrences, "image of the school" 12 co-occurrences), the other concerning **social relationships** (sub-codes "inclusion/acceptance" 17 co-occurrences, "language" 14 co-occurrences, "emotional support&empathy" 14 co-occurrences). Regarding the teaching approach and being a teacher, the participants suggested having younger, more competent teachers and that there be teacher continuity without too many changes over the years as well as the possibility to choose some subjects and more variety (e.g. foreign languages). **Regarding the inclusive school environment**, from the linguistic point of view, the students suggested having translators at school, increasing the language and communication skills of the teachers, but also more solidarity and mutual help between classmates ("*that among classmates we can help each other*"). From a **relational point of view**, participants thought that teachers should show more kindness, wisdom, empathy, listening skills, understanding and attention to the relational difficulties of their students and their needs.

### Main ethical and methodological challenges

Concerning challenges with the professionals, in the **preschool context**, if the choice to let teachers co-conduct the activities ensured a familiar, reassuring environment where children could more easily express their ideas, it also raised the issues of losing control of the guiding the activities. In the **primary school**, it was difficult to obtain the active participation of some teachers: in both formal context at times it was quite difficult to schedule the activities without letting too much time to pass between one meeting and another. In the **informal context**, since the motivational labs were organized during the week during after-school hours, participants always arrived tired from a whole day spent at school.

In both formal context, the children were highly engaged during all of the activities and the intervention had an extremely positive effect on children who showed a high level of interest, participation and motivation. In the **informal context**, both groups generally appreciated the activities, although they showed signs of fatigue and difficulty concentrating because of the low socio-cultural level of the group and the high degree of fragility of the participants on cultural, cognitive, linguistic, socio-economic and behavioral levels. However, it was possible to find effective customization strategies, minimally differentiating the activities for each group and adapting times to the levels of concentration and the types of response of the participants.

Concerning the informed consent, in the **formal contexts**, we presented the informed consent in a digital, interactive version through the ISOTIS VLE. The digital presentation of the consent form was quite engaging, and some of the children asked us questions regarding the various passages of it and its implications, although some children signed the consent form without understanding (despite our efforts to provide further explanations using simple language). In the **primary school** context, the only ethical challenge was with a teacher who decided to punish one of the newly-arrived students by preventing her from participating in the research activity. We were therefore faced with the difficult choice of contradicting the teacher or preventing the student from participating in a moment that proved to be very important and significant for her. It was therefore decided to ask the teacher for an explanation and persuade her to retract her position

by allowing the student to participate. In the **informal context**, some ethical challenges emerged : first some negative emotions related to the sharing of painful experiences due to negative emotions expressed during the research and at times difficult to manage; second, the difficulty to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants among the group members or to avoid stigmatizing remarks by the participants that could offend other participants; third, the linguistic-cultural barriers that made it difficult the full participation of a Chinese child.

### Discussion: Limitations, main lessons and recommendations for practices and policies

From the 3 studies carried out in 3 separate contexts, we identified a number of limitations, lessons learned and recommendations that we will explain separately in the following paragraphs.

#### Limitations

**Timing and engagement of professionals:** The first limitation of this study was related to time and the availability of the professionals. In both formal contexts, we had difficulty negotiating appropriate and necessary timing with the teachers to ensure that the children would have a good research experience. We presume that this limitation was mainly due to the fact that the objectives, goals and methodology of the research were not well explained to the teachers.

**Sample size:** It was a qualitative study, a higher number of research participants would have provided more solid material and more variability: with greater resources, the study could have been carried out in 2 classes/informal groups in 2 schools/afterschool centers.

**Language of the research:** The study was carried out in the majority language, thus creating an imbalance between native speakers/children with good competence in the majority language and newcomers.

#### Lessons learned

##### Methodological aspects

**Time as crucial to access to the world of children:** It was thus necessary to have the time to prepare the research, spending a great deal of time to share the objectives of the research with the professionals and training them in the use of participative methodologies, especially in the preschool context where teachers were key-figures to mediate with and reach the children.

**Multilanguage research technique:** Researchers, using participatory methods, could adopt more “multilingual” techniques such as using the VLE developed in WPs 3-4-5 (which resulted as a positive instrument in the primary school context), more particularly the multilingual tool Beeba and recruiting bilingual/multilingual researchers who spoke the languages of the research participants.

#### Children’s perspectives and proposals

**Respect was the first premise for children’s well-being:** The data collected showed clearly that the basis for children’s well-being was respect and children of all ages and contexts talked about respect and were against discrimination, albeit in their own terms.

**The importance of the socio-relational dimension of the school experience:** All the research participants highlighted the importance of the socio-relational dimension of the school context as a main factor promoting well-being: this referred both to the teachers and to the peer group. The socio-relational dimension included the importance of inclusion, emotional support and empathy both from teachers and peers and friendship between children.

**The place of student cultures, languages and food at school:** Children from different contexts stressed the importance of the enhancement of cultural, linguistic and food traditions. On the one hand, children stressed the importance of showing the majority culture and language and the institutional culture to newcomers. On the other hand, pupils underlined the fact that the culture, language and food of all children needed to be present in everyday life at school.

### Recommendations

The Italian participatory research led us to develop the following recommendations for schools, institutions involved with teachers training:

**Giving space to cultural and linguistic diversity:** The recommendation to schools was to take care, not only of teaching L2 to newcomers, but also to give more space to the cultural and linguistic diversities of the school by giving them visibility.

**The active involvement of students in welcoming newcomers:** We recommend that schools actively involve students in welcoming newcomers, namely letting the students introduce newcomers to the spaces and the rules of the school, both through materials and thanks to peers who speak the same language.

**The renewal of teaching approaches:** We also recommend teacher training (both during university and at long-life learning) to focus more on teacher approaches based on socio-relational dimensions.

**Include participatory methods to improve the school environment:** We recommend that preschools and schools adopt participatory methods to evaluate the school environment and to collect and implement the children's proposals. We recommend that institutions organize training for teachers in order to enable them to use participatory methods and to adopt student voice perspectives.

### 3.2.6 GREECE

Ioanna Strataki and Konstantinos Petrogiannis

#### Short abstract

The goal of the WP2 “Children interview study”<sup>50</sup> was (a) to explore children’s perspectives regarding the elements that make them feel good at school despite their differences and social and cultural identity, and (b) to record children’s proposals for making their school more friendly and inclusive. The chapter presents the Greek case of this particular study and describes the characteristics of the selected sites and participants, the procedures that were followed during the implementation of the study, the methodological and ethical considerations that emerged, as well some of the most critical initial findings. Three groups of Roma and non-Roma children participated in the Greek study from two municipalities of the Attica Prefecture: one formal group with 22 children aged between 4-5 years registered in a municipal child-care centre (Aghia Varvara), and two informal groups with 8 children each aged between 9-14 years old attending after-school programs of municipal community centres. Based on an initial analysis it became evident that the majority of the children had a good relationship with their teachers, and they enjoyed school while emphasising on the learning process of new things/experiences. However, especially in the informal groups, complaints about teachers’ rigidity for all the children in the class were recorded. Finally, some of the children’s proposals referred to the improvement of school structural facilities and to the needed support of the newcomers which can be achieved by teaching them the Greek language while assisting them to accommodate to their new context especially when issues arise. This could be achieved through the educational system, namely with the use of individualized instruction to foreign students, led by specialized teachers.

**Keywords:** children’s perspective, well-being, inclusion, Roma, preschool, informal context

#### Research sites and participants

The selection criteria of the sites were the same as the ones used for the interview study of WP2 (Broekhuizen, Ereky-Stevens, Wolf, & Moser, 2018) namely West Athens Sector and West Attica Sector. However, for the Children Study, we decided to focus only on the first site of West Athens Sector and specifically on the municipality of Aghia Varvara. However, during the organization of the study of the informal group in Aghia Varvara, several problems were raised, and it was decided to collaborate with the community centre with a branch for the Roma community of the municipality of Athens, as well. We had two groups from the municipality of Aghia Varvara. The first one was the formal group of 3-6 years old registered in a child-care centre. In total 85 children were registered in the childcare centre grouped in 4 groups. The second was the informal group of 9-14 years old registered in the supplementary teaching programme that currently is running by the community centre at the Town Hall. Only one of them was Roma and the rest of the children were immigrants or had immigrant background. We had one informal group of 9-14 years old from the municipality of Athens. All the children were Roma and they were registered in the after-school lessons of the Community Centre of municipality last year. See Table 1 for an overview of the participants.

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<sup>50</sup> This study is part of the international research project ‘Children’s views on inclusion at school’ within the European Project ISOTIS (see D.2.5: Pastori G., Pagani V., Sarcinelli S., Technical report on the Child Interview study. Children’s views on inclusion at school’ - digital source available on [isotis.org](http://isotis.org))

Table 1. Overview of the target groups, sites and contexts involved.

Target group	Name	Context type	Sites		Number of professionals involved	Participants	
			Age	City/area		Number and age of children involved	Division in groups
Roma	-	Formal, preschool	3-6	municipality of Aghia Varvara	2	22 (4-5 years old)	2 groups of around 11 children
Multi-ethnic	Community Centre	Informal, After-school program	9-14	municipality of Aghia Varvara	1	8 (9-13 years old)	No
Roma	Community Centre	Informal, After-school program	9-14	municipality of Athens	2	8 (8-13 years old)	No

## Methodology

Following the appropriate research ethics considerations and clarifications provided to the local authorities and the relevant approval, the research team collaborated with the child-care centre and the two Community Centres. First, the researchers had a meeting with the headteacher of the child-care centre and the teachers who implement the supplementary teaching programmes to inform them about the content of the Children Study and to provide her with the necessary clarifications concerning the anonymity and other personal data security procedures. In the second meeting, the researchers met the teachers of each group to inform them about the goals of the Children Study and the activities that would be conducted. During these meetings, they shared their opinion and their suggestions regarding the proposed activities. The parents of the students that would participate were informed about the aims and the relevant procedures of the study by the teachers. After collecting the consent forms, the final dates of conducting the studies were scheduled. Below there are outlines of the activities that were implemented for each group. All the activities were audio recorded.

Table 2. Overview of the main steps and activities for the formal group of 3-6-year-old children

Day	Activity	Description of implementation
Day 1	Introduction of the study	Step 1. The two researchers presented themselves and explained to children's group the reason they would be in the classroom for a week.
		Step 2. The researchers conducted field observation as non-participants by observing the "circle time". During the rest of the day, the researchers conducted field observation as participants, as well, as they assisted in the implementation of the activities. In both cases, researchers gathered information about the children and the teaching methods.
Day 2	Introduction of the activities - Division of groups	Step 1. The researchers explained the goal of the two activities. Step 2. The children were split into two groups to make an inclusion first aid kit. This division was kept during the entire study.

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Circle time

Step 1. The first group of nine children worked in circle time with one researcher. They discussed what they could propose and what materials they could prepare to welcome the “newcomers”, i.e. children arriving from another country, and make them feel as good as possible in their new school.

Step 2. Their final decision was to make a cake and have a party to welcome the new children. During the activity, the assistant was present to take care of one child who had behaviour problems.

Child-led tour

Step 1. In the meantime, the second group of 11 children had the child-led tour with one researcher and the educator who was assisting in the discussion. During the tour, the children were slightly disoriented, and they did not decide what to do for the “inclusion first aid kit”.

Step 1. The researcher introduced again the goal of the activity and summed up what the children did the previous day. She also introduced the material that the children would use for making the cake and the cupcakes.

Inclusion first aid kit/  
implementation –  
1<sup>st</sup> Group

Step 2. The group made a cardboard cake and some cotton cupcakes (see Appendix, Figure 1) under the supervision of the first researcher. Also, the assistant was present to take care of the child who had behaviour problems to accommodate the activities of the rest of the children.

Step 3. After the suggestion of one of the centre’s educators, it was decided to have a mask party where all the children would wear a monkey mask and one would wear a lion mask. The monkeys would be the old students and the lions would be the new students.

Step 4. One of the researchers prepared the masks.

Day 3

Step 5. Unfortunately, it was not possible to have a party as it was planned because of the constant disruptive behaviours expressed by one specific child.

Step 1. The researcher introduced again the goal of the activity and summed up what the children did the previous day.

Inclusion first aid kit/  
implementation –  
2<sup>nd</sup> Group

Step 2. The group drew something to welcome the new children under the supervision and cooperation of the second researcher and the educator of the class (see Appendix, Figure 2).

Step 3. Following the suggestion of the educator, two photos of two children, randomly selected, were used to show to the students how the new children would look like. In this way, it was considered that the students would get more engaged/committed to the goal of the activity and make it more realistic.

Step 4. At the end of the drawing activity, each child described to the researcher what they drew.

Day 4	Identity cards	<p>Step 1. The researchers presented their own ID card explaining in detail all the elements of the template as well as the idea behind the activity.</p> <p>Step 2. Both groups drew their identity card (see Appendix, Figure 3) which included their portrait, what they would like to do when they grow up and their favourite toy. Before drawing, the children stood with the researchers in front of a mirror and had a small discussion about what characteristics they see and how they differ.</p> <p>Step 3. After drawing each part, the children described to the researchers what they drew (see Appendix, Figure 4).</p> <p><i>Note:</i> During the activity, both the educator and the assistant were present. The assistant was taking care of a child who excessively displayed disruptive behaviour during all the tasks.</p>
Day 5	Sun & Clouds	<p>Step 1. The researchers explained the goal of the activity and presented the material that the children would use.</p> <p>Step 2. Each group had a small discussion about what they liked or disliked about their school and then they drew the suns and clouds (see Appendix, Figure 5).</p> <p>Step 3. After completing their drawing, the children explained to the researchers their drawing.</p> <p>Step 4. At the end of the study, all the drawings and the materials that were produced during the activities were displayed on a wall in the centre of the day-care centre (see Appendix, Figure 6).</p> <p><i>Note:</i> During the activity, both the educator and the assistant were present. The assistant was taking care of the child with disruptive behaviour.</p>

Table 3. Overview of the main steps and activities for the 1<sup>st</sup> informal group of 9-14-year-old children (Community Centre, municipality of Aghia Varvara)

Day	Activity	Description of implementation
Day 1	Introduction of the study	<p>Step 1. The researcher presented herself and explained the reasons she would be in the classroom for the four following days.</p> <p>Step 2. The researcher conducted field observation both as non-participant by observing the lesson, and as participant to gather information about the children.</p>
Day 2	Presentation of the research + Ice-break activity*	<p>Step 1. The researcher introduced the first "ice-breaker" activity.</p> <p>Step 2. All the children participated and presented themselves.</p> <p>Step 3. The children discussed what they would do to survive on the island.</p>

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“Do I feel good at school? A video-cued focus group”

Step 1. The researcher introduced the activity with the two videos. The first video that was used was from a research project entitled “Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion”<sup>51</sup> (LERI) that was conducted in a school of the municipality of Aghia Varvara. In this project, the students of the school were presenting areas of their school where conflicts between the students take place and areas where the students may be amused.

Step 2. After watching a small part of this video, the children discussed whether there are similar places at their schools, what they like or dislike about their schools, what makes them feel good or not at their school setting. The lack of time did not permit the accomplishment of the activity which was continued the third day.

“Do I feel good at school? A video-cued focus group” (Cntd)

+ Warm-up activity

Day 3

Step 1. The children watched the second video<sup>52</sup> about multilingualism and multiculturalism from the short movie “Immersion” proposed by the manual of the study.

Step 2. The children discussed about similar experiences they had in the past regarding inclusion or language, experiences of other students that they have heard of, how they consider a new student would feel at their school and what they could do to help a new student feel well, and what languages do the students speak at school. The warming-up activity itself was not implemented due to lack of time.

My school autobiography

Step 1. The activity of school autobiography was introduced.

Step 2. The children decided to write some things about their school autobiography and talked a little about it to the researcher.

Warm-up activity

The children participated in the warming-up activity about the effectiveness and appreciation of the activities.

Step 1. Then, the researcher introduced the final activity of writing a message to the authorities.

Step 2. Initially, the children were supposed to work in groups of two but in the end, each child wrote his/her letter about what they would like to change at their school.

Day 4

“Feel better at school”- a message to authorities

Step 3. After finishing the letter, each child talked about it to the researcher.

Step 4. The children made by themselves envelopes where they put their letter in. At the same time, the teacher, for supporting them, combined all the ideas of the children and wrote a new more refined letter.

Step 5. Since the lessons of the group took place at the town hall, the teacher and the students decided that it would be a great opportunity to write a letter to the mayor and deliver it to him. Unfortunately, we don't have any information about the delivery of the letter and its impact.

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<sup>51</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vB88z4tjA\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vB88z4tjA_g)

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6Y0HAjLKyl>

Table 4. Overview of the main steps and activities for the 2<sup>nd</sup> informal group of 9-14-year-old children (Community Centre, municipality of Athens)

Day	Activity	Description of implementation
Day 1	Introduction of the study	The researcher presented herself and explained the reason she would be in the classroom for four days. She didn't conduct field observation because the children were gathered voluntarily only for conducting the Children Study.
	Warm-up activity	The researcher directly introduced the first ice-breaker activity of "lost in a deserted island". The researcher presented herself and then encouraged the children to do the same. Unfortunately, only a few children did so, because the majority was feeling bit awkward or shy. So, the researcher started discussing with the children to receive some information about them.
	"Do I feel good at school? A video-cued focus group"	Step 1. The researcher introduced the activity with the two videos. The first video was the same that was used for the 1 <sup>st</sup> informal group of 9-14-year-old children.  Step 2. After watching the first video, the children were hesitant and not very talkative, something that was interpreted as a response to unfamiliarity with the researchers and the research procedures. Also, most of the children reported that everything was fine at their school and didn't share more information.
Day 2	"Do I feel good at school? A video-cued focus group" (Cntd)	Step 1. The children watched the second video about multilingualism and multiculturalism.  Step 2. Then, the children discussed about similar experiences they had had in the past regarding inclusion or language, experiences of other students that they had heard of, how would a new student feel at their school and what they could do to help a new student feel well, and what languages do the students speak at school. In this way, this activity included part of the warming-up activity which was sharing experiences of inclusion.
	Warming up activity	The warming-up activity itself was not implemented because of the limited time available.  Step 1. Finally, the activity of school autobiography was introduced.
Day 3	School autobiography	Step 2. The children decided to have a small personal interview and talk about their school autobiography to the researcher. It was not possible to write it, because many children did not prefer it or feared their writing was of poor quality. The children were considered to be more open and talkative in an interview situation.
	A message to authorities	Step 1. The researcher introduced the final activity of writing, "a message to the authorities".  Step 2. It was not possible to do it in written form as was planned, because many children did not prefer to write or possibly feared their writing was of poor quality. Therefore, they decided to talk to the researcher about what they would like to be changed at their school. This day the children were even more open and talkative.

## Coding and analysis

The first step of the analytical process was to fully transcribe all the audio recordings which ended up in having three transcripts, one for each study. The next step was to code the transcripts using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 11. Thematic analysis was performed, and the coding of the transcripts was based on a coding system that was common for all the participating countries (Pastori, Pagani, & Sarcinelli, 2018). Two researchers of the Greek team coded the transcripts. During the coding process, extra sub-codes were created to better describe and analyse the data. The analysis was focused on the most recurring or salient themes.

We should note that the formal group participated in our study consisted of children between 4-5 years of age and the total number proposals-suggestions-responses was extremely limited, most of the times the children repeated a view or a response of a child following a standard pattern of responses. Therefore, we decided to focus mainly on analysing the two informal groups (references from the formal group of young children were sporadically presented in the report).

## Main Findings

According to Table 5, 43 references were also coded as School Organization as well, and 22 references were also coded as Social Relationships. This means that many of the responses reflecting the promotion of the wellbeing are related to the way that the school is organized, especially in terms of Space, Learning and Teaching approach. Many students of both informal groups mentioned that the lesson of gymnastics makes them feel more relaxed and they would like to have more sessions/classes of it. A more playful or play-like educational strategy could be more appropriate for approaching students/groups making them stay in the class happily. Moreover, some children mentioned that they enjoy school by emphasising the learning of new things or having new experiences. Another factor is the time to play with other children in the school context. Many students of both informal groups enjoy hanging out with their friends at school and getting involved in a variety of playful activities/games. Also, the school climate and facilities appeared to play an important role for the children. Specifically, the children enjoy the fact that their school has facilities for playing sports or that the schoolyard is not full of stones that he could get hurt. Moreover, many children in both informal groups reported that they would like the building of the school to be decorated with graffiti or that they are happy that their school is decorated. To sum up, the findings revealed that the school facilities and climate, the learning subjects, the student-teacher relationship, the ability to play and the feeling of security are factors that promote the wellbeing of the children at school.

Table 5. *Co-occurrence of Factors promoting well-being at school per group*

Codes	Subcodes	3-6 formal group	1 <sup>st</sup> informal group	2 <sup>nd</sup> informal group	Total number
<b>Diversity</b>		0	1	0	1
	<i>Social inequalities</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Language</i>	0	1	0	1
	<i>Culture</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>Identity</b>		0	0	1	1
	<i>Cultural identity</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Linguistic identity</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Social identity</i>	0	0	0	0

	<i>Somatic features</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Myself in the future</i>	0	0	1	1
<b>Representations</b>		-	2	10	12
	<i>Image of the child-student</i>	0	0	1	1
	<i>Image of the teacher</i>	0	2	6	8
	<i>Image of the school</i>	0	0	7	7
	<i>Image of the society</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>School organization</b>		5	16	22	43
	<i>Space</i>	3	5	6	14
	<i>Time</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Rules</i>	0	0	1	1
	<i>Play</i>	1	9	5	15
	<i>Learning</i>	0	4	16	20
	<i>Food</i>	1	0	0	1
	<i>Teaching approach</i>	0	2	2	4
<b>Social relationships</b>		-	11	11	22
	<i>Inclusion-acceptance</i>	0	0	2	2
	<i>Discrimination</i>	0	0	1	1
	<i>Conflict</i>	0	0	2	2
	<i>Friendship</i>	0	11	7	18
	<i>Behaviour</i>	0	1	0	1
	<i>Emotional support-empathy</i>	0	0	1	1

Many of the things that undermine the wellbeing of the children are related to the way that the school is organized, especially in terms of space, teaching methodology and social relationships (see Table 6). Many children of both informal groups stated that the negative peer relationships affect the way they feel at school, specifically mentioning the fights between them. Another factor was the skills or the rigidity of some teachers. Some children referred to the subjects and the large amount of homework which detracts time from extracurricular activities. Also, the difficulty of the subjects was mentioned in terms of complex language, and the stressful procedure of subjects' evaluation tests. Finally, it was revealed that the school facilities affect children's wellbeing since the current facilities do not only need improvement, but also put children at risk regarding their physical and psychological health.

Table 6. Co-occurrence of Factors undermining well-being at school per group

Codes	Subcodes	3-6 formal group	1 <sup>st</sup> informal group	2 <sup>nd</sup> informal group	Total number
<b>Diversity</b>		0	10	1	11
	<i>Social inequalities</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Language</i>	0	10	1	11
	<i>Culture</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>Identity</b>		0	1	2	3
	<i>Cultural identity</i>	0	1	1	2
	<i>Linguistic identity</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Social identity</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Somatic features</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Myself in the future</i>	0	0	1	1
<b>Representations</b>		0	4	7	11
	<i>Image of the child-student</i>	0	0	1	1
	<i>Image of the teacher</i>	0	4	5	9
	<i>Image of the school</i>	0	0	2	2
	<i>Image of the society</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>School organization</b>		2	24	14	40
	<i>Space</i>	1	11	1	13
	<i>Time</i>	0	1	0	1
	<i>Rules</i>	0	0	2	2
	<i>Play</i>	1	0	0	1
	<i>Learning</i>	0	5	7	12
	<i>Food</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Teaching approach</i>	0	11	7	18
<b>Social relationships</b>		0	26	7	33
	<i>Inclusion-acceptance</i>	0	2	3	5
	<i>Discrimination</i>	0	2	1	3
	<i>Conflict</i>	0	11	4	15
	<i>Friendship</i>	0	5	3	8
	<i>Behaviour</i>	0	10	2	12
	<i>Emotional support-empathy</i>	0	3	0	3

Regarding the children's proposals, many of the things they proposed are related to the way that the school is organized, especially about the available space (quality, quantity) (see Table 7). The children of the informal groups reported inadequate conditions and suggested that the school infrastructure should be more friendly and warm to children by painting the building or having more space for football and basketball or a swimming pool. Also, some children proposed to have free lunches from the school canteen so that their parents would not be tired because of preparing their food. This proposal may reflect the financial difficulties

that the families of the children have. During the discussion about what to do to welcome new students that come from another country, the children from both informal groups proposed to support them by teaching them Greek, making them friends and helping them when they face a problem. It seems that, for the children, it is essential for a newcomer to learn the language to communicate, but also making friends.

Table 7. Co-occurrence of Transformative factors (proposals & wishes) per group

Codes	Subcodes	3-6 formal group	1 <sup>st</sup> informal group	2 <sup>nd</sup> informal group	Total number
<b>Diversity</b>		0	6	0	6
	<i>Social inequalities</i>	0	3	0	3
	<i>Language</i>	0	3	0	3
	<i>Culture</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>Identity</b>		0	0	0	0
	<i>Cultural identity</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Linguistic identity</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Social identity</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Somatic features</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Myself in the future</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>Representations</b>		0	1	5	6
	<i>Image of the child-student</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Image of the teacher</i>	0	0	4	4
	<i>Image of the school</i>	0	1	1	2
	<i>Image of the society</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>School organization</b>		4	21	16	41
	<i>Space</i>	2	15	9	26
	<i>Time</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Rules</i>	0	2	3	5
	<i>Play</i>	2	3	2	7
	<i>Learning</i>	0	4	1	5
	<i>Food</i>	0	4	0	4
	<i>Teaching approach</i>	0	4	4	8
<b>Social relationships</b>		0	5	2	7
	<i>Inclusion-acceptance</i>	0	0	1	1
	<i>Discrimination</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Conflict</i>	0	0	1	1
	<i>Friendship</i>	0	3	1	4
	<i>Behaviour</i>	0	3	1	4
	<i>Emotional support-empathy</i>	0	0	0	0

### **Main ethical and methodological challenges**

One challenge for the researchers was to cope with misbehaviour of some young children of the formal group, as the kind of relationship they had was different than the one with their educator. Regarding the 1st informal group in Aghia Varvara, there were many problems during the organization of the study, as delays in collecting the consent forms and finding Roma children to participate. In the end, only one Roma child participated and some children that were immigrants or had immigrant background. Also, in the 2nd informal group, only Roma children participated which resulted in missing the views of non-Roma children. Moreover, the time of conducting the three studies was very short to ensure that the children would feel comfortable enough with the researchers to share their views. Therefore, there was lack of familiarity between children and researchers which may explain why the children were hesitant and not talkative especially at the beginning of the studies. Another common issue is related to competence in writing. This was true for both the formal group (due to their developmental stage) and informal groups (due to either insufficient school attendance, language acquisition problems, fear of judgement etc). In these cases, only the graphical mode (e.g. picture drawing) and the oral mode (e.g. presentation, discussion and interview are considered as the most appropriate strategies for extracting information, views or perceptions from the informants. During all three studies, the children were given the choice to stop participating in any activity at any time and without any need for explanation. This was important especially for young children who can get tired easily.

### **Discussion: Limitations, main lessons and recommendations for practice and policy**

To sum up, the findings revealed that the school facilities and climate, the learning subjects, the student-teacher relationship, the ability to play and the feeling of security are factors that promote the wellbeing of the children at school. Many of the things that undermine the wellbeing of the children are related to the way that the school is organized, especially in terms of space, teaching approaches and social relationships. Regarding the children's proposals, many of the things they proposed are related to the way that the school is organized, especially about the available space (quality, quantity). Another important issue that emerged is the power and the need of a network among children as a kind of support each other to overcome the difficulties of the new educational, cultural and language context. Also, children's views showed that there is a need for more informed teachers who can speak their language. It seems that continuing in-service training and the use of the native language in classroom are critical factors to students' wellbeing.

There were some limitations for the study, such as the young age of the children of the formal group which did not allow to extract concrete conclusions from their responses. Also, the study with the informal group with only Roma children does not provide any comparative perspective. Another important issue was the lack of familiarity between children and researchers for all three groups. The time of conducting the study was too short to ensure that the children would feel comfortable enough with the researchers to share their views. Time is a critical factor since this kind of tasks need a longer period of presence of the research teams in the educational context so that both researchers and educational staff and children can get to know better each other, and especially for the research team to get a better view of the psychological/educational dynamics of the group.

Despite the limitations, the findings of the present study provide a first insight on the children's perspectives regarding the elements that make them feel good at school. This study advances our understanding of the things that should change in Greek schools in terms of facilities or teaching approach to make them more welcoming and inclusive. A kind of action research is recommended, where the teacher or a member of the educational staff will be part of the research team so that the potential biases either by the children the staff or the researchers would be overcome.

### 3.2.7 POLAND

Kamila Wichrowska and Olga Wysłowska

#### Short abstract

This study is part of the international research project ‘Children’s views on inclusion at school’ within the European Project ISOTIS (see D.2.5: Pastori G., Pagani V., Sarcinelli S., Technical report on the Child Interview study. Children’s views on inclusion at school’ - digital source available on Isotis.org) and was conducted in Poland based on the manual developed by the task leaders. This case study involved two groups of children recruited via Warsaw formal educational settings, more specific a public preschool and a primary school. In total 28 children took part in the study (thirteen 4- to 6-year-olds and fifteen 8- to 10-year-olds). Both groups included pupils of socially disadvantaged background. In both contexts within two days children participated in several individual, small group and whole group activities. The general goal of the research was to learn about children’s perspectives on inclusive aspects of their educational settings facilitating well-being of all pupils. The following summary of the technical report presents the context and implementation process of the study. Moreover ethical challenges encountered by the research team are outlined. The findings revealed that children relate their well-being in the educational setting to: having the possibility to choose what, where and with whom they want to play, tasty food, setting openness for parental involvement, warm relations with teachers and peers as well as attractive outdoor and indoor space and toys.

**Keywords:** socially disadvantaged children; Poland; ISOTIS project, children wellbeing; children views on inclusion

#### Research sites and participants

In the preschool 3 teachers were directly involved in the study. All the professionals were women of Polish origin. Within both days of the study three researchers were accompanied by two teachers (two teachers took part only in one day of the study; one teacher took part in both days of the study).

In the primary school as a rule the class was supposed to have a class teacher and an assistant teacher. However, at the time when the study was conducted the class teacher was on extended sick leave. Due to the staff shortage the responsibilities of the class teacher were divided between two teachers, hence as a result three teachers were engaged in the study, namely two substitute teachers exchanging the role of a leading teacher and an assistant teacher. However, the involvement of one of the teachers was limited and concerned only the organizational support.

Table 1. *Overview of the target groups, sites and contexts involved*

Target group	Context Type	Age range of children in the institution	City Area	Number of professionals involved	Number and age of children involved	Division in groups
Low-income	Formal, Preschool	3-6	Warsaw, Żoliborz	3	13 (4-6 years old)	NO
	Formal, Primary school	6-15	Warsaw, Praga Północ	2	15 (8-10 years old)	NO

## Methodology

The study was conducted based on the theoretical framework and implementation guidelines included in the manual “Feel good: children’s views on inclusion”, draft proposal - June 22, 2018 by Giulia Pastori, Valentina Pagani, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli. However some customizations were introduced as a result of negotiations with the staff working at the facilities, conducted prior to the implementation of the study. The main adaptations concerned: the time span of research actions (two days instead of three days), change of the activities order, parallel organization of some activities (‘Suns and clouds’ activity and ‘Trip around the pre(school)’), adjustment of some ID cards sections (at school the *Brief self-presentation* was supplemented with sentence beginnings - *I am...* , *I like...* , *Others like in me...* , *At school I like to play...* , and *My portrait* was replaced with *My favourite place at school, write or draw.*). Moreover the ‘Inclusion first kit’ activity was replaced by the ‘Trip around the pre(school)’.

Table 2. *Brief overview of research actions undertaken in the preschool*

POLAND - PRESCHOOL		
Day 1	<b>Phase 1: Introduction</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Introducing researchers; presentation of the study goals, ways of documenting the data, rules of children involvement <u>Step 2.</u> Name cards preparation
	<b>Phase 2: ID cards</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Presentation of an ID card by one researcher <u>Step 2.</u> Preparation of ID cards by children <u>Step 3.</u> A group discussion on the activities planned for the next day <u>Step 4.</u> After school leaving, researchers visited the centre and took photos of the places and toys mentioned by the children as welcoming and attractive. Preparation of a PowerPoint presentation using photos as well as the documentation of ID cards (photos, audio and video recordings), to show to the children on the day after.
Day 2	<b>Phase 1: Revision</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Group discussion based on the PowerPoint presentation referring to the activities accomplished the previous day
	<b>Phase 2: Brainstorm</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Considerations on the advantages of the preschool <u>Step 2.</u> Discussion on the aspects of the preschool which the children considered worth improving in order to make all children feel welcome <u>Step 3.</u> Presentation of the suns and clouds task
	<b>Phase 3: Suns and clouds</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Suns and clouds preparation <u>Step 2.</u> Presentation and documentation of art works <u>Step 3.</u> Making ‘preschool sky’ of children art works
	<b>Phase 4: Tour</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Tours of one researcher around the preschool guided by small groups of children
	<b>Phase 5: Sum up</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Sum up of the activities <u>Step 2.</u> Acknowledgement of children’s engagement

Table 3. *Brief overview of research actions undertaken in the primary school*

POLAND – PRIMARY SCHOOL		
Day 1	<b>Phase 1: Introduction</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Introduction of researchers, presentation of the study goals <u>Step 2.</u> Presentation of ways of documenting the data and detailed rules of involvement in the activities <u>Step 3.</u> Name cards preparation
	<b>Phase 2: Discussion on the letter</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Introduction of the activity based on a letter describing other academics' experiences from a visit to a different primary school <u>Step 2.</u> Discussion over each part of the letter
	<b>Phase 3: ID cards</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Presentation of an ID card by one researcher <u>Step 2.</u> Preparation of ID cards by children <u>Step 3.</u> Documentation of children ID cards
	<b>Phase 4: Sum up</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Presentation of ID cards to the group by volunteers <u>Step 2.</u> Brief presentation of the activities planned for the following day
Day 2	<b>Phase 1: Revision</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Introduction of the research assistant who came to the class for the first time and informing her by children about the activities conducted on the previous day <u>Step 2.</u> Presentation of ID cards to the group by volunteers
	<b>Phase 2: Brainstorm</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> The discussion about the welcoming aspects of the school <u>Step 2.</u> The discussion to the topic of improvements which could be introduced at school in order to make all children feel welcome <u>Step 3.</u> Presentation of the suns and clouds task
	<b>Phase 3: Suns and clouds</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> 'School skies' preparation by groups of 3-4 children <u>Step 2.</u> Documentation of the 'school skies'
	<b>Phase 4: Tour</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Tours of one researcher around the school guided by small groups of children
	<b>Phase 5: Sum up</b>	<u>Step 1.</u> Presentation of the 'school skies' by volunteers and sharing experiences of trip around the school participants <u>Step 2.</u> Acknowledgement of children's engagement

### Coding and analysis

Some adaptations of the coding and analysis approach were made in comparison to the overall study framework. Due to the limited amount of transcripts (on many occasion children declined being audio recorded) the decision on including into the analysis researchers notes was taken. Both the transcripts and notes were ordered into files according to the phases of work.

On many occasion it was impossible to identify voices of children on the recordings and assign them to particular pupils. Moreover researchers' notes taken into consideration within the process of analysis did not always include the precise number of children who for example mentioned a particular topic during a group discussion or the number of children who mentioned the same factor undermining their well-being at school several times. Hence, researchers decided to focus on the (prevalent) occurrence vs not occurrence of the topics instead of the number of each theme occurrence or presentation of the Word Cloud.

## Main Findings

Within both settings children related Factors influencing inclusion and wellbeing mainly with school organization, more specific physical environment (e.g. availability of space to relax at the premise) as well as rules of children and family involvement in different types of actions such as play and organized learning activities (e.g. provision of some educational activities within one-to-one or small groups arrangements; openness of the setting for parents presence). Moreover pupils pointed to the importance of positive relations with peers and professionals for their general attitude towards school. Factors undermining children wellbeing at (pre)school were only pointed by school pupils and concerned: their negative interactions with peers (e.g. conflicts), high turnover of professionals, and general malaise and low-self esteem of children. Furthermore it was suggested that lack of free of charge school aids available in the premise may limit children engagement in the educational activities. Transformative proposals of children could not be implemented within the research process. One may say that the ‘co-denominator’ of children proposals was willingness to get more involved in shaping space and activities (e.g. content of extracurricular activities) at the premise.

Table 6. Co-occurrence of Factors influencing inclusion and well-being with thematic and complimentary codes

		Preschool			School		
		F1. Factors promoting well-being	F2. Factors undermining well-being	F3. Transformative factors (proposals and wishes)	F1. Factors promoting well-being	F2. Factors undermining well-being	F3. Transformative factors (proposals and wishes)
Diversity	Social inequalities				V	<b>V*</b>	V
	Language						
	Culture						
Social Relationships	Inclusion/ acceptance	<b>V</b>					V
	Discrimination						
	Conflict				V		
	Friendship	<b>V</b>					
	Behavior				V		
	Emotional support/ empathy	V			<b>V</b>		
Identity	Linguistic identity						
	Social identity						
	Myself in the future						
School organization	Space	<b>V</b>		V	<b>V</b>		
	Rules	<b>V</b>	V				
	Play	<b>V</b>		V	<b>V</b>		
	Learning	V			<b>V</b>		
	Food	<b>V</b>					
	Teaching Approach				<b>V</b>		

Representations	Image of the child(ren)	v				v	
	Image of the teacher	V			V		
	Image of the school	V					
Complementary codes	Peers	v					
	Teachers	v					
	Family	V				v	

\*v- the topic occurred prevalent

### Main ethical and methodological challenges

The main methodological challenge concerned the sample selection. More specifically, as in the Polish study the focus was on identifying inclusive aspects of educational settings as perceived by native socioeconomically disadvantaged children, in our research group occurred questions such as: should settings involving high or low percentage of pupils of such background be included?; in what context it is easier for children to notice inclusive aspects of the settings? As a result the decision on involving one group with just a few and the other with the majority of children with disadvantaged socio-economic background was taken.

Regarding the ethical challenges the researchers felt that the elaborated rules of children involvement in the research activities secured their rights. At the same time the researchers could have noticed that on some occasion children 'used' their rights and for example refused to be audio recorded without any particular reason (their decision was respected on every occasion). One may say that children were not used to making decisions in such matters and simply had a pleasure of being 'decisive'. As a result considerably limited amount of audio data was collected.

### Discussion: Limitations, main lessons and recommendations for practice and policy

The following study had several limitations of which three seem to be of the greatest importance for its implementation. Firstly the researchers involved in the study found the time allocated for the research activities insufficient. The second limitation concerned the lack of information on the individual participants' socio-economic background, which in consequence, on some occasion made it challenging to interpret children's opinions or behaviour. Thirdly participants had very limited contact with non-Polish speakers and representatives of other cultures; most probably because of this reason it was very difficult for researchers to enhance them to reflect on linguistic or cultural diversity at their (pre)school.

Based on the children's experiences, opinions and ideas shared with researchers within the research process the following recommendations were formulated:

- Peer relations should be an important concern of professionals.
- Food and drinks, as well as school aids, should be available to all children at the premise.
- Children should be enhanced to actively participate in taking decisions on the arrangement of play areas at the premise.
- At the premise there should be space for children to relax in peace and quiet, in small groups or individually.
- Parents should be encouraged to visit the premise and take part in the organization of its work.
- Attractive extracurricular activities should be available at the premise.

### 3.2.8 THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Jana Obrovská, Lenka Kissová, Viktorie Hermanová and Lenka Špinková

#### Short abstract

In this case study, we focus on activities conducted as part of the WP2 Task 2.5 “Children Study” within the larger ISOTIS project in the Czech Republic. The study consisted of three activities focusing on the views of children on inclusion and wellbeing in the school environment. Activities were conducted in four classrooms attended by approximately 80 children in two primary schools at two locations. While the classrooms in the city of Brno were attended by 20-30% of pupils with minority ethnic background with only a low percentage of Roma pupils, the two classrooms in Ústí nad Labem included higher percentages (40% on average) of pupils with Roma background. In this country report, we reflect on data collected during this study. We present a detailed characterization of the context, participants and methodological as well as ethical issues we dealt with. At the end, we outline the findings of the study.

**Keywords:** Diversity, ethnically minor pupils; Roma pupils; children’s views on inclusion; Czech Republic; ISOTIS project

#### Research sites and participants

We selected two schools in two locations in the Czech Republic, in the cities of Brno and Ústí nad Labem. These locations were chosen in line with the general selection criteria defined for the whole ISOTIS project: urban areas with ethnically diverse populations but different social policies. Brno and Ústí nad Labem both have relatively high percentages of people with a minority background and both host the biggest populations of the Roma minority, which was one of the target groups for the Czech Republic in the ISOTIS project. The criterion of increased ethnic diversity was crucial as the Czech society is predominantly ethnically homogeneous (the population of minority background constitutes less than 5%).

**School 1** located in the Brno inner-city comprises approximately 20-30% pupils from ethnic minorities per classroom. The school neighbourhood is affluent as it is located in the middle of the city’s historic center; however, the streets inhabited mainly by socio-economically disadvantaged families are not so far away from here. This localization brings a specific social mixture of pupils which is characteristic for this school.

**School 2.** The school is situated at the edge of Ústí nad Labem agglomeration with a direct connection to the biggest highway in the Czech Republic. The school comprises approximately 40% of Roma pupils per classroom on average, however there was a higher number of Roma pupils in one classroom involved in the Children Study (70%), while there were about 30% of Roma pupils in the second classroom.

In the next table, you can see the overview of the target groups, sites and contexts involved in the Children Study.

Table 1. Overview of the target groups, sites and contexts involved in the Children Study

Target group	Context type	Age	City/Area	Number of professionals involved	Number and age of children involved	Division in groups
Romani	Formal Primary School	6-10	Brno	2 (+2)	43 (8-9 years old)	21 (class 3.B) 22 (class 3.C)
	Formal Primary School	6-11	Ústí nad Labem	2	41 (9-11 years old)	18 (class 5.B) 23 (class 4.C)

### Methodology

At both schools in the Czech Republic (School 1 and 2), we started with getting familiar with context, teachers and children in spring 2018, including participant observations in all classes and interviews with the four teachers. In the late fall 2018 we started to discuss the activities we would be conducting in the classes within the WP2.5 Children Study. We continued with the three Children Study activities in autumn and winter 2018. In the following table you can see the steps of the three activities.

Table 2. Steps of the three Children Study activities

BRNO and ÚSTÍ NAD LABEM		
Day 1	<b>Introduction of the study</b>	<p>Step 1. Researchers introduced themselves as well as explained the goal of the visit; gave information concerning the documentation of the activities within the study and agreed upon the rules of involvement in the activities;</p> <p>Step 2. Preparation of the name cards for the researchers and children.</p>
	<b>ID cards</b>	<p>Step 1. Researcher presented the activity in detail and explained what is expected from the pupils.</p> <p>Step 2. During the activity the researchers assisted pupils with their ID cards, explained details of the activity if unclear.</p> <p>Step 3. Researchers encouraged children to talk about their ID cards during a group discussion.</p> <p>Step 4. After the activity, researchers took pictures of the ID cards.</p> <p>Step 5. A discussion with the teachers took place. Researchers discussed the process and outcomes of the activity. They also discussed suggestions for improvement.</p>
	<b>Suns and clouds</b>	<p>Step 1. Pre-preparation of suns and clouds.</p> <p>Step 2. Researchers explained the activity and asked children to cut out three suns and three clouds.</p> <p>Step 3. Researchers asked pupils to write down three positive and three negative they like/do not like about their school.</p> <p>Step 4. Researchers encouraged children to talk about their suns and clouds during a group discussion.</p> <p>Step 5. After the activity, researchers took pictures of the suns and clouds.</p> <p>Step 6. A discussion with the teachers took place. Researchers discussed the process and outcomes of the activity. They also discussed suggestions for improvement.</p>

<b>Day 2</b>	<b>First aid kit</b>	<p>Step 1. Researchers read the first part of the letter to children (letter talking about the imaginary new classmate coming from a foreign country).</p> <p>Step 2. Researchers explained the activity.</p> <p>Step 3. The teacher divided the class to smaller groups.</p> <p>Step 4. Researchers and the teacher assisted pupils with the first aid kit preparation. They discussed potential options pupils can elaborate on.</p> <p>Step 5. Researchers encouraged children to talk about their suns and clouds during a group discussion.</p> <p>Step 6. After the activity, researchers took pictures of the outcomes.</p> <p>Step 7. A discussion with the teachers took place. Researchers discussed the process and outcomes of the activity. They also discussed suggestions for improvements.</p>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Focus groups (The letter)</b>	<p>Step 1. The teacher divided pupils to groups.</p> <p>Step 2. Each researcher took one group and found a calm space in the school.</p> <p>Step 3. Researchers introduced the activity and explained the rules for the focus group. They also announced that the interview would be recorded.</p> <p>Step 4. Researchers asked about the previous activities. They were interested whether the pupils remembered the activities. They also asked about the first part of the letter.</p> <p>Step 5. Researchers read the rest of the letter (one part after another) and they were posing related questions. Thus, pupils were given the opportunity to discuss the letter and its topics. Researchers were also encouraging pupils who were shy or not so dominant in the discussions.</p>

### Coding and analysis

The coding and analysis procedure followed the general guidelines presented in Chapter 3.1 (page 263ff).

### Main Findings

One of the main facilitators supporting well-being at school is the teacher persona. Teachers have been mentioned as positive aspects of the children's school attendance and of children feeling good and safe at school. Also, according to some children, bad teachers are the reason why kids leave the school.

Another positive aspect of being at school that the children identified is friends, peers and relationships with them. The fact they can spend time with their friends in the classroom or in the after school activities is a strong facilitator. In this regard, children evaluate positively the after-school clubs where they can play with others and meet new kids. Time spent together with their classmates in the afterschool club or at the PE lessons seems to reinforce their relationships that are one of the essential factors supporting well-being at school. Friendships are relevant also in relation to inclusion of children with minority background or those who do not speak the local language. Another facilitating factor the children stated is breaks. Pupils associate them with free time they can spend playing and talking to their friends, eating and not studying. This is further associated with play (for example, playing hide and seek, soccer, double) they consider essential too. Also, a small number of pupils named school environment as a positive facilitator. To them, big rooms and nicely decorated school hallways and classrooms evoke positive emotions. One of the most discussed factors influencing how children feel about school is the curriculum subjects. Significant number of pupils mentioned PE as a supporting factor because they are allowed to move instead of sitting all the time; or creative

education (namely painting) because they learn how to draw and paint, they can create products; music education because they can sing.

Table 3. *Co-occurrences among main thematic codes and codes Factors promoting/undermining inclusion and Transformative factors*

Over-codes	FACTORS PROMOTING WELL BEING AND INCLUSION	FACTORS UNDERMINING WELL BEING AND INCLUSION	TRASFORMATIVE FACTORS
<b>Site: Brno typology</b>	<b>Target 2</b>	<b>Target 2</b>	<b>Target 2</b>
<b>Codes</b>	<b>Formal 8-11</b>	<b>Formal 8-11</b>	<b>Formal 8-11</b>
<b>Diversity</b>			
Social inequalities	0	5	0
Language	0	10	9
Culture	0	0	2
<b>Representations</b>			
Images of the child-student	0	4	0
Image of the teacher	1	0	0
Image of the school	0	0	0
Image of the family	0	0	0
<b>Identity</b>			
Cultural i.	0	3	1
Linguistic i.	0	2	0
Social i.	2	1	0
Somatic features	0	0	0
Myself in the future	0	0	0
<b>School Organization</b>			

Space	1	0	2
Time	0	0	0
Rules	0	0	0
Play	2	0	6
Food	0	0	0
Learning	0	5	3
Teaching approach	0	4	1
<b>Social relationship</b>			
Inclusion-acceptance	0	7	12
Discrimination	0	0	0
Conflict	0	4	0
Friendship	0	3	4
Behaviour	3	4	1
Emotional support/Empathy	0	1	1

When the children were asked about what they associate with the school, majority of them identified the process of teaching/learning. Part of them associates learning with negative characteristics, connected to boredom, testing, bad grades. They dislike exams because they make them nervous and fearful of bad grades. According to some of them, they spend too much time at school learning difficult things. They evaluate negatively they have to wake up early, they have to sit long hours and they do not have time for other activities. In this regard, as well as said above, children name particular subjects they do not like (like the Czech language or Maths, which they consider difficult). Another set of negative features that children associate with school refers to their peers. They dislike when other kids shout, when they make fun of others or when they are rude. During the focus group interviews some children raised several examples of being mocked because of being perceived as “other” (e.g., because of different hair colour, having slices, being fat etc.).

Language seems to be an important factor in learning and in establishing friendships. When asked to reflect about languages and language diversity, pupils as well as teachers identified it as essential. It is one of the factors identified as supporting inclusion and well-being in school as well as enhancing exclusion. The children regarded not knowing the language as a significant barrier to acceptance in the collective and understanding in the classes. Teachers too perceived not knowing the majority language as a barrier to good performance of the children with different ethnic or language background. However, they do not find enough space in otherwise “dense” curriculum to involve the cross-sectional topics (such as multicultural education) to their daily teaching practice.

### **Main ethical and methodological challenges**

During this research, we experienced some formal and processual challenges. The formal level of research ethics of the Children Study became complicated when due to bad teacher-parent communication some of the parents rejected to sign the informed consent forms. Some of the parents required specific modifications of the consent form and we also established together a rule that they will be informed at least one week before each activity will be conducted in the classroom about the planned activities and the data to be collected.

Regarding the processual ethics, we faced some obstacles in involvement of ethnically minor pupils during the focus groups. Although one of the aims of the study was to give voice to children as they are often overlooked by the mainstream research, ethnically “other” children were rather silent during the group interviews and they were not very enthusiastic about sharing their experiences about the country of origin or their cultural habits with the class even during the other Children Study activities.

### **Discussion: Limitations, main lessons and recommendations for practice and policy**

In general, the participatory activities which were part of the Children Study enabled the pupils to reflect on relational topics (such as multiculturalism, arrival of a new non-Czech speaking classmate to their school/classroom, factors promoting/undermining inclusion in their classrooms etc.). We also encouraged them to actively express their opinions, visualise their ideas, think about hypothetical situations, share their own experiences as well as present their own suggestions how to solve concrete situation/problems. Although some teachers perceived these reflective and presentation skills of their pupils as rather underdeveloped, they appreciated that Children Study activities gave space to develop them further. Similarly, the children were in general engaged in the activities and expressed positive evaluations/feelings regarding the content as well as form of each activity.

We learned that some of these activities definitely need adaptations to the cultural contexts of the individual countries where they are conducted as well as to the context of each classroom with regard to the age of children, their prior experiences with similar topics, as well as with the curriculum of the respective grade. The need for their adaptation could be a good trigger for teachers to get involved in the design of the study on more participatory basis.

We further learnt that establishing space for children to reflect upon conducted activities requires a lot of time, good cooperation with the teacher and disciplined time-management. In the classroom encompassing twenty four pupils on average it is important to dedicate enough time to circles or similar platforms providing children enough and safe space to reflect and talk. Researchers need to discuss each phase of each activity with the teachers in advance to make clear decisions about the responsibilities when facilitating these reflective discussions (e.g., the facilitation of the main activity could be in hands of the researchers, however it is sometimes more appropriate to entrust the reflective part to the teacher, or vice versa).

Lastly, the communication with parents is very important. Although most of the parents were not very interested in research activities conducted in their school, there are always some who need regular contact with the research team, detailed explanation of collection and treatment of research data and good enough standard of reporting/sharing the results. Besides that, collecting such data for an international research project requires a lot of preparation before starting with the data collection to negotiate all necessities with Ethical Committees and lawyers in respective countries.

### 3.3 THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY. A CROSS NATIONAL DATA ANALYSIS

Giulia Pastori, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, & Valentina Pagani

The cross national data analysis focuses on some key results that could be addressed through a comparative perspective, in relation to :

- Factors promoting well-being and inclusion
- Factors undermining well-being and inclusion
- Transformative factors, that is the children's proposals for changing their school

Interestingly, the international analysis gave some highlights on the ethics and methodological questions in making research *with* and *for* children.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL SAMPLE. AN OVERVIEW

The selected countries presented relevant variations at several levels (such as national income, educational structure, welfare and support systems) and presented three different target groups within the ISOTIS project (native low-income groups, indigenous ethnic-cultural minority groups such as Romani people, and immigrant linguistic minority groups). Table 1 provides an overview of the countries involved and their corresponding target groups.

The variety of target groups contributed to making the Children Study more interesting, but it also implied an increased level of complexity in the international data analysis phase. Therefore, even though some classes/groups also featuring children with disabilities had been included in the sample and those pupils' ideas/experiences/proposals about how to make school more inclusive had been welcomed, we decided not to address this level of diversity directly (albeit interesting and valuable) since it would have broadened our focus too much.

The study was conducted in (pre)school and after-school social contexts, but not in family environments<sup>53</sup>.

In the research groups with children aged 9 to 14, it was also decided to involve informal extra-school contexts (such as youth centers, spaces for recreational activities and study support, etc.), to meet them in more neutral settings compared to school, where we assumed the topics of inclusion and well-being at school could be addressed by the children in a freer, more spontaneous way, allowing for comparison between formal and informal contexts.

Overall, as shown in Table 2.1, 331 children, specifically, 145 preschoolers, 139 primary school students, and 47 children attending after-school programs) and 32 professionals in 16 different contexts participated in the international study.

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<sup>53</sup> With regard to the environment where the children were met, it makes an exception the study conducted in England (see Chapter 7), where the bilingual Turkish and English researcher, Pinar Kolancı, was already in contact with several families with a Turkish background living in London, involved in a previous study.

COUNTRY	TARGET GROUP	CONTEXT TYPE	SITE(S)		NUMBER OF PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED	PARTICIPANTS	
			AGE	CITY/AREA		NUMBER AND AGE OF CHILDREN INVOLVED	DIVISION IN GROUPS (IF ANY)
Czech Republic	Romani	Formal, Primary School	6-10	Brno	2 (+2)	43 (8/9 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 (class 3.B)</li> <li>• 22 (class 3.C)</li> </ul>
		Formal, Primary School	6-11	Ústí nad Labem	2	41 (9/10-10/11 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 (class 5.B)</li> <li>• 23 (class 4.C)</li> </ul>
England	Low-income	Home environment	4-6	London	-	25 (4-6years old)	No
Germany	Immigrant background	Formal, Preschool	1-6	Berlin	1 (+1)	10 (4-6 years old)	No
Greece	Romani	Formal, Preschool	3-6	municipality of Aghia Varvara	2	22 (4-5 years old)	2 groups of 11 children
		Informal, After-school program	9-14	municipality of Aghia Varvara	1	8 (9-13 years old)	No
		Informal, After-school program	9-14	municipality of Athens	2	8 (8-13 years old)	No
Italy	Immigrant background	Formal, Preschool	3-6	Milan	2	33 (4-5 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 4-year old children;</li> <li>• 11 5-year old children</li> </ul>
		Formal, Primary school	6-10	Milan	2	22 (10-11 years old)	No
		Informal, After-school program	9-14	Milan	3	31 (9-14years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 9-10 year old children;</li> <li>• 21 10-14 year</li> </ul>

							old children
<b>Norway</b>	Immigrant background	Formal, Public pre-school	0/1-5	Urban area in a county in South East Norway	4	6 (4-5 years old)	3 departments (2 children pr. department)*
		Formal, Public primary school	6-14	Urban area in a county in South East Norway	1	18 (11-12 years old)	1 class
<b>Poland</b>	Low-income	Formal, Pre-school	3-6	Warsaw, Żoliborz	3	13 (4-6 years old)	NO
		Formal, Primary school	6-15	Warsaw, Praga Północ	2	15 (8-10 years old)	NO
<b>The Netherlands</b>	Mixed, immigrant and native low-income SES	Child centre Preschool care	<b>3-6</b>	Utrecht, Ondiep	1	12 (3years old)	3 group of 4 children 11 individual interviews
		Child centre After school care	<b>4-6</b>		1	24 (4-6 years old)	3 group of 4 children 9 individual interviews

## **CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON FACTORS PROMOTING AND UNDERMINING WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL AND THEIR PROPOSALS TO CHANGE THE SCHOOL**

As illustrated in Chapter 1, the analysis at both the national and international levels followed a thematic approach, based on a common coding framework that permitted combining the qualitative analysis with a quantitative analysis of the frequency of the codes, namely the co-occurrence rate between the thematic codes and the three target over-codes Factors promoting and Factors undermining well-being and inclusion at school and Transformative Factors (children's proposals and wishes for changing and enhancing the school environment).

The qualitative analysis was enriched by this 'quantitative picture' of the distribution of the codes that gave a meaningful contribution in identifying the dimensions/themes most addressed by children and the ones that were mentioned more rarely, comparing ages and different settings. The quantitative analysis was enriched by detailed descriptions and interpretations based on the comprehensive verbal materials collected thanks to audio recordings and observations. The cross-country analysis took the three main above-mentioned factors into consideration .

### **Children's views on Factors promoting well-being at school**

We introduce the data analysis by proposing three graphs showing the co-occurrence distribution of the codes. The first target over-code "Factors promoting well-being and inclusion: a first graph" (see figure 1 below) shows the overall distribution of the co-occurrence of all the sub-codes included in the main thematic areas, illustrating the 'hierarchy' of the dimensions addressed by children considering the entire sample. The second graph shows the distribution of the co-occurrence of the main thematic codes per age and per context (see figure 2), to quickly grasp how much the main dimensions were addressed in the three groups (3-6 preschool context; 9-11 primary school, 9+ informal context).

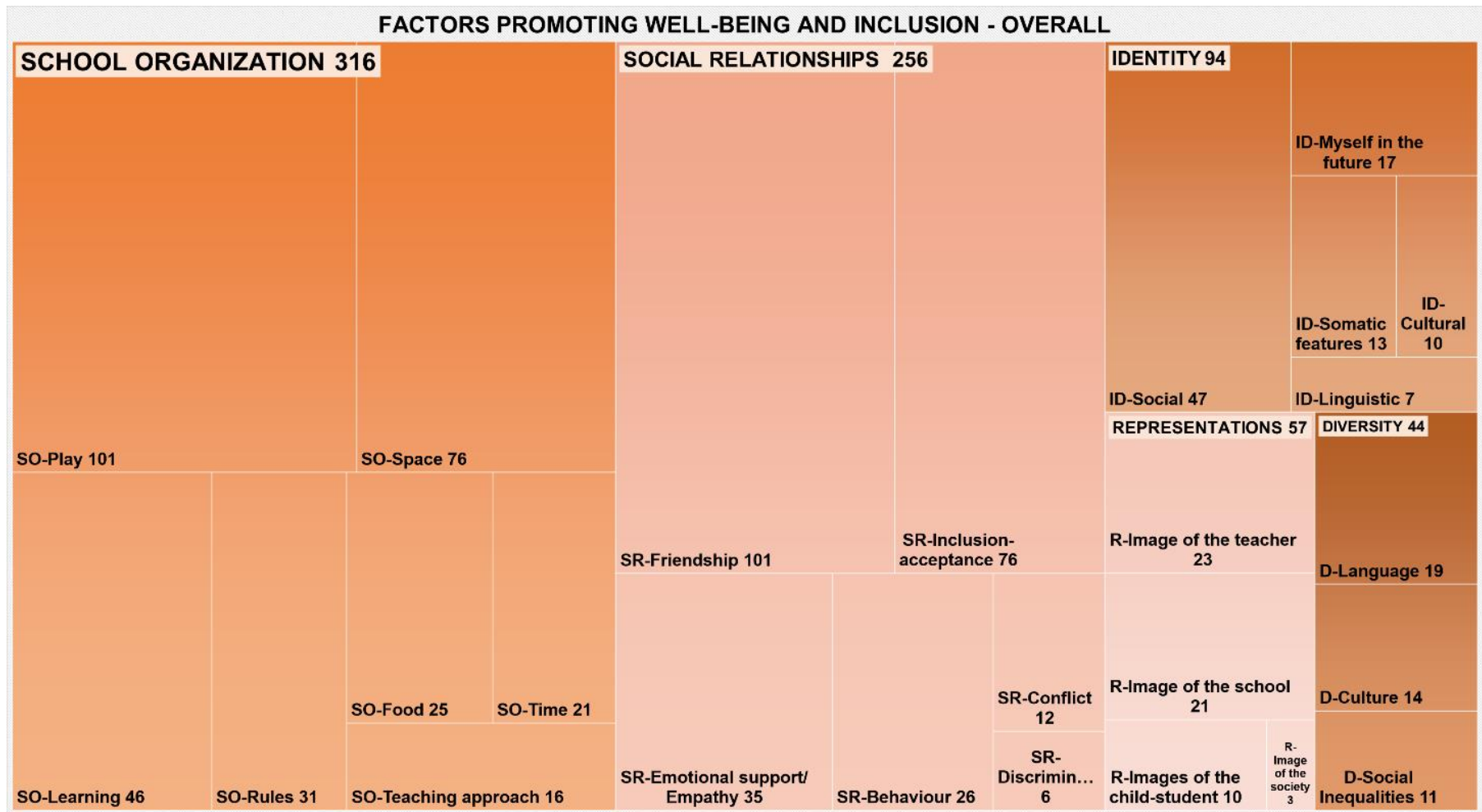


Figure 1. Overall co-occurrence of Factors promoting well-being and inclusion per main thematic code and sub-code

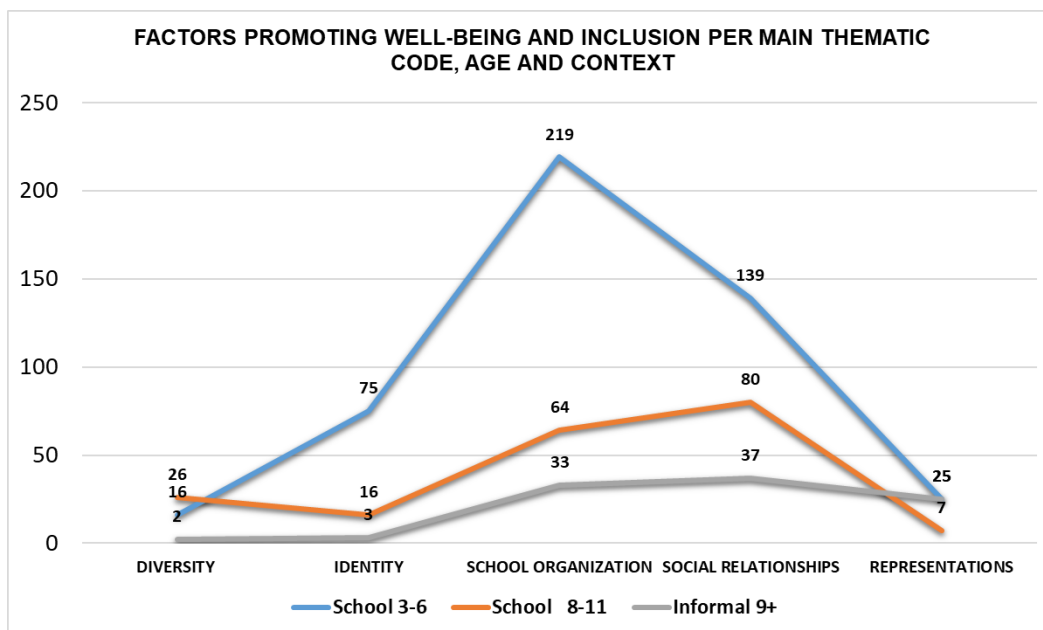


Figure 2. Co-occurrence of Factors promoting well-being and inclusion per main thematic code, age and context

From a quantitative point of view (see Figure 3), the codes with the most co-occurrences with factors promoting well-being cross-countries and cross-ages was “School organization” (316 co-occurrences) - and more precisely “Play” (101 co-occurrences) and “Space” (76 co-occurrences) - followed by “Social Relationships” (256 co-occurrences) and, more precisely, “Friendship” (101 co-occurrences) and “Inclusion-acceptance” (76 co-occurrences).

Splitting the data, elements of continuity and differences are noticeable:

- in the preschool, the higher number of co-occurrences in the code “School organization” in the sub-codes “Play” (78 co-occurrences) and “Space” (58 co-occurrences) were followed by the sub-codes “Friendship” in the code “Social relationships”;
- in the primary school, the co-occurrences focused on the code “Social relationships”, more precisely “Friendship” (29 co-occurrences), “Inclusion/acceptance” (23 co-occurrences) and, in the code “School organization” the sub-code “Play” (17 co-occurrences);
- in the informal context, the main co-occurrences were 3 sub-codes, namely “Learning” (17 co-occurrences) sub-code of “School organization”, “Friendship” (15 co-occurrences) sub-code of “Social relationships” and “Image of the school” (13 co-occurrences) sub-code of “Representations”.

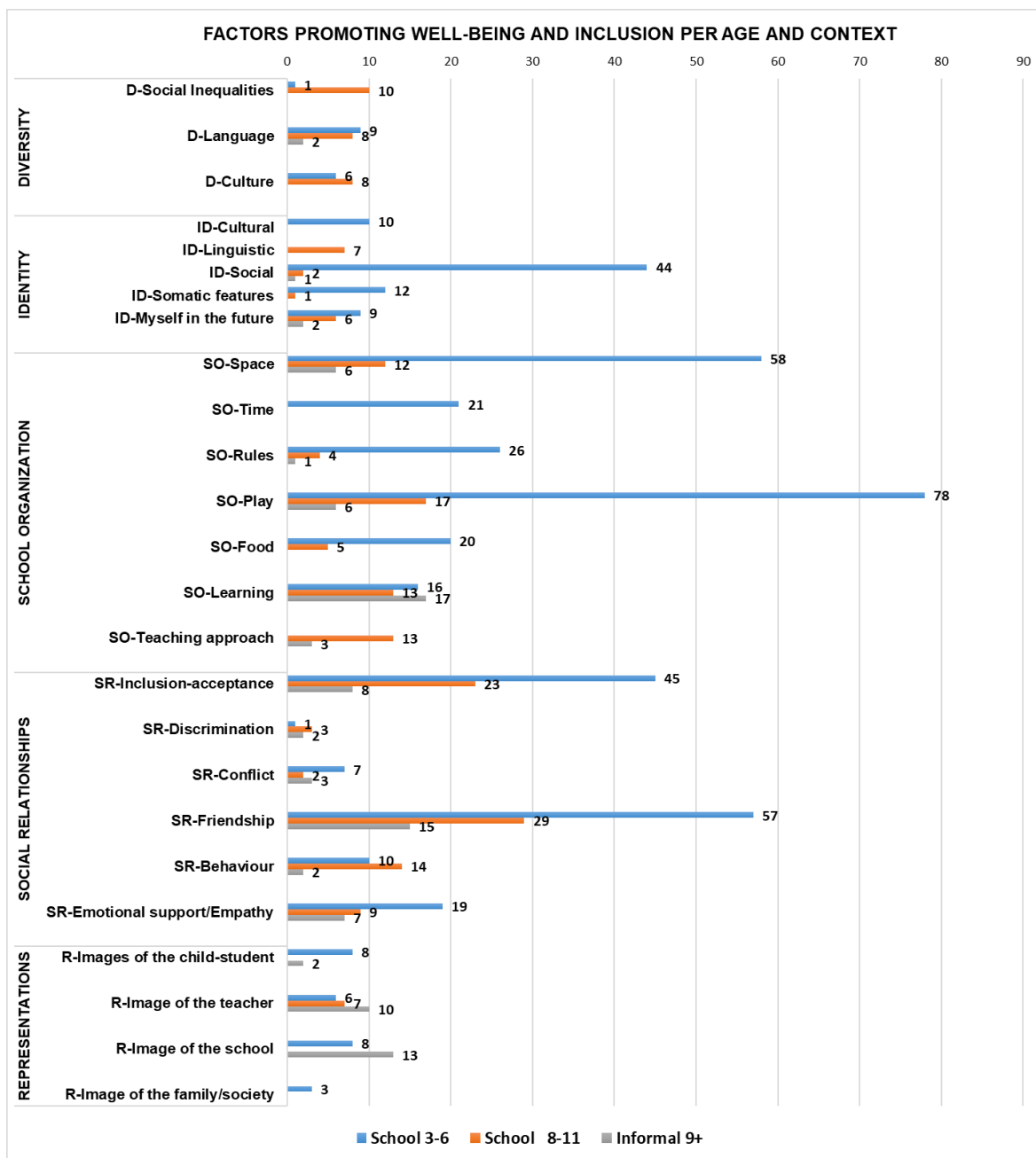


Figure 3. Co-occurrence of Factors promoting well-being and inclusion per code, age and context

In the following paragraphs, we will analyze the content of the main codes and sub-codes.

### Code: School organization

#### Sub-code: Space

The **quantity** and the **quality of spaces** were considered very important factors across countries, contexts and ages. In primary schools (e.g. Polish, Norwegian and Italian contexts), children referred not only to the **beauty, size and smell** (e.g. big school or rooms, decorations,

nice floors, colorful books, good smells), but also to the things that they could do in those places: (have fun, events, snacks and parties are the main reasons they like places like the garden, the classroom or the gym) and the fact of being together in these places. The possibility to move and to participate in less traditional activities was considered by primary school students (e.g. Italian, Czech and Polish contexts) to be important factors in promoting well-being at school, counterbalanced by undermining factors like having to sit for many hours: they love school spaces outside class such as the library, the art and crafts room, the computer and science lab, the gym, the playground, but also going on school trips or to museums.

Preschool children (i.e. in the Polish context) children liked attractive play areas where they could participate in activities based on movement (e.g. driving vehicles) and creativity, such as the outdoor playgrounds, the plastic ball pool, spaces with gymnastics ladders and mattresses, the sofa corner, the art room, the exhibition space. Children appreciated the facilities: for instance, in the Greek informal context, children mentioned the facilities for playing sports, whereas the Polish children mentioned that the playground was renovated and has lots of games, such as swings and the ship. Norwegian children pointed out that clothing suitable for all weather conditions is a very important aspect for well-being in the preschool. Children also appreciated safe places, like a schoolyard without dangerous stones or a well-guarded area where children felt protected from fights or other misbehavior.

Another important aspect highlighted by some children (i.e. Italian and Norwegian preschool children) was the fact of knowing the school places and how to reach them: hence, a factor promoting the well-being of newcomers was having someone accompany them, showing them the places and the way, assuring that the new child got a blanket for the rest time, labels with images of the child on their place in the wardrobe or stickers on the fridge with drawings of food, materials and kitchen tools to prepare food. Norwegian preschoolers pointed the importance of material objects giving information to the children, such as the posters showing activities.

Another factor promoting well-being was the possibility of sharing the space with some family members: places where parents could come to look at the artwork or could get involved in the preschool life by reading books or talking about their profession or simply being there while they played (e.g. in the German and Polish preschool contexts).

Finally, preschool children (in the German and Polish contexts) stated that self-determination was also important to them regarding the possibility to use the spaces. For instance, in the Polish preschool, children showed excitement when saying "*in our preschool we can all play wherever we want*") and in the Dutch preschool children, enjoyed the possibility to go beyond the 'official boundaries' and explore without restrictions.

#### *Sub-code: Rules*

An important aspect about rules was being informed about them: both Norwegian and Italian preschool children found it important to clearly explain rules to newcomers in a way they could understand, e.g. with informative pictures and drawing hanging on the walls on how to wash hands or how to participate in outdoor activities, or with a multilingual digital presentation of the school.

### *Sub-code: Time*

An important factor connected to time regarded self-determination: for instance, in the Polish context, children repeated on several occasions to what extent choosing where they spent time affected well-being at school. This was particularly stressed in contexts where children were used to having considerable freedom, such as in the Polish preschool.

Primary school children underlined the importance of a good alternation between moments of concentration and breaks, that is to say free time they can spend playing, chatting or eating.

### *Sub-code: Play*

Playing, hanging out with friends and getting involved in a variety of playful activities/games in the school context appeared to be important factors of well-being in many contexts and across ages, especially freely accessible play possibilities. The possibility to play with friends was one of the first memories of positive moments in the Italian preschool (“I felt happy because I was in a school and I could play with my new friends”). Children were eager to share their favorite games with the researchers: favorite games were results of what was valued in different preschool and school cultures across Europe: playing outdoors was a Norwegian and Nordic value (but also present in the experience of German preschoolers) that was internalized by the children and often mentioned as an important factor of well-being that newcomers needed to be introduced to. More generally, children seemed to feel good in socially inclusive play activities (such as collaborative building or cooking/baking) and/or physical active playing.

Many children cross-ages and contexts (Italian preschool, Czech primary school, Greek informal context) indicated play as a crucial factor for strengthening inclusion and the well-being of newcomers (especially those coming from abroad and did not speak the language used at school), showing them where and what to play.

### *Sub-code: Food*

Food as a socially inclusive activity was mentioned cross-countries and cross-ages. **Sharing food or making meals together** were factors promoting the well-being and inclusion of newly arrived children (e.g. Norwegian preschool, Italian informal context). But “food talks” were also mentioned as an important moment and the importance of being able to communicate about food was mentioned by Norwegian children: in fact, non-native speakers with little or no competence in the majority language were considered to be in strong need of **being informed of what they were eating**. Food also emerged as an important factor in expressing cultural identity at school and sharing it with others (getting to know others by tasting their food or being able to learn about other pupils religious tradition).

Considering the target of children experiencing social inequalities, the **availability of tasty food** emerged as an important factor for Polish students, who did not have this at home because of poverty.

### *Sub-code: Learning*

Learning was sometimes perceived as a source of joy and enjoyment when connected to the possibility of learning new things, having new experiences, working together with other students (Norwegian primary school, Polish preschool) or when it implied “non-traditional” teaching approaches that were more playful, play-like and creative approaches (namely painting and

singing) (in the Greek and Italian informal contexts, and the Czech primary school). In fact, children often mentioned the importance of teaching approaches with physical movements such as the gym class because children were allowed to move instead of sitting all the time.

#### *Sub-code: Teaching approach*

As explained in the sub-code “Learning”, children appreciated cooperative learning teaching and pedagogical approaches and attractive individual activities or in small groups, especially when outside of the traditional class (e.g. in the art class, gym class, science and computer lab) (Polish and Czech contexts) and with a lower number of students and adults enabling a more friendly and intimate atmosphere. This was also expressed by preschool children, who enjoyed reading books in small groups (Polish preschool contexts) and involving parents.

#### **Code: Social relationships**

Social relationships were among the main codes promoting well-being and inclusion. The peer group and the sense of community were central in the children’s representations of the school environment as can be clearly seen in the development of the different sub-codes.

#### *Sub-code: Inclusion/Discrimination*

Children in multicultural contexts felt good in an inclusive and welcoming school where there were no discriminatory events and every culture, language and religion had space and was valued. This was highlighted especially in the Italian preschool and primary school.

Some children (Norwegian and Italian primary schools) proudly stated that they did not exclude or bully children because they were a multicultural context that respected each with their differences. In both cases, respect was something that children learned through the school experience, as a Norwegian children recalled: “We have worked and we have not given up, we have been friends and thought a lot about how it could have been and how other classes are when... And we have had some lessons about the milieu in the class, we have been reading from a book that is about exclusion and bullying.” Also in the Czech context, children agreed on the fact that newcomers should be accepted regardless of their cultural, linguistic or other differences and not be judged based on cultural, social, somatic or ethnic identity.

#### *Sub-code: Friendship*

Together with play, friendship and friendly attitudes were considered crucial for the well-being of all children (Norwegian context, Italian informal context, Czech primary school): many children wrote this in their suns, for instance a Czech girl wrote that she likes friends at her school, because she could not be herself without them. Friendship played also a crucial role in the inclusion and welcoming of newcomers, children with minority backgrounds or those who did not speak the local language (Italian preschool, Czech primary school). Children felt the responsibility of having good attitudes with new friends, despite linguistic barriers.

The presence of friends and having fun with friends was among the first memories of Italian preschoolers (Dutch and Italian preschools), being able to spend time with friends in the classroom and during extracurricular activities.

### *Sub-code: emotional support*

Children valued the emotional support that they received at school both from teachers and peers, but also from siblings when they attended the same school or preschool (Dutch preschool). Children recalled the emotional support they received from peers when they arrived first at preschool and recognized the role that emotional support from teachers and peers could play in welcoming newly arrived children. Preschool children said that emotional support for newcomers was provided by consoling, cuddling, hugging and playing with them when they cried or when they felt lost in the structure. Also, the Italian primary school students and Italian informal children recognized the value of someone in the class who was always by their side ("The people who make us feel good at school are: our classmates, because when something happens they are with us") and the sense of protection deriving from this, as well as how essential it was to get to know what a newly arrived student liked or did not like and what they cared about.

### **Code: Identity**

#### *Sub-code: Cultural identity*

In some countries, cultural identity was identified as a positive factor promoting well-being. For instance, in the Norwegian primary school, children seemed to appreciate both the fact of belonging to the Norwegian culture ("I was born in Norway, and I am happy for that") and the fact of being able to maintain their family culture, namely through fasting ("I am happy because I manage to fast sometimes"), although this was seen as something to be practiced at home ("It is good for children to try to fast, but not at school"). Also in the German preschool, cultural tradition (connected to cooking and hosting) were related to the family sphere and not to school. In other contexts, such as the Czech and the Italian one, cultural diversity in the school context was seen as a positive aspect for learning about different cultural traditions and tasting food from different countries.

### **Code: Representations**

#### *Sub-code: Image of teachers*

Many children seemed to associate well-being at school with a certain image of the teachers and of the model of an ideal teacher. Teachers were considered key-actors in promoting well-being, both in their relationship with children and in mediating the relationship among children (Czech, Greek and Italian contexts). Some children stated that they liked their class precisely because of the teacher and indicated the relationship that a teacher has with students as an important factor for well-being (Greek informal context). Children appreciated kind, wise teachers, who did not yell at students (Italian and Greek informal context) and who proposed attractive activities (Polish context). Other students (e.g. in the Italian primary school) indicated that the teachers' main role in promoting well-being consisted in being actively involved in conflict resolutions and in transmitting respect and anti-discriminatory and anti-racist attitudes among the children. Teachers played a key role in counter-balancing education received at home or out-of-school, as one child said: "I was practically racist when I arrived...but I wasn't. [...] My

father, like, he was a racist. And then I learned that from him. It hurt a lot to learn that, but as soon as I got into this class, I learned that you shouldn't do it. [...]"

Finally, in the Czech context, a factor promoting well-being was not to have too much teachers turn-over.

In the Polish context, children indicated the importance of having positive relationships with all the people working at the institution, such as librarians or the pedagogue at the after-school center.

#### *Sub-code: Image of the school*

Many children had a positive image of the school, one defined it "my other home". The children of different ages seemed to have a clear idea of what was a good model for a school or preschool context promoting well-being. Italian preschool children indicated that they appreciated an inclusive and welcoming preschool, able to value diversity and where there were no episodes of discrimination and conflict. In the Italian informal context and in the Polish one, the school model identified as promoting well-being was one offering less "traditional" school activities and teaching approaches that promoted group activities, if possible outdoors or in other spaces than the class (e.g. out-of-school, in the garden, the gym or the school library).

### **Code: Diversity**

#### *Sub-code: Language*

In many multicultural contexts and across-ages, the ability to communicate with other children was considered a crucial factor for children's well-being. More precisely, the possibility to speak L1 was seen as an important factor for well-being, especially for newly arrived students, but not exclusively. The Italian preschool children considered that the presence of mother tongues in the school environment made a child "feel at home" in the school context, whereas in the Italian primary school, students highlighted the importance of the presence of translators for newcomers, as a child recalled: "When I arrived I didn't speak Italian well and child18 translated for me". However, the linguistic difference was not considered an obstacle in making friends.

Children also highlighted that the presence of different languages at school was a value: for instance, some children enjoyed learning words in foreign languages, considered a positive aspect of the school environment (e.g. Czech and Italian primary schools), as well as teaching L2 to a foreign newcomers (e.g. saying words in the majority language and showing pictures to new children), as Czech and Norwegian children stated.

### **Children's views on Factors undermining well-being and inclusion at school**

Below we present the analysis of the Factors undermining well-being with three graphs of the code co-occurrences: the overall distribution of co-occurrence between "Factors undermining well-being at school" and the thematic codes and sub-codes over the entire sample, the main thematic codes per-age and context, and the sub-codes per age and context.

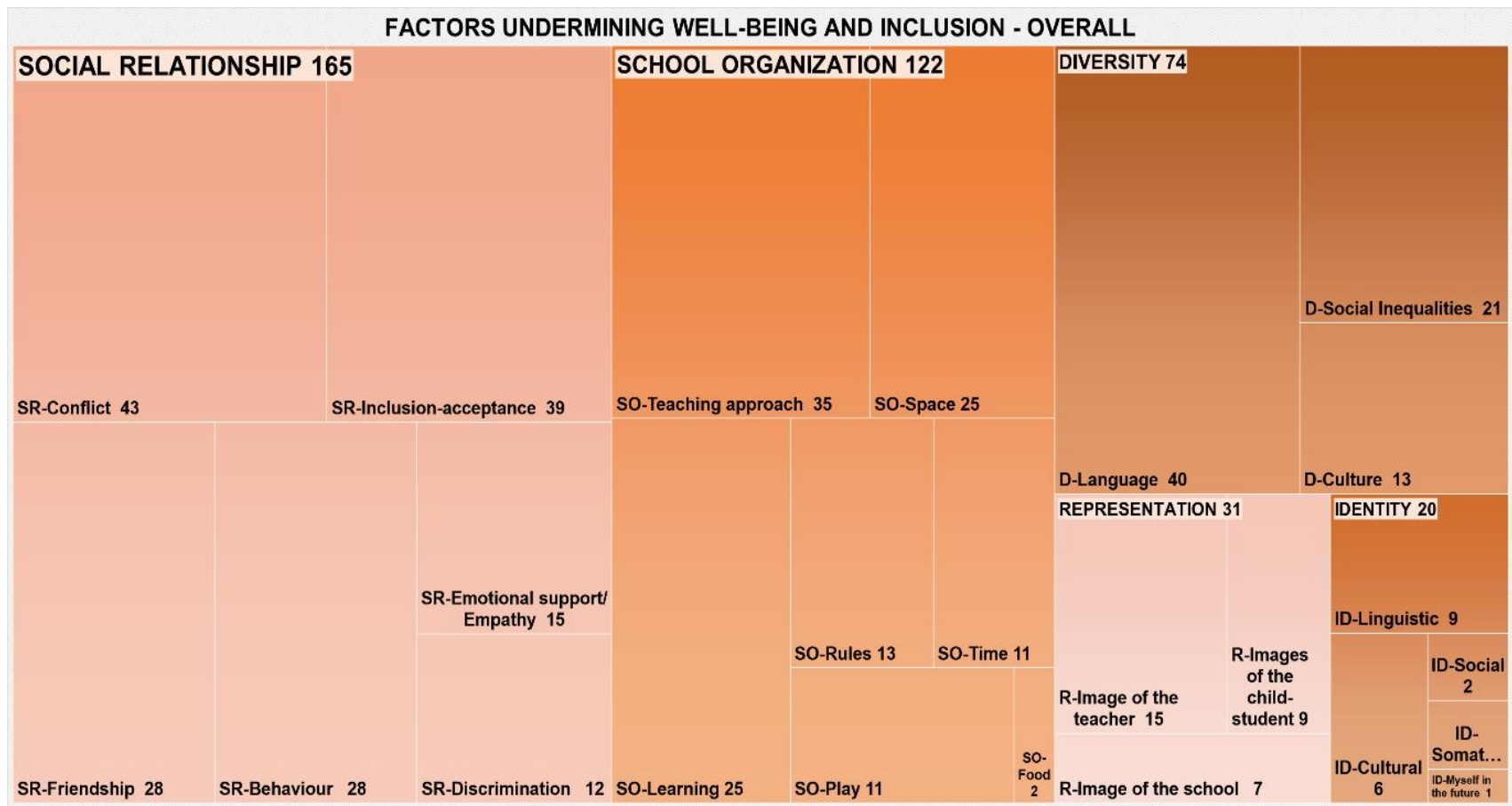


Figure 4. Overall co-occurrence of Factors undermining well-being and inclusion per main thematic code and sub-code

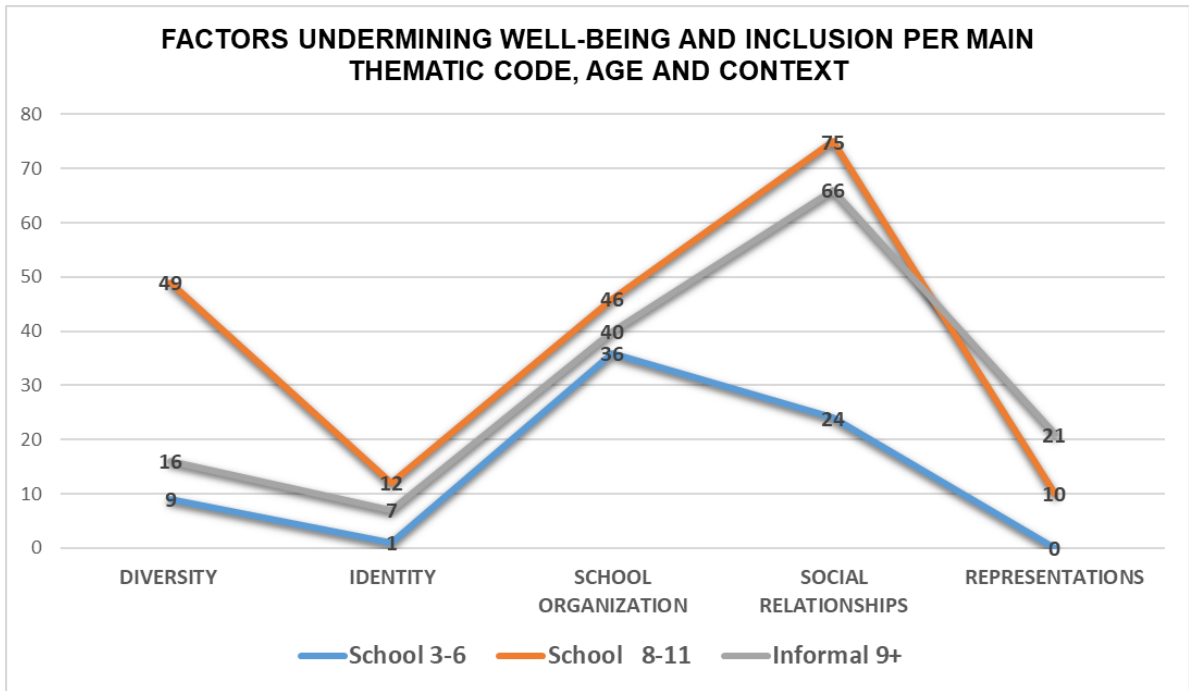


Figure 5. Co-occurrence of Factors undermining well-being and inclusion per main thematic code, age and context

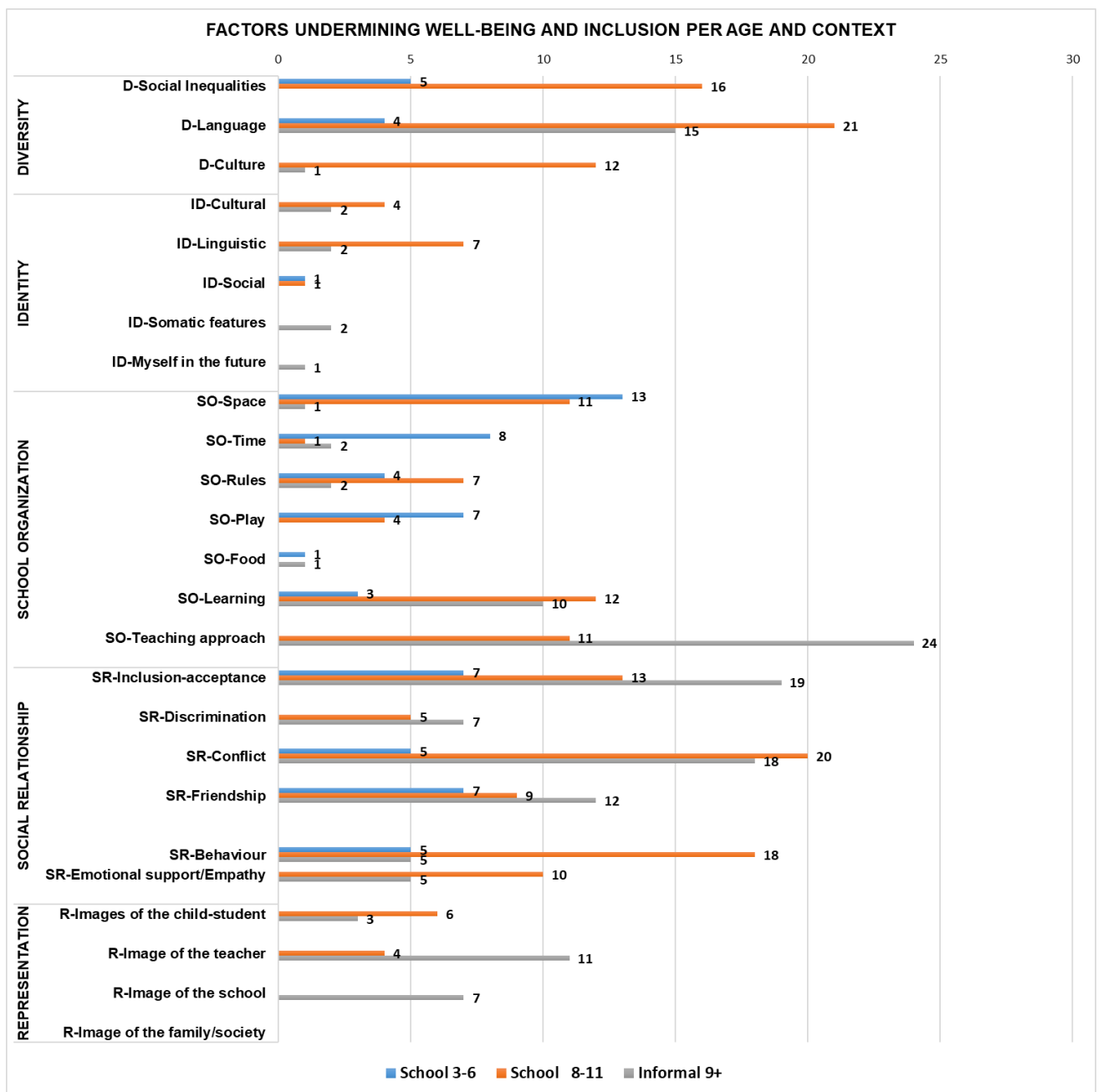


Figure 6. Co-occurrence of Factors undermining well-being and inclusion per code, age and context

Looking at the overall (across-country and age) distribution of the co-occurrences (see Figure 4), the coding thematic area that most frequently co-occurred with the over-code Factors undermining well-being and inclusion was Social relationships (165 co-occurrences), in particular the sub-codes Conflict (43 co-occurrences) e “Inclusion/Acceptance” (39 co-occurrences) and with the sub-code “language” (40 co-occurrences) from the Identity thematic area. Analyzing the co-occurrences per context, it is possible to notice that children from informal and primary-school contexts expressed more ideas and opinions regarding the Factors undermining well-being and inclusion at school, than the children from preschool, who were more able to talk about what promoted well-being and inclusion and propose how to enhance the school environment.

The co-occurrence distribution per age and per context highlights continuities and differences (see Figure 6):

- regarding the **preschoolers**, the thematic area most cited was “School organization”, namely the sub-codes Space (13 co-occurrences), Time (8 co-occurrences), Play (7 co-occurrences) and “Friendship” (7 co-occurrences);
- regarding the **primary school** students, the predominant sub-code was Language (21 co-occurrences) within the Identity thematic area, followed by the codes regarding Social relationships”, in particular the sub-codes “Conflict” (20 co-occurrences) and “Behavior” (18 co-occurrences);
- finally, in the **informal context**, children mainly mentioned “Teaching approach” (24 co-occurrences), a sub-code of the School Organization thematic area, and the sub-codes of Social relationships, especially “Inclusion” (19 co-occurrences) e “Conflict” (18 co-occurrences).

The qualitative analysis makes it possible to enter more deeply into this 'thematic geography' which sees the predominance of the dimensions of "Social relationships" (in particular in relation to "Inclusion / acceptance", "Conflict"; "Behavior") and “School organization” (in particular in relation to "Space", "Time" and "Learning"), as illustrated in the following paragraphs.

### **Code: School Organization**

#### *Sub-code: Space*

The topic of the space as a dimension that can undermine well-being and inclusion at school emerged from all the age and context groups, formal (preschool and primary schools) and informal (post-school informal contexts).

In some cases children complained about the **quality of the spaces**: some spaces or furnishings or materials needed to be fixed or to be better maintained as they were “dirty and chaotic spaces”, as emerged from the Italian study in the primary school; some spaces were considered to be “not well-equipped”, as highlighted in the Norwegian preschool, where some children evaluated it was not well-equipped for the Norwegian weather conditions. In fact, Norwegian children were aware that not only places, but also weather conditions could potentially undermine children’s well-being (especially if not equipped with appropriate clothing):

Researcher: “If the children are not used to the weather, what do we tell them then?”

Child:” They only will sit like this and cry and cry.”

In some other cases, children referred to the **quantity of the spaces**: spaces were judged as not enough or too small, as in the case of the German preschool and the Greek schools; or materials available to children at school were too poor or ruined, as in the Polish case. In this last case, children made reference especially to the materials that should be provided by the families, but who could not sometimes afford the expense, and they complained for instance about the lack of crayons or the bad quality crayons at school.

In other cases, children did not appreciate **rules that constrained them and did not allow them self-determination in the use of the spaces**: children talked about **limited access to places and materials**, as in the Norwegian preschool where children complained that some materials and toys were locked in a closet or in a room; or in the Polish school where toys are not accessible 'because the children didn't know how to play with them nicely'. Children stated that in some cases they were scolded if they used the spaces in a creative and spontaneous way, as in the German preschool: two children, for example, were once told that they were observed trying to "furnish an apartment" in the movement-room and were reminded by a preschool teacher that that room was a space for movement. Children also declared they sometimes felt obliged to use a space when they didn't feel like it, as in the Norwegian preschool where children preferred to stay indoors when it rained.

Finally, in the Italian preschool case, children focused on the experience of new children (from abroad, from the infant-toddler center ...), and they observed that a factor that can make a child feel bad could be **the lack of familiarity with the school spaces**: its environment, its spaces and rules.

#### *Sub-code: Time*

Also several dimensions related to time emerged from all the groups, no matter what age and context they belonged to. A first factor undermining well-being at school indicated by children was the lack of **self-determination in the organization of the daily school routine**, either in choosing what activities to do, or the time schedule. The rigidity of school time was addressed also by the preschool children. In the German preschool case, children would have liked to have a say in their daily routine and sometimes, for example, they would like to play a game longer than expected by the teachers.

Primary school children raised several issues concerning school time.

In Norway, children criticized the fact that **the organization of the school year was frequently not respectful of the cultural and religious diversity** as it is based on the Christian festivities, so Muslim children had to miss some lessons when they had a Muslim festivity.

In the Czech Republic, children observed that they "have to wake up early, they have to sit long hours (some say their backs hurt) and they do not have time for example to read anything other than textbooks". This last example was connected to the general topic of the **quantity of time spent at school** or spent working and studying, taken from other activities and play.

#### *Sub-code: Play*

In connection to the time dimension, children talked about the balance between work and play, a key-pedagogical issue. Children would have liked to have more time to play (as in the German preschool), they did not like restrictions during free play, for example interruptions for mealtimes or playing outside during certain time-slots (Dutch preschool) or they would have liked to be offered more extra-curricular activities (as in the Greek case, especially in the informal context groups, and in the Polish case), or to stay sitting for a shorter time at school (in the Polish case).

#### *Sub-code: Learning*

Children who attended the primary school (both the groups met in the school setting and out

of it) talked a lot about learning and frequently expressed **negative emotions in this regard**: they expressed emotions of boredom, nervousness, fear (i.e in the Czech schools) and also anxiety and stress (for example in the Greek informal contexts).

Three main elements seemed to cause negative emotions around 'the learning issue': exams, grades and homework. Especially **homework** was considered too time-consuming in the Greek informal groups or that it could be done at school instead of at home, as highlighted by the Italian children in both the informal and the primary school setting.

Homework, exams and school learning were contested not only in terms of quantity ("*Sometimes I don't make it and it is 00:00 until I study*" - Greek informal context), but also for the complexity and difficulty of the topics they had to study and the subjects that were not their favorite ones.

### Code: Social relationships

A second group of codes that were highly present in co-occurrence with "Factors undermining well-being at school" was Social relationships, specifically the sub-codes "Inclusion/Acceptance"; "Behavior" and "Conflicts".

#### Sub-code: Inclusion

In many countries, the eldest children (from the primary school level and from the secondary school level when included in the informal contexts) talked about how **inclusion and acceptance in the school environment were not considered enough** or even neglected and absent, especially regarding newly arrived children who had a different linguistic, cultural religious background (as did many of the children interviewed). In the Italian informal context, children talked about **a lack of skills to overcome the linguistic barriers** but also about '**unfriendly attitudes**' in relationships. Also in the Czech primary school settings, children stated that coming from abroad to a foreign country and entering school was not easy and for many reasons a child could feel uneasy for a long time. Generally, children mentioned feelings and experiences of exclusion when schoolmates engaged in disrespectful behaviors and in many countries children in the eldest groups pinpointed jeering and bullying were present, strongly affecting well-being and inclusion. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviors were strictly connected to this.

#### Sub-code: Discrimination

The topic of discrimination came out more in an indirect way, frequently talking about jeering, but also in direct way, like in the Italian primary school. In this case, children explicitly described several mechanisms that produced exclusion among classmates, in reference to race, gender, religion and language. They focused on discriminatory behaviors as part of the overarching problem of bullying and they created many outputs (such as video interviews, billboards, video documentaries) to sensitize teachers and children. At the origin of discriminatory bullying behaviors, they identified influence external to the school environment like parents, relatives, people in general, the media. Some children highlighted how the somatic features could be ethnic markers targeted by social stigma (e.g. hair or skin color). Other children emphasized more general physical characteristics (i.e weight, as in the Czech primary school). In several countries, also speaking a second language (mainly the language of instruction, that

usually was also the national language) with a foreign accent or partially incorrectly could be a source of anxiety and feeling exposed to the social mockery. Children declared that those kinds of mockeries also happened in the preschool.

#### *Sub-code: Conflict*

Conflict is another cross-cutting theme that was mentioned and treated (albeit otherwise) cross-ages. Children recognized that the poor quality of peer relationships, fights, shouting, hostility, violence, being rude and making fun of others could make an important contribution to their feeling of malaise at school (as highlighted especially in the informal Greek context, in the Norwegian primary school and in the Czech primary school). Fights were experienced as an element of malaise, not only by the children who took part in them, but also by those who experienced them without being directly involved: as one child recalled, it happens to move away from the places where there are on-going conflicts. A negative attitude that hindered well-being could come from both classmates and teachers. In fact, if primary school children strongly criticized children who were bullying, doing "something to others" or "jeering at people" (as in the Italian and Czech primary schools), the youngest (in the preschool German pupils) and the oldest (in the Italian informal context) affirmed that the lack of intervention by educators and teachers in conflict resolution was an element of profound distress for children.

#### *Subcode: Friendship*

The presence of friends was an important factor for well-being: children did not feel good on school days when their friends are not at preschool (Dutch context). As already emerged in the previous subtopics, many children from the preschool, school and informal contexts emphasized how unfriendly behaviors (e.g. teasing, mocking, laughing at each other) and the lack of friends were at the origin of feelings of malaise. Also linked to the difficulty of making friends, the lack of ability to speak the language of the country was highlighted, also by preschool children (see next paragraph).

### **Code: Diversity**

#### *Sub-code: Language*

The linguistic dimension was highlighted by many children as a central element and that was at the origin of various situations that undermined malaise at school.

A first element was the **lack of competence** in the language of the country of schooling. This emerged particularly in multicultural contexts marked by a strong influx of newly arrived children (e.g. Italian preschool and primary school, Greek informal context, Czech primary school). The linguistic barrier was indicated by many as a factor of exclusion in / from the group.

In many contexts, children stressed that the lack of linguistic competence has a strong negative impact on newcomers. First of all, not understanding the majority language and the inability to communicate at school could deepen feelings of estrangement in newcomers (as highlighted in the Czech primary school). Secondly, it could prevent them from making friends and be at the origin of discriminatory behaviors among the classmates, who at times might make fun of them (e.g. inability to use correct declinations).

Thirdly, it could be an obstacle to learning when some children have difficulty understanding, and this became a further element of malaise when the teachers' assistance was missing and led to learning content by heart without understanding it (in the Greek informal context).

A second element concerned the mother tongue. In particular, **the prohibition to speak in one's own language of origin by teachers** (as underlined in Italian formal contexts, Norwegian context) was perceived as discriminatory, especially for some languages (such as Arabic). But children also admitted that sometimes they chose not to use their mother tongue in class for fear of **mockery and being made fun of** by their classmates. This fear derives from teasing episodes experienced at preschool, as reported children from the Czech primary school.

### Code: Representations

A third code that was present in the co-occurrence table with "Factors undermining well-being at school" was "Representation" and particularly the sub-codes "Image of teachers" and "Image of the school".

#### Sub-code: Image of teachers

The older children highlighted some of the teachers' attitudes as potential obstacles to children's well-being: according to some children from the Czech Republic "bad teachers are the reasons why kids leave the school". Among the negative characteristics of teachers, the children mentioned

the rigidity of some teachers (strict or yelling at students), teachers not teaching at all (Greek informal context), having favorites in the classroom or giving excessive homework, punishments and punishment homework: *"Here, one thing I don't like at all is that only a few individuals in the class behave badly, they often punish everyone. You already have to suffer from the chaos of some classmates, then that of the teachers and in addition the punishment of all classmates"* (Italian primary school). At the same time, the high turnover of teachers is seen as a factor undermining well-being (Czech Republic and Poland).

### Code: Identity

Finally, while we can say that in many cases identity was not directly addressed but present 'between the lines', in some cases it also emerged directly as an element undermining the well-being at school, as in the Polish primary school case and in the Italian informal context case, where children expressed concerns about self-image and the will to change themselves, their lives and their sense of being or feeling part of a 'lost youth'.

### Transformative factors and proposals to change schools

Looking at the overall (across-country and age) distribution of the co-occurrences (see Figure 7), the thematic coding area that most frequently co-occurred with the over-code "Proposals to change schools" and inclusion was "School organization" (180 co-occurrences) - in particular the sub-codes "Space" (42 co-occurrences), "Learning" (35 co-occurrences) and "Teaching approach" (32 co-occurrences) - and Social relationships (120 co-occurrences), in particular the

sub-codes “Inclusion/Acceptance” (46 co-occurrences) and “Emotional support” (23 co-occurrences), with the sub-code “Language” (55 co-occurrences) from the thematic area “Identity”.

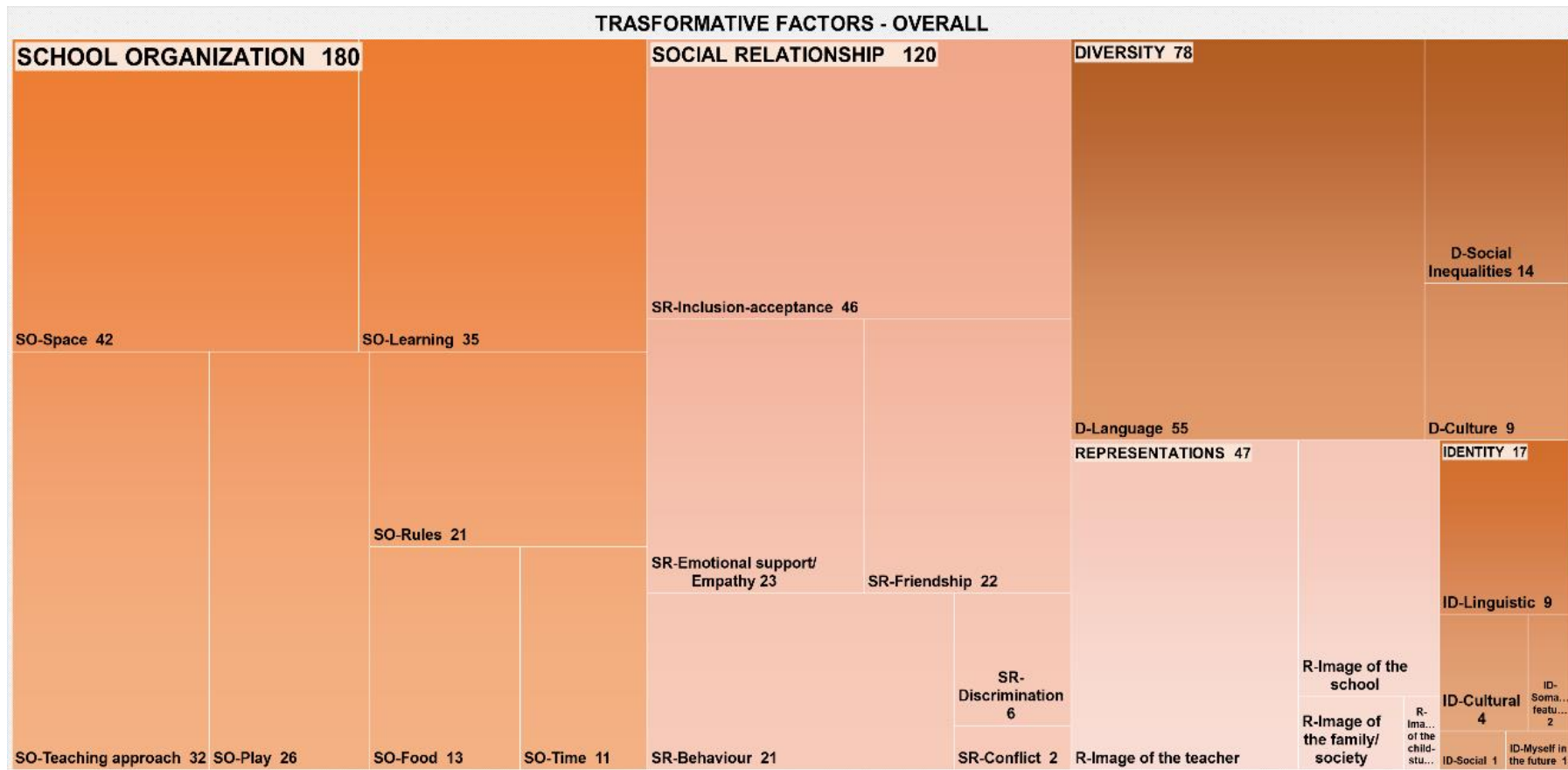


Figure 7. Overall co-occurrence of Transformative factors per main thematic code and sub-code

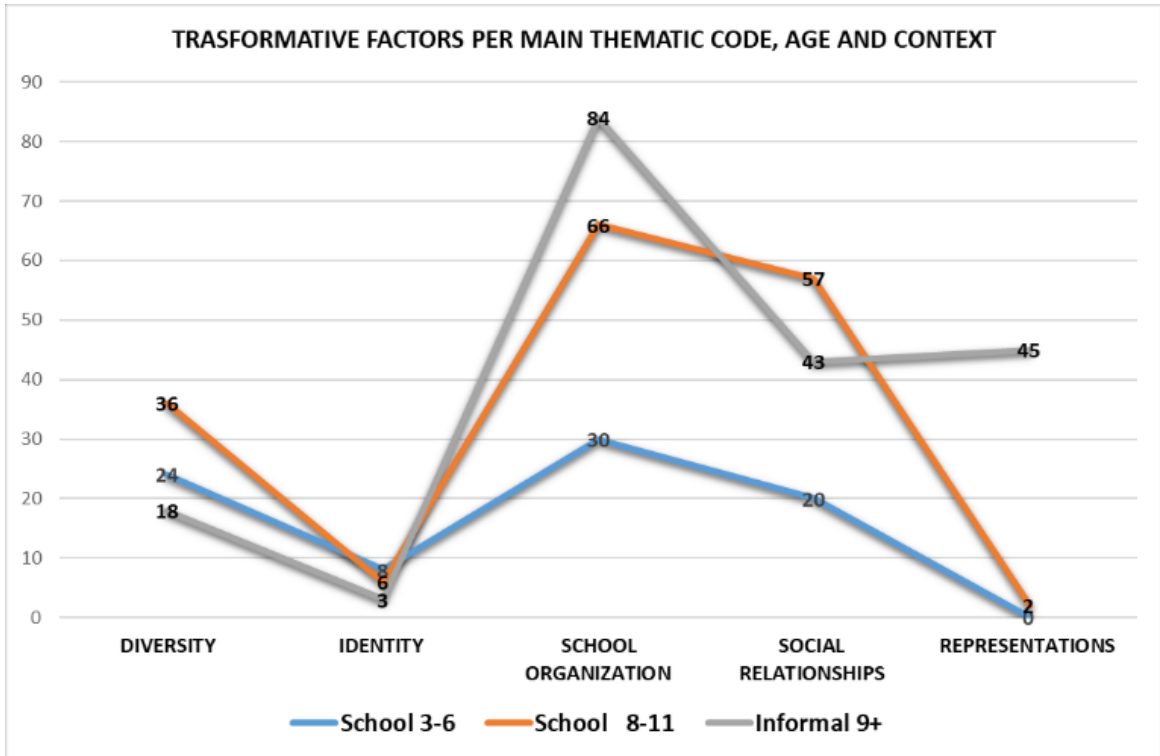


Figure 8. Co-occurrence of Transformative factors per main thematic code, age and context

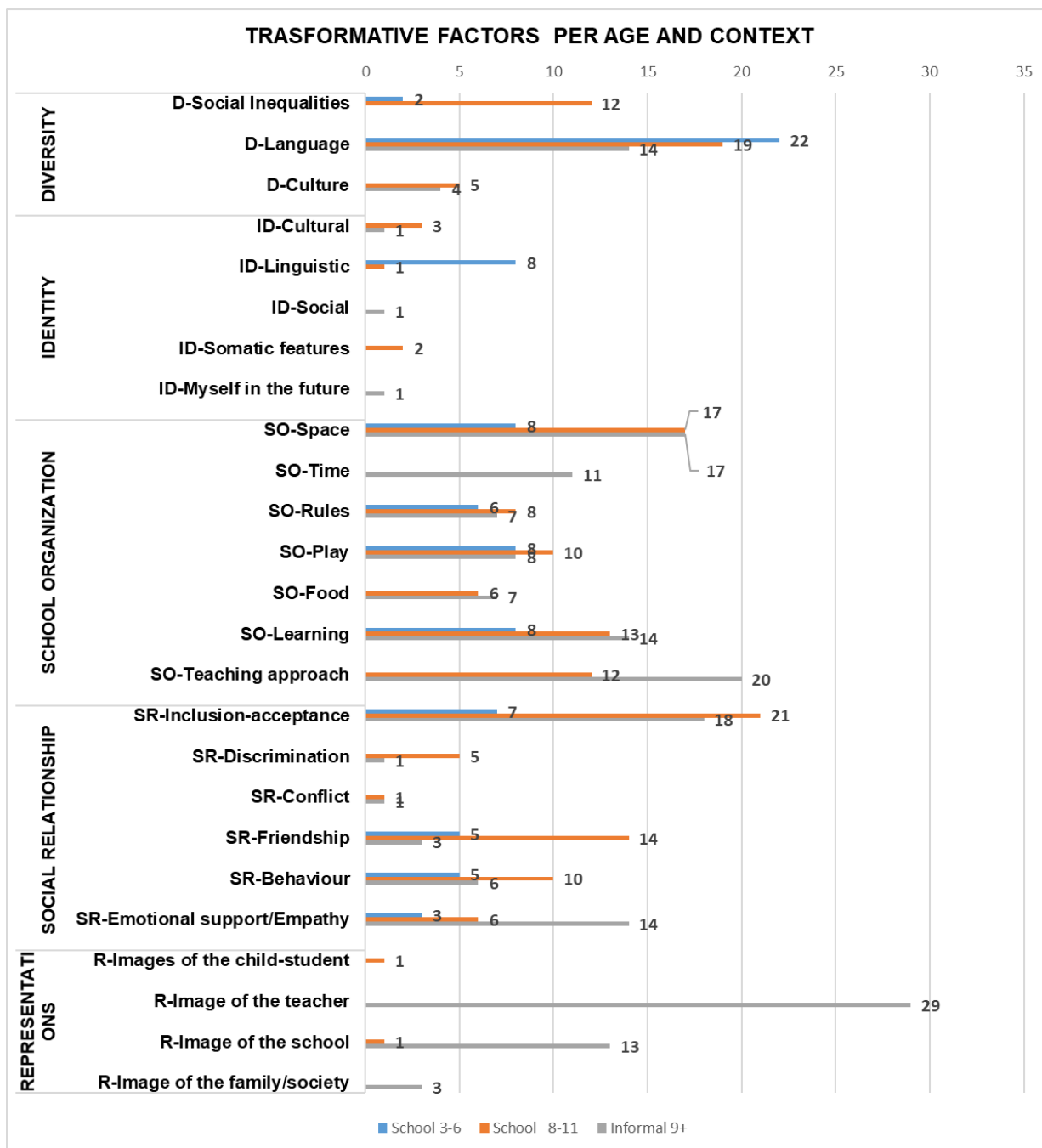


Figure 9. Co-occurrence of Transformative factors per code, age and context

The co-occurrence distribution per age and per context highlights continuities and differences (see Figure 9):

- regarding preschoolers, the thematic area most addressed was “School organization” (30 co-occurrences), namely the sub-codes “Space” (8 co-occurrences), “Learning” (8 co-occurrences) and “Play” (8 co-occurrences) and the sub-codes “Language” (22 co-occurrences) from the thematic area “Diversity” and “Linguistic identity” from the thematic area “Identity” (8 co-occurrences);
- regarding primary school students, the predominant sub-code was “School

organization” (66 co-occurrences) and in particular “Space” (17 co-occurrences). The others main sub-codes were “Inclusion” (21 co-occurrences) and Language” (19 co-occurrences) in the code the “Social relationship”“;

- finally, in the informal context, children mainly mentioned the thematic area “School organization” (84 co-occurrences) and, in particular, “Teaching approach” (20 co-occurrences) followed by “Image of the teacher” (29 co-occurrences) in the code “Representation”; “Emotional support/Empathy” (14 co-occurrences) in the code “Social relationships” and “Language” (14 co-occurrences) in the code “Diversity”.

### Code: School organization

#### Sub-code: Space

Space was considered a salient aspect by the children who offered many proposals centered around some main themes:

- some proposals (Greek and Italian contexts) concerned a **more beautiful and decorated school and classroom** (with bright colors, smiling emoticons, more pictures): according to the children, if it was more welcoming and joyful, it could reassure newcomers (proposal by Italian preschoolers);
- in many contexts (Italy, Norway, Czech Republic and Poland) children proposed several ways of **introducing newcomers (especially non-native speakers) to the spaces of the school/preschool**: the Italian preschoolers created a digital mixed-media (visual and audio) tour of their school to present the different spaces/rooms and the rules, involving parents with immigrant backgrounds who provided written and audio translations in other languages for newcomers; the Italian primary school students proposed that a child “tutor” to accompany each new child around the school; the Norwegian preschoolers proposed showing newcomers places of significance that they themselves liked for their play, outdoor trips outside the preschool area and teaching them how to dress for outdoors (rain and cold weather); the Czech children prepared a school map for newcomers;
- others students (e.g. Greek and Polish contexts) proposed to improve the structural facilities of the school, especially those which were broken or not very comfortable for the children (such as squat toilets)
- some children (Polish context) proposed also **more space** for playing football and basketball, a swimming pool, a playground area or dancing space and suggested creating **new spaces** (e.g. a quiet rest area that would help the children who were tired of school noise or adding a second floor to the school);
- other transformative factors focused on the **outdoor spaces** (e.g. planting more trees in the garden or a forest in the playground, making clothes and boots easily accessible, more bins to keep their schoolyard clean);
- other students highlighted the children’s need to recognize the **importance of individual preferences, spaces and personal belonging** (Dutch context).

### *Sub-code: Learning*

Some proposals (Italian informal context, Czech and Norwegian primary school) were related to the sub-topic “Learning”, more precisely:

- to change the subjects they found difficult or have easier subjects;
- to change the way of learning and make it more playful;
- abolishing stressful exams;
- providing newcomers with an extra teacher.

### *Sub-code: Teaching approach*

Some proposals regarded the teaching approach and, more generally, teachers:

- In the Italian informal context, the participants suggested having younger, more competent teachers and that there be teacher continuity without too many changes over the years, as well as the possibility to choose some subjects and have more variety (e.g. foreign languages)
- Many children suggested less traditional teaching approaches (encouraging trips, computer science, the gym, the swimming pool and "learning lessons through games and not through the usual lessons");
- Children emphasized the relational aspect of learning and suggested way of learning "by playing (...) all in a circle"; "Because in class sometimes we are divided into pairs and we can all be together only during the break. Instead when you go on a trip, you make in line in pairs and we are all close"; more time to socialize; give the opportunity to do homework at school instead of having to do it at home alone.

### *Sub-code: Play*

In their proposals, children talked about balancing studying and playing and suggested ways to combine playing and lessons (beside those who would like to “never have lessons.”!), developing a more attractive set of extracurricular activities including field trips.

Children’s proposals about friendship highlighted that play offered space for establishing and deepening friendships. In fact, play has a crucial role in welcoming newcomers: Italian preschoolers suggested letting newcomers play with their toys, inviting them to play together and read books they like as important factors for well-being, as well as hiding toys harmful for younger children. Children (Czech primary school) also underlined that playing was a way to help overcome language barriers with foreign newcomers.

### *Sub-code: Rules*

Proposals concerning rules related to the following themes:

- informing newcomers about the rules and making them understandable (Norwegian and Italian preschool);
- making sure everyone respected the rules (e.g. not allowing older children to enter their school since they caused problems such as destroying facilities).

### *Sub-code: Food*

Few children (Italian primary and informal context) asked for a more varied lunch with international dishes and dishes from the culture of the foreign children so that they could feel at home.

### *Sub-code: Time*

The proposals concerning “Time” concerned to have right to self-determine the use of time (e.g. where to spend time during breaks and during afterschool time, Polish primary schools), to lengthen the break time and to start school later in the morning.

## **Code: Social relationships**

### *Sub-code: Inclusion*

In many countries (Netherlands, Czech Republic, Norway, Italy), many proposals aimed at welcoming newcomers and making them feel welcomed such as:

- choosing specific children to welcome newcomers, namely the most friendly ones;
- informing newcomers about the country’s cultural traditions and about the city they lived in;
- introducing new children to classmates (e.g. preparing a chart with classmates and teachers);
- welcoming newcomers with drawings, multilingual posters, parties, cakes, songs and dances in the mother tongues, .

Children (from the Dutch context) also proposed over-arching bonding group symbols and preparing collective products (e.g. the ‘group book’).

### *Sub-code: Emotional support and empathy*

Italian and Norwegian preschoolers’ and primary school students’ proposals included ways to provide emotional support to newly-arrived children such as:

- calming them down with a story;
- cuddling and kissing them;
- giving them food and care;
- being helpful and making children feel safe.;
- being kind;
- teaching exciting things;
- becoming friends;
- avoiding children’s over-enthusiasm towards newcomers that could stress them.

Children also proposed institutional practices to welcome newcomers, such as placing a

bench for newly arrived children who have no friends yet so that other children could go to sit beside the “lonely ones”.

More generally, children suggested increasing empathic attitudes: "Trying to communicate, even without speaking languages, for example. That is, it's enough that to understand what a person needs. As I said before, put yourself in their shoes. Not only knowing a language (...) you have to always put yourself in the shoes of that person and understand what they're saying, in that moment.

#### *Sub-code: Friendship*

Friendship was perceived as the most fundamental premise for inclusion into the group. Children proposed both institutional and individual practices to promote friendship among peers including newcomers. Friendly attitudes and institutional practices to facilitate the development of friendship were seen by Italian, Norwegian and Czech children as key transformative factors to improve the well-being of newcomers such as:

- making friendship bracelets;
- organizing learning activities that promote friendship.

Alongside institutional practices, children were aware of their active role in becoming friends with newly-arrived children.

#### *Sub-code: Discrimination*

Norwegian and Italian pupils were very concerned about the fact that discriminatory behaviors and teasing should not exist in the school environment. Respectful attitudes concerned religious, linguistic and cultural diversity and other students' opinions. Mutual respect (in particular for diversity) should come both from peers and teachers who should treat everybody as equals (“We are all like each other and at the same time we are different from one another. We are all worth the same and perfect.”).

Italian students proposed activities to raise awareness on the theme of religious diversity and discrimination, such as videos and posters as channels to launch an anti-bullying message and a digital multi-religious calendar posted on the school website. They also proposed have friendly attitudes so a bully can stop acting like a bully and become "a normal friend who only has had a sad past".

#### *Sub-code: Conflict*

Czech students proposed talking things out together in case of fights or conflicts, involving the teacher or calling parents to school.

### **Code: Diversity**

#### *Sub-code: Language*

There were a lot of proposals about language from both preschoolers and students of different countries. First of all, children proposed to show more solidarity and mutual help between classmates, finding ways to overcome language barriers with newcomers by:

- trying to communicate, even without speaking language or through *universal gestures* (e.g., hugs, kisses, caresses);
  - using drawings or photos labelled with bilingual words;
  - using peers and parents as linguistic mediators or having translators at school ;
  - using their mother tongue - if they shared it,
  - having peers to teach them the majority language (i.e. teaching new children words by repeating them when they looked at drawings and images)
  - making small multilingual dictionaries of basic words, phrases, the alphabet and how to count
  - helping them understand what was said
  - teaching little by little so it does not become too much, so not so many things had to be kept in mind;
- creating a multilingual poster to welcome newcomers (with the word 'welcome' written in different languages).

Students also suggested institutional engagement in multilingualism and L2 teaching such as:

- creating extra-curricular language courses;
- providing an extra teacher supporting newcomers with the language;
- increasing the language and communication skills of the teachers;
- devoting more time to the new arrivals, showing them more attention and flexibility.

But language was not only a barrier for newcomers: some Greek children proposed postponing the year that children started studying religion, since there were a lot of difficult words.

Moreover, children proposed using language awareness approaches through institutional practices at school, namely:

- using various languages (e.g. celebrating by singing songs in different languages; counting in different languages) to offer everyone the chance to 'feel at home' and express themselves even in their home language.
- adding books in different languages and about classmates' countries of origin of to the school library;
- learning more languages at school

#### *Sub-code: Social inequalities*

In some countries (Greece and Norway), pupils suggested having free lunch from the school canteen and providing a school uniform. For newly-arrived, low-income students, they suggested free school trips to them.

## ETHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY

The international study *Children's views on inclusion and wellbeing at school* offers an interesting contribution in a seldom-explored field with respect to how to talk with children about delicate issues as inclusion and respect for social and cultural differences. In the ISOTIS Children Study, the focus was not to 'measure' identification or acculturation processes regarding the perception of discrimination (as is done in studies in the field of social psychology), but to enter into children's '*direct experience*', in order to reflect with children on what they considered to be factors of well-being or discomfort in the school context.

One of the main methodological challenges was to elaborate a research protocol that would enable researchers to truly listen to children, that is, "taking full account of what they tell us" (Roberts, 2000, p. 225):

As Helen Roberts argues,

"It is clear that listening to children, hearing children, and acting on what children say are three very different activities, although they are frequently elided as if they were not (...). There have always been people who have listened, sometimes there have been people who have heard, and perhaps less often, those who have acted wisely on what children have to say" (2000, p. 238).

The research protocol we developed tried to meet the challenge of listening to children, hearing them and acting on what they said. In this sense, it was based on the idea that the research proposals needed to be adapted to the children according to their age and the context. For these reasons, different kinds of stimuli were provided in order to reach the same objectives and answer the same research questions. For instance, the stimuli for pre-schoolers needed to be very direct and concrete, whereas for teenagers the stimuli were more indirect, such as a letter from a researcher or clips from a movie.

Not only were different kinds of stimuli included in the research protocol, but it was crucial to provide a methodology with a high level of flexibility and customization, yet maintaining common elements across ages, target groups and countries. To guarantee this process of customization, a main pillar of the methodological approach was the observation of the context (and the negotiation with the professionals involved).

Given the variability of adults' ideas about children's ability (Garnier, 1995) and local pedagogical orientations, this preliminary step not only aimed at letting the children (and professionals) get to know the researchers and the research process, but also allowed the researchers to familiarize with the context, in particular with:

- the professionals' ideas about children, children's roles in the school life and in the learning experiences and children's ability to participate;
- the professionals' local pedagogical culture to listen to children and ask them for proposals.

These characteristics regarding each context were crucial variables that researchers had to take into consideration in order to define the ways, techniques and times required for the involvement of children in a research process characterized by a high level of **direct**

**participation.** Including children in a process of research, participation and reflection on the school context and proposing changes, required careful evaluation of the techniques and the time needed to avoid hastily evaluating children as incapable or not yet mature enough to participate. The negotiation of the research protocol and the timing with the professionals was thus a key point in the preparation of the fieldwork.

**Ethical challenges** were also significant in our research process, especially with regard to children's ages and the topics addressed (Bittencourt Ribeiro, 2017).

A key point of the theoretical and methodological framework that was a good choice was to adopt a positive and constructive stance in the research approach involving children, aiming at improving their critical analysis of their experiences at school and at improving the school context itself, avoiding focusing only on the negative aspects.

The children had the opportunity to talk about themselves and also to share painful experiences in and out of school. This self-revelation was not an end in itself and was not put in the spotlight by the researchers as the main object of research, but was welcomed within a path of constructive and positive work regarding the analysis of resources and the possibilities for improving the context.

The question of children's participation and the notion of children's voices have been critically addressed and deconstructed (Komulainen, 2007; Lewis, 2010). Research with children, especially with very young ones, gives rise to major ethical and methodological questions. In the existing literature, the inherent risks of oversimplification, hypocrisy, manipulation or practices that are more formal than substantive are highlighted (Atweh & Burton, 1995; Einarisdóttir, 2007); Fielding, 2004; Palaiologou, 2012, 2014). Notwithstanding this, children's voices need to be expressed and heard. These issues were taken into account, especially considering the very delicate issues addressed by the study such as inclusiveness, well-being and respect for diversity (Bittencourt Ribeiro, 2017).

The ethical questions that we addressed in designing the research methods regarded the positive involvement of young children in exploring and discussing inclusion/exclusion in school contexts characterized by cultural diversity and social inequalities by addressing of these issues in a sensitive yet meaningful way and aligning the research questions and methodology with the children's competence, motivations and interests.

The analysis of the studies conducted in the eight countries involved allowed us to identify some of the complexities and challenges encountered during the research process and identify some criteria and resolution strategies, which we present briefly as a contribution to the research to be carried out for future studies in this field.

From an ethical point of view, there was a formal plan that included aspects related to privacy and informed consent, also required from the children before starting and during the course of the activities in relation to their participation in the study as well as the possibility to photograph the children and/or their products or audio and video record them. An ethics process plan covered a multiplicity of aspects, also regarding methodology, on how subjects were involved during the course of the study. The ethics of the process allowed us to avoid "the risks of drifting towards ethical absolutism, when the types of ethical problems we encountered depended on the situation and social characteristics of the children in question." (Sarcinelli 2015, p. 9).

### Formal ethics level

The 'formal-ethical' dimension was extremely relevant also from the point of view of the research process, as it represented the first form of communication regarding the involvement of the subjects, which was very delicate in this study for several reasons: the themes addressed by the study, the age of the children in some cases of pre-school age, the lack of mastery in the national language of the families of the children involved, the flexibility and openness required by operators and teachers.

The attention and care given to communicating the research aims, how children were involved and the use of data in respect of privacy in order to prevent resistance at the outset was of particular importance in order to avoid the counterproductive effects of resistance and suspicion, especially in families.

### Communication and consent of professionals

This level of dialogue did not present any significant critical points, although in some cases it was important to negotiate the timing of the activities so that they were not excessively invasive within the flow of teaching. In this regard, the aims and timing of the research were not always in harmony with the aims and timing of the school and its program, but above all, the experience of children and the significance of their participation in the research, especially the continuity that this experience required, was not always at the center of attention on the part of teachers. From the very first communications and negotiations with the school context, the centrality of the children's experience was fundamental in the reflection and collaboration with teachers. Excessive segmentation of the research experience, especially with very young children, made the research process and the outcomes of the work qualitatively worse, in addition to an excessive concentration of the research work in a short period of time (as will be highlighted later).

In communicating with teachers, it was crucial to ensure that research aims and methodologies were fully understood because teachers, as well as other operators in extracurricular contexts, were 'mediators' of fundamental importance for the success of the study with both children and families; they were key informants on the characteristics of the local context and its actors and offered valuable suggestions in identifying the most appropriate communication methods and strategies during the early stages of research communication and consensus-raising.

### Communication and consent of parents

In most of the studies, families gave their consent without making relevant criticisms and demands. However, in some cases difficulties were encountered: in the Czech Republic, in one of the schools, the communication from the school was initially imprecise and some of the parents refused to give their consent, also expressing doubts about the time that the activities of the study would take away from regular teaching. The research team had to meet this group of parents and modify the letter of consent based on the parents' requests and ensure that they would inform the parents the week before each activity about the activity itself. In the same

school, one parent maintained a hostile position to the project for ideological reasons, not sharing the project's inclusive aims with the Roma minority. This parent agreed to let his daughter participate in the study, but not to collect any data about his daughter.

This case highlights in particular the delicacy of communication with families in research work with children, even in a protected context such as school, where teachers and/or other operators were present at all activities and who contributed, at the request of researchers, to adapting the activities themselves.

Ethical questions also arose when a parent requested that his or her daughter not contribute to the research data, in opposition to the inclusive purpose that characterized the research work, also consistent with the school's educational project. It was not easy to explain to a child why, for example, their work would not be used in publications or shared with the local community, when she took part in the activities and perhaps showed appreciation for them. It was not easy to assess the extent to which a parent could express ideas that were radically opposed not only to the research project, but to those values in the educational project of the school chosen for that child.

In the Norwegian study, the letter of consent developed by local authorities in accordance with national guidelines, after a long process of screening for approval on the ethics of the research, was complex and the research team, in collaboration with teachers, had to rework the form to make it accessible to those parents who did not have Norwegian as their mother tongue. As the Norwegian colleagues pointed out, the letter almost had a "frightening potential" and it was essential to adapt it to the interlocutors. In addition to the difficulties regarding the period of the year when the research took place (during the Easter period, due to the long wait for approval by the local authority), among the possible causes of the non-enthusiastic support by parents was the lack of understanding the written communication. Other observations: the researchers found that other research had been carried out in the area and had aroused skepticism from ethnic and cultural minority families because they felt they had almost been damaged by the results of the research; the teachers, who supported the process of recruitment of parents by informing and motivating them in person, also pointed out that the parents did not consider the subject of the research and its aims relevant.

Communication from a distance must be very well constructed, responding not only to consistency with formal guidelines, but to the characteristics of the interlocutors, and it is necessary to meet the families personally, allowing local operators to mediate in this communication, leveraging the relationship of trust already established and built by them with the families. The involvement of children raises even more concerns and doubts than a study that only involves adults, and trust is to be won starting from the very first steps in the research communication. This is why it is very important that teachers have a very good understanding of the purpose and work methods.

The gradual trust placed by parents in researchers can also become a criterion for guiding the research process itself, as in the Czech case mentioned above. The researchers, in light of the fact that parents had expressed doubts about recording the focus groups with children, chose to postpone this activity to the last part of the journey, allowing parents to become familiar with the activities of the experience, where the researchers regularly communicated with parents, who in turn were able to observe the reactions of their children and their participation (as reported at home by the children themselves) over time.

## Communication and consent of children

Regarding the children, researchers in all countries made efforts to guarantee that children were fully informed, providing them a genuine choice about whether to participate, ensuring that they had the option to choose not to participate. Children were provided with an oral explanation about the research, using age appropriate language with question time, stressing more than once that they were free to participate or quit whenever they wanted. During the study, the children's consent was seen as an on-going process, renegotiated verbally at each stage of the research, enabling children to withdraw at any time and asking children for their permission for audio and/or video recording.

In some cases, such as in the Polish study, the researchers asked for the consent of the children (aged 10/11 years) several times, asking for permission to photograph the work of the children for each activity, noting that in some cases the children refused without giving a specific reason. The researchers hypothesized that the children had taken the opportunity, probably not frequent in school, to express an opinion and make decisions, almost exacerbating this possibility. It was possible that the researcher's request for consent had to be made during the course of the experience without excess. For example, before the start of an activity, it is advisable to ask for consent, recalling during the process that it is possible to withdraw consent.

In the Italian case, some complexities arose with respect to the request for consent addressed to 4 and 5 year old children in preschool. The formulation of the consent form for children was designed after an extensive literature review on the topic, following the guidelines provided by the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) project (Graham et al., 2013) and was agreed on with the class teachers, simplifying the content while maintaining the completeness of the information. The consent form was proposed to the children using a digital platform, integrated with figures and drawings. The researchers explained the aim of the research, its implications and their rights to each child, and then assisted them in the completion of the form. Most of the children completed the consent individually, while, following the teachers' suggestion, the shyest children went through the process together with one or two peers. At that age, some children were quite aware and ready to understand, even posing questions on the use of the video recordings (i.e. asking if videos would be published on YouTube), but several seemed to sign the consent form without understanding, despite all the efforts to provide further explanations, media and using simple language. The fieldwork observations made the researchers question the validity and the significance for children of proposing an informed consent form to children that young and raised interest in exploring alternative solutions. For example, it is possible to present children different requests for consent step-by-step (before being audio or video taped for instance) and monitor the children's participation and enjoyment during the research process, as will be highlighted regarding the process ethics.

Consent, required from both parents and children, had to be carefully coordinated to avoid situations of divergence, which even if well explained to the children, still generated some discomfort. For example, in primary school in Italy, some children gave consent to be videotaped and photographed where their parents refused consent. As far as the children were concerned, it was explained that the will of the parent is binding. Some of the children experienced the fact that they could not be included in the documentation of the research work as a limit, with respect to their classmates.

## Process Ethics and Methodological challenges

The process of research with children, even more than with adults, presents numerous challenges that are often both ethical and methodological in nature. From the analysis of the empirical studies conducted in this international study, some particularly salient aspects can be identified.

### The priority of the educational value and the pleasantness of the experience for the subjects

As already illustrated in the Technical Report and in the Manual that guided the research work, in all countries, beyond the formal requirements for research with young children, the methodological approach and the fundamental ethical criteria of the research framework gave priority to the formative value of the research experience for children (compared to the mere heuristic interest in knowing children's opinions) and to offering children an engaging experience of active participation with concrete effects on the school environment, in a pleasant atmosphere.

The choices regarding the activities, the adaptations made locally and the realization of at least part of the proposals of the children (which took place in many of the contexts involved in the study) represented the backbone of this positive, constructive and participatory approach, which was ensured by paying attention to the communication and relationship modes during the work and observing the behavior of the children in a sensitive way.

In all the country reports, the researchers observed how they tried to be as sensitive as possible in order to understand the situation and the perspective of each individual child during the activities and data collection. As effectively described in the Norwegian country report "If there was any indication that a situation became unpleasant for the children, the researchers considered carefully whether it was justifiable to continue or whether the child should be made aware that they could leave the situation, end the activity or adjust the activity without any problems".

The reasons why a research experience may become unpleasant are varied. In some cases, it may be fatigue or concentration difficulties due to activities that are not suitable for the participants' linguistic, cognitive, socio-cultural or social skills (such as the ability to work in groups), or to unsuitable times (e.g. activities carried out at the end of the day after an entire day of school as in the Italian informal context). Hence the importance of having a suitable setting, as discussed in more detail in the following pages. It is therefore crucial that researchers exercise constant adaptability, trying to grasp when it is time to end the activity or "lighten it".

Although in a constructive perspective, the research also brought out experiences of suffering. All researchers had to constantly seek the right balance between the right of children to express these experiences and the duty to protect them. Even apparently simple activities, such as interviews or individual conversations between the researcher and the child, required constant monitoring of the extent to which a child was enjoying the interaction, or if being asked questions created difficulty or boredom. In some studies, such as the English one, one of the researcher's strategies was to remind the children they could interrupt the conversation at any time. In the Italian study, following an interview interrupted by a moment of emotion

on the part of the interviewee, it was decided to include the presence of an educator during the interviews (initially conducted only by the researchers) so that children could have a point of reference able to handle these experiences of suffering, which would not just remain "research data".

In other situations, the discomfort arose during moments of group sharing, in some cases because of the lack of respect for confidentiality (when, for example, the children revealed events in which other children were protagonists, without realizing that the latter might not want to share them) or because of the fact of sharing their stereotyped opinions towards some ethnic groups. On these occasions, the adults (researchers and operators) intervened with a two-fold objective: on the one hand, to stem the situation to protect children who might feel offended; on the other hand, to seize the opportunity to pass on to children participation modalities that were respectful of others, their fragility and right to confidentiality. In the Italian case, the children were often reminded to share the facts without having to name the people involved.

It is clear, therefore, that even with an approach oriented towards elements of well-being, it is almost inevitable to find oneself in front of the suffering or discomfort of the participants, especially when it comes to stigmatized minorities or targets carrying multiple fragilities. Learning to welcome and contain suffering is therefore a sine qua non for researchers eager to open up to the voices of children, learning together with them the precious competence of listening to and welcoming the experience of young participants.

### **Time as a crucial variable for access to the world of children**

As in the theoretical background illustrated in the Technical report, Welty and Lundy (2013; Lundy, 2007), four separate factors are highlighted to truly listen to children's perspectives and allow children to have meaningful experiences within research: space, voice, audience and influence. The research conducted allowed the emergence of a fifth key-factor that deserves great attention: time. Time is in fact a fundamental variable; it is essential to take the necessary time, both before and during the research.

Before the research, it took time to find the right context, familiarize with it and its actors, first and foremost the children.

First of all, procedures to find the right context and carry out acts related to formal ethics (e.g. collecting consent forms) can last longer than expected and cause delays that sometimes do not match very well with the tight timeframes of international research based on deadlines.

Secondly, it was necessary to have time to familiarize with the context, in particular the culture of local childhood, as well as the social characteristics of the group of children in question. This phase was fundamental to negotiate the presence on the field and the modalities of participation. At the same time, it took time for the professionals to understand the research process, the methodologies adopted, the needs, objectives and timing.

Finally, time was needed for researchers and participants to become familiar with each other: having access to children's voices implies building a relationship, however limited, based on trust and open dialogue. This is particularly important for research situations where there is a

significant distance between researchers and participants, both in terms of practices and representations (Duvoux 2014). In addition to the distance between adults-researchers and children-participants, in many case studies a socio-cultural and linguistic distance had to be faced. This moment of familiarization does not necessarily imply adopting "the least-adult role" (Mandell 1988) by concealing our own physical and symbolic differences between adults and children (Lignier 2008), but rather overcoming the symbolic boundaries that separate us from children and building a research relationship based on a non-authoritarian attitude without denying the status of adults and children (Mayall 2002; Brougère 2006). It is a matter of being able to familiarize with children "well enough to gain their trust and respect during the course of all activities" even if this time is "still not enough to know a classroom very well and to be able to trace the peer-relation patterns and interpret what was seen with relative ease", as explained in the Czech Republic report. This is why it is equally important to dedicate time to converse together and gather information with the professional involved, if not to involve them directly in the research, as will be discussed in the following points. The counter-proof of the fundamental importance of familiarization time is that collecting children's voices was very difficult in those contexts where this time was lacking. This was the case of one of the informal contexts in Greece where the 'children were hesitant, not very talkative and more skeptical to openly express their thoughts because they did not have the time to get familiar with the researcher and did not feel comfortable enough with the researchers to share their views'. Moreover, the quality of relationship did not enable researchers to cope with the misbehavior of some children.

In addition to these preliminary steps, the international study revealed how crucial and strategic good evaluation and negotiation with the professionals from the contexts involved regarding the time needed to carry out the research was. As the Norwegian report shows, for example, children needed a "slow and progressive time" to be able to open up and bring out their voices. The "slow and progressive time" is not only a question of quantity, but also of quality: 2 hours in the morning or at the end of the day after a long day spent at school are not the same thing, as can be seen from the report of the Netherlands which reports two very different experiences, one with children "floating" after a day in school, focused on their peers and difficult to engage in a structured activity with many distractions around them and the other characterized by structure in time and activities during the day that made it easier to decide on the best time-slot for research-activities. This "slow and progressive time" was often in contrast with the "tight and sometimes inflexible time" of the institutional contexts in which the research was carried out: contexts based on predefined times (such as the 90 minutes of motivational workshops held at the end of the day after an entire day spent at school) and on objectives and programs to be completed and which sometimes consider the research simply too time-consuming, as in the case of Norway. Giving space to "slow and progressive time" allows children's voices to emerge: the voice of shy and silent children, but also deeper experiences that were shared only during the second phase of the research, and this is even more relevant given the issues of the research (as underlined in the report from the Czech Republic).

The question of time is also closely linked to the age and skills of the children: for example, it was necessary to pay close attention to the fact that younger children have a limited attention span. Finally, it was necessary access different types of "times": not only formal times, but also informal times. As already stated in the technical report (p. 35), the time required cannot be foreseen, but could vary considerably (e.g. from class to class and depending on the medium

selected, such as drawing, writing, pictures, videos...). Finally, the opportunity to spend time with the students informally enabled researchers to gather rich data that is rarely expressed and shared during formal situations.

These considerations illustrate how important it is to make the professionals involved aware of the multifaceted dimension of time in order to find a good meeting point and balance between research needs and structural variables in respect of both the needs of research and the context in which researchers are hosted. In cases where it is impossible to allow oneself these times but being aware of them, one can find strategies that can facilitate the work, such as giving a preponderant role to the professionals, a subject that we will discuss later.

### **Silent children who spoke and children who were uncomfortable**

In many cases (fortunately the most numerous), the methodology was particularly effective even with the shyest and quietest children regarding whom teachers expressed amazement at their participation and the number of ideas that the children expressed. This happened in the Norwegian case where researchers were advised of the presence of many "silent children". In the case of the Italian primary school, there were surprises, such as a newly arrived, not particularly talkative child who showed her exaltation and strong initiative when the time came to talk about her religion.

In some cases, the involvement of ethnic minority pupils was particularly difficult (for example in the Czech Republic and a Chinese child in the Italian informal group showed difficulties and embarrassment in sharing their experiences), and this obviously raised both ethical and methodological questions, since the research experience aimed to be a pleasant and formative opportunity, even if demanding.

When we tried to give voice to "those who have no voice", we were faced with the contradiction of finding ourselves in front of silent children, who did not seem to want to express their "voice".

Firstly, these difficulties further reinforced the need to understand the local culture and, in particular, the local pedagogy aimed at the theme of differences. If time helped to build a dialogue, sometimes it was not enough in institutional contexts where these topics had never been discussed or insurmountable symbolic-cultural boundaries that separated researchers from some stigmatized minorities such as Roma or from some ethnic groups (such as the Chinese).

Secondly, we needed to ask ourselves about the children's silence and take advantage of it. As Ann Lewis (2010) reminds us, the promotion of children's voice must take into account the challenges related to the very practice of collecting these voices, which are never universal but always the result of a specific individual and collective experience. If we think of the embedded nature of voice and the performative character of communication (Sarcinelli 2014), silence is also a research fact: voice (in the form of words, drawings, gestures or videos) and silence are two types of response, two doors to produce knowledge about a given social reality. This lack of participation can then be thought of not only as an obstacle but also as "a condition of the anthropological and sociological intelligibility of human societies" (Fassin 2008, p. 10) that allow us to better understand the life experiences of those children who remain silent in front of the

researcher. Silence is a voice that tells us about existing power relationships and different codes of communication that sometimes separate the researcher from their interlocutor-children belonging to minorities. This is the case in the Norwegian study, which was conducted in a municipality where the target population felt that the study featured them in an unfavourable way. Refusing to participate was an attempt at resistance that may also have affected (more or less directly) children.

### The language barrier

However, children's silence was not always insurmountable. Sometimes it was enough to reflect and understand how to overcome silences that were not rejections, barriers or necessarily symbolic and cultural. The first barrier that separated us from these children was language (for example, the Chinese child was not very competent in Italian and the Czech Roma children feared making mistakes because of their lack of competence in the Czech language, a fear that was an indicator of the socio-cultural context (whether the context clearly allowed and legitimated the freedom for self-expression even for those with less linguistic competence). The Greek report underlined how the "perceived or objective weakness, fear, ambivalence or resistance to express themselves in a foreign language" was a potential obstacle or difficulty in children's participation. It is therefore necessary to understand the many ways to overcome this type of obstacle. In this vein, we can use the "hundred languages of children" (Edwards, Gandini, Forman 1998) as in the case in Norway, where drawings supported verbal communication with the children, allowing us to overcome or even avoid the language barrier. In other cases, the participants themselves preferred to express themselves in Romani language to a linguistic mediator. In these cases, the presence of a linguistic mediator (and another child who could act as a translator) were valid tools if children could only express themselves in languages not known by researchers. But the use of mediators is not always the best strategy: in some cases (as in the case of the informal Italian context), after careful reflection, it was decided not to involve a Chinese linguistic-cultural mediator to facilitate the participation of a very shy Chinese child, considering that an operator present "only" for him would have created even more in difficulty. Instead, more support was offered during the "individual" activities by the adults already present. This same obstacle was addressed differently, depending on the situation.

This problem was even more widespread with regard to competence in writing, either because of the developmental stage or due to insufficient school attendance, language acquisition problems and fear of judgement etc. As already stated in the manual and described in the technical report, in respect of Art. 13 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989), children uncomfortable with writing or drawing were free to choose another way to participate. This was actually the case in several situations (e.g. in the Greek case) where other modes of expression proved to be more appropriate strategies to obtain children's participation and offered access to their views.

To sum up, welcoming children's voices also means giving them a choice among the "hundred languages of children" (Edwards, Gandini, Forman 1998), while the researchers' role was to make this possibility to choose concrete and effective.

### **The setting and choice of activities to capture and maintain the attention and interest of children**

A further aspect to underline is the fact that the setting and customization of activities are fundamental in capturing and maintaining the attention and interest of children.

In the case of the informal Italian context, the space where the workshops took place did not guarantee the privacy of the interviewee and this effected concentration during the interviews. An office not usually used for activities was therefore used as a place dedicated to interviews. On the other hand, using the VLE or other mediation tools (e.g. the use of visual supports) to carry out some of the activities allowed on the one hand to capture the attention and interest of the children and, on the other hand, sometimes risked becoming a distractor, since the children were more interested in the medium (e.g. using the PC, watching a film, drawing, recording with the camera) than in the content.

Secondly, we had to make sure to propose activities that were concrete and close to the experience of children, especially those in preschool. The Greek report highlighted that the educators commented that the concept of "new children coming to school" to work on the relevant concepts and situations was quite abstract for such young children. On the other hand, in the Italian preschool the choice of making these "new children concrete" by taking advantage of a visit by a group of preschoolers as an occasion to welcome real children proved to be an effective methodological choice precisely because it was concrete and real.

Finally, it was necessary for the researchers' attention to be constant and always open to adapting the proposals, even during the course of work. Flexibility was one of the cornerstones of the methodological proposal envisaged, as illustrated in the technical report, and it proved to be so in the face of real experiences. This was the case of the Netherlands, where the activities were promptly adapted, "shortened, made concrete and adjusted to fit children's attention span according to their age and particular context".

### **Content validity of the questions and answers**

Another important element was the understanding and content validity of the researchers' questions and of the children's answers. The importance of being understood by children was already foreseen in the manual (see D2.4, paragraph 3.5) and highlighted in some country reports: the UK report reflected on the relevance and possibility the effective use of how and why questions depending on the age of the children but also on whether they were bilingual or not; the Italian report stated that in the preschool, in order to ensure the content validity of the questions, the educators led the discussions and were able to "translate" the researchers' questions using words and examples that closer to the universe of the children, who they knew well.

As with silence, it was also important to ask questions about lies. This was the case in Greece, where two young people from an informal context declared that they had no problem with their school as far as language was concerned, whereas their teacher informed that these children had not attended school for a month because of language barriers. The problem of lies is very common in research situations (Mauger 1991, p. 139) and research with children is not exempt. Two reflections are needed in this regard. On the one hand, the researcher needs some

objective information. It is therefore necessary to resort to a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Zaluar 2004) towards the material collected, i.e. to systematically compare and verify the information communicated with other sources of information. This was the case in the UK, where we tried to overcome this difficulty by comparing initial questions on children's attitudes towards a language through facial expression cards with the answers given to the open-ended questions or re-asking the questions through a facial expression card and open-ended questions.

Secondly, we need to ask ourselves about the significance of lies, in the same way as silence. What do the lies tell us about our interlocutors? Perhaps we can consider lies and hare-brained ideas as part of the "hundred languages of children" (Gandini et al. 1998), if we are able to listen, hear and interpret them.

### **The role of teachers and professionals in conducting activities**

A final element concerned negotiating the role of researchers and professionals during the research. This aspect had already been dealt with in the manual, where the pros and cons and the need to evaluate on a case by case basis were highlighted (see D2.4, paragraph 3.5.3). One of the parameters that weighed heavily was the age of the children: with young children, the presence of a teacher or caregiver to whom they were accustomed was central. This was evident in some country reports which stated how important professionals were in helping to create syntony with children, unless the researchers really spent a lot of time, and how the absence of the teacher/caregiver had a great impact on the success of the experience.

The reports showed that there were often complementary advantages and disadvantages of co-conducting the activities with the teachers. On the one hand, actively involving teachers was often effective and valuable, especially during the initial phases of the study, when the children did not know the researchers well and the researchers only had a superficial knowledge of their characteristics, attitudes and personal stories. The active role of teachers contributed to ensuring a familiar, reassuring environment where children could more easily express their ideas. However, this was not always fundamental: a counterexample was in the Italian primary school, where the almost total absence of teachers did not prove to be an obstacle and trust was been created quite quickly during the week of observations.

On the other hand, even with young children, there were also some downsides of letting the teachers play an active role in conducting the activities, especially when the latter tended to direct the children's conversation instead of keeping it open to questions. This happened in some cases in the Italian pre-school but the situation was resolved after the researchers pointed it out to the educators.

In any case, in most cases collaboration with professionals was positive and their role was essential for the management of children's misbehavior, behavioral concerns or discomfort, allowing the researchers to have a complementary role. It was therefore of fundamental importance to invest a lot of energy in creating a relationship of trust and dialogue and a clear definition of roles with professionals, but also to give them an active role and the opportunity to contribute in a real way to the research through the possibility of customization, conducting or co-conducting.

## CONCLUSIONS

This concluding part aims to enumerate some limits of the international study, some meta-reflections on the formative effects of the research according to the feedback collected on the work from the research participants (children, teachers or other professionals) as well as on the content of the study regarding the most relevant dimensions concerning well-being and inclusion at school, in order to identify some essential recommendations for practice and policies aimed at children and education.

### Limitations of the study

Each country team indicated the limits of the study carried out by observing general and above all contextual aspects. Here we highlight only a few general limits that affected the international study as a whole. These are essentially:

- The dimension of time: time was a limiting variable, based on shared reflections regarding the fact that, particularly in a study with children, time is a crucial dimension for entering into contact with children in an appropriate manner and for ensuring good understanding of their point of view thanks to diversified tools and an extended timeframe. The study with the children took place over a few months, when many teams also had other project tasks and in many countries the negotiation for the ethical approval of the study with the authorities, who understandably carefully scrutinized the characteristics of the study, took a long time. The coincidence of the entry into force of the GDPR made this procedure even more complex. A second area of negotiation was with the schools and teachers with whom it was often difficult to reach an agreement, especially in the primary schools, where the curriculum was more structured and the fear of taking away too much time from the curriculum led to limiting the number of the hours dedicated to the project, in some cases too much time passed between one meeting and another. The case of Poland was the most extreme from this point of view, but in almost all countries, the topic/problem of the time presented itself.
- A second limit of the study concerned the use of only aggregated data concerning the ethnic-cultural, linguistic and economic-social backgrounds of the children, without being able to deepen the individual profiles / or group target profiles of the children in the analysis of the data. This choice was made at the beginning, in an effort to avoid additional complexity in the approval process regarding the ethical characteristics of the study by both the competent authorities, families and professionals. In some cases (in Norway and Poland) the researchers were not able to know the cultural and social backgrounds of the children in order to protect privacy, which was believed to have facilitated the understanding of what the children expressed during the course of the activities. However, both the ethnic-cultural and social dimensions of the groups of subjects involved in the research required specific attention and sensitivity in the way they were approached during the course of the field work so as to avoid that the research paradoxically became an amplifier of the perception of diversity and otherness by all subjects within the school or social community where the research took place.
- A third limit concerned the selection of materials used for verbal coding and analysis. In particular, when the research involved children aged 3-5, the integration of

communication occurred in the verbal dimension and in the non-verbal dimension (from facial expressions, to body gestures) and this was crucial for understanding the points of view of the children, however the study did not provide a shared mode for the transcription and coding of non-verbal data, although the research teams tried to keep track or through observational notes or, where possible, using video-recordings, even of non-verbal data.

- A fourth limit of the research concerned the language spoken by the researchers (with the exception of the English study). The majority language was chosen as the verbal means of expression for the children (including foreign and newly-arrived children). The research was carried out in the majority language, thus including an imbalance between native speakers/children with good competence in the majority language and the newcomers.
- Finally, among its characteristics and aims, the results of the study were not generalizable, however, we believe that the size of the sample and the analysis regarding the content, in addition to the methodological and ethical challenges, can offer a valuable contribution to studies in the field.

### **Main learning and reflections**

In addition to the aspects concerning the methodological and ethical complexities of doing research with children, learning and reflections of interest concerned both the content that emerged in the words of the children as well as the effects of the research process on the subjects and contexts involved.

### **Educational and formative impact on children**

With respect to the children involved in the research, a first point that can be observed, on a meta-reflexive level, is that the research process showed that the children of all ages who were involved, even at the early age of 3-5 years, took part in the work, proving they were capable and eager to express and reflect on well-being and inclusion at school, referring to the many differences that coexisted in the school and social contexts (from linguistic-cultural, religious to social aspects). This statement does not mean that this was immediate and simple and that it would happen under any conditions. In an even more compelling way than in research with adults, the researcher (or the professional educator in general) was responsible for creating the conditions for the emergence of the point of view of children in an atmosphere of welcome, psychological freedom, pleasure in expressing their ideas and to promote the progressive construction of ideas, approaching the issues in question through methodologies and experiential situations close to the children, their daily experience at school, in the family and in society. The participatory activities which were part of the Children Study enabled children to: reflect on complex topics (such as multiculturalism, factors promoting/undermining inclusion in their classrooms etc.); actively express their opinions, visualize their ideas, think about hypothetical situations, share their own experiences as well as present their own suggestions on how to solve concrete situation/problems (for example the arrival of a new child who could not speak the language at school). The research process not only offered them the opportunity

to express ideas, but it also represented a stimulating experience to progressively acquire critical-reflective thinking skills, to think of the context not as something to merely adapt to, but as where one could become an agent of change and a place for acquiring collaborative communication skills with peers and adults, modifying the relationship that, while remaining asymmetrical, takes on a different configuration: adults and children were collaborators in the construction of the context and the school experience.

The **participatory and transformative research experience** can have great educational value and models *democratic life practice* in a 'child-friendly' form in the school context, anchored to children's everyday experience. As stated in the first Chapter, the participatory and transformative research model is a form of education *through* democracy (Gollob et al, 2010), or, as in Dewey (1916), a 'practice and experience-based' active citizenship, offering a supportive democratic learning environment, which not only gives 'voice', but allows children to collaborate in decision making which in turn renders them active social actors who are responsible for their environment, albeit in a manner proportional to their psychological maturity. The interaction processes supported the development of children's agency, by talking, expressing opinions and ideas, reflecting alone and with the group, while the adults provided a coherent scaffolding to support these processes.

The guiding principles of participatory and transformative research are coherent and reinforce a socio-constructivist and active teaching approach, promoting a collaborative social and relational climate, respectful of different points of view, all salient factors in the improvement of children's learning and school motivation. But it is possible to say that they represent a step forward in children's participation, as they embrace the possibility for **children to be full-fledged protagonists of the school environment**, not only in the learning experiences but in the whole life of the school. Proposals for school innovations and their implementation augmented the participation and enthusiasm of the children involved (as has emerged in several country chapters, see chapter DE, IT, PL), confirming the opportunity to include these transformative and applicative aspects in research with children.

Of course, in this kind of research model, it is crucial to consider how much the context will allow for implementation of at least part of the children's proposals. In some countries a lack of time (like in the Czech Republic) represented an **obstacle for implementing proposals**. However, in general, it was very important that researchers and teachers or educators were attuned to the values and aims that inspired this research practice, and that all social actors involved were sensitized to offer concrete experiences of context transformation. It had to be part of the research agreement settled beforehand with professionals and it is relevant that, even if the proposals could not be put into practice, the professionals showed the children that they were heard, that the information they provided was useful, and explained how it could be implemented or why it could not be acted upon, always guaranteeing a "responsive feedback-loop", as suggested in the Dutch study. More over, the feasibility of the proposals should be weighed with the children themselves, helping them identify the right interlocutors at different levels (from the class teacher, the entire teaching staff and the principal, to local or national administrative levels). Children needed help in recognizing and discriminating among these different levels.

In all of the studies, moreover, the participation of the children was very high; they expressed motivation and pleasure in taking part in the activities, showing that they appreciated being put

in a position to express their ideas and to rethink the school context. If well-being and inclusion at school were the subject of reflection and rethinking to innovate the school context, the practices of welcoming new students and so on, at the same time the research process itself seems to have promoted well-being and inclusion among children. Indirectly (but also directly, as will be seen in the section on content), the children expressed the desire to be protagonists at school; to have the opportunity to express themselves to be heard; to be able to contribute to building the school context; to receive greater recognition for their capacity for self-determination. Despite the methodological complexities that were highlighted, children emerged as reliable interlocutors who could and did want to contribute to changing school contexts, they could also be drivers of change.

### Educational and formative impact on children

**Regarding the effects not only on children but also professionals, it is possible to observe the personal enrichment and the stimulus to recreate their teaching approach and practice continuously and especially to re-consider who the children and their abilities.**

We believe that an interesting result of the analysis of the international research is the educational impact that this research experience has had on teachers or educators who have collaborated or at least witnessed the research work, as far as it was possible to detect in the short-term by the research teams. In several countries, the teachers or educators have shown amazement and appreciation for the ability shown by children, even very young ones, to participate in the research: some teachers who did think that the young age and language difficulties of the children would be an obstacle for achieving the goals of the study realized that these moments turned out not to be a barrier at all. Teachers were generally surprised that children were able to carry out activities like the ones proposed by the research protocol, such as working in groups or **formulating their opinions, being proactive** (CZ, IT). In brief, the research experience allowed teachers and educators to **think about and probably re-consider their ideas about children**, their potential and recognize that they were **underestimating the children's abilities** to give their opinions, evaluate the school and make proposals. First of all, the activities proposed allowed some children, often recognized by the teachers as negative leaders, to be put into a positive light and be valued for their qualities. The usually shy and bashful children started to actively participate in the activities proposed and freely expressed their ideas after the first few meetings (IT, NO). The activities enriched the class collective, because everyone could get better acquainted with each other. They also provided the teachers (Czech, Greek context) with some new information about the children's background and history, which otherwise perhaps would never have emerged and which gave them additional tools and knowledge for working better with the children. Only in few cases teachers had some critical comments on the activities (for example in Greece, preschool teachers considered some activities too abstract or the Italian primary school teachers who found the research activities too demanding and disconnected from the "program"), but most teachers were likely to increment the activities involving children's participation and to extend them to other classes (like in IT, CZ). Teachers had also the opportunity to realize that the theme of "cultural diversity" and multilingualism was not (enough) included into their teaching systematically and into the class curriculum.

But, most important, teachers **realized how children were engaged in the research and**

**conscious about positive and negative factors** as in terms of well-being and inclusion at school, to what extent children are competent members of a social community able to provide meaningful contributions to the researchers if they are listened to in an appropriate context. Even those professionals who had high consideration of their children's competences (like the Italian preschool teachers), were surprised that they had such clear ideas about complex issues and advanced such sophisticated proposals.

All teachers could understand the importance to involve children in decision-making processes about different aspects of everyday pedagogical life (both school organization and social relationships). However, participatory research is not an easy task and teachers had to admit that some children did have some difficulties explaining their opinions and with working in groups. This led teachers to express the interest to develop these skills further and work with children in order to improve these yet underdeveloped skills, as well as to change their teaching approach. In some contexts, professionals decided to go forward, giving more space to the experience, dynamics and discomfort at school with the aim of creating greater awareness regarding the reflections of the children and involving them more actively in defining topics of extracurricular classes, as in the Polish context.

As stated in some national studies, for the maximum formative impact, it was crucial for teachers and educators to be actively involved so that they could become protagonists in the collaborative research work with children. This happened primarily in the preschool context compared to other levels and research contexts. It should be noted that, in this case, the research required a longer time for working with local professionals

### **Relevant dimensions for well-being and inclusion at school**

The dimension of well-being and inclusion at school was broken down into the three sub-dimensions of the factors that promote, the factors that hinder and the factors of change proposed by the children themselves. The latter two graphs summarize the three dimensions while figure 10 illustrates the total value of the three factors distributed by code, by age and by context, and in figure 11, the total value of the three factors distributed only by thematic area and by code totals.

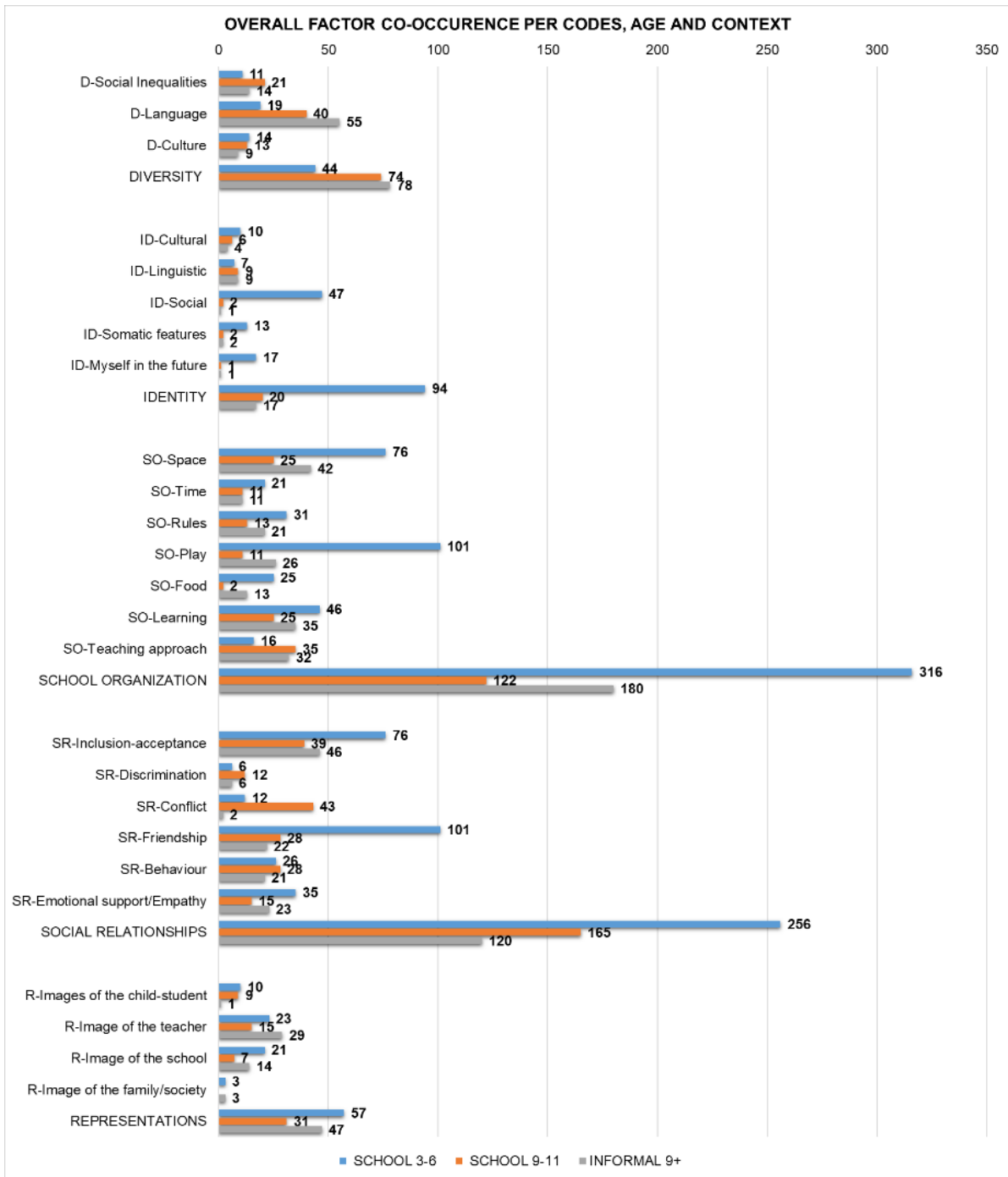


Figure 10. Overall factors per code, age and context

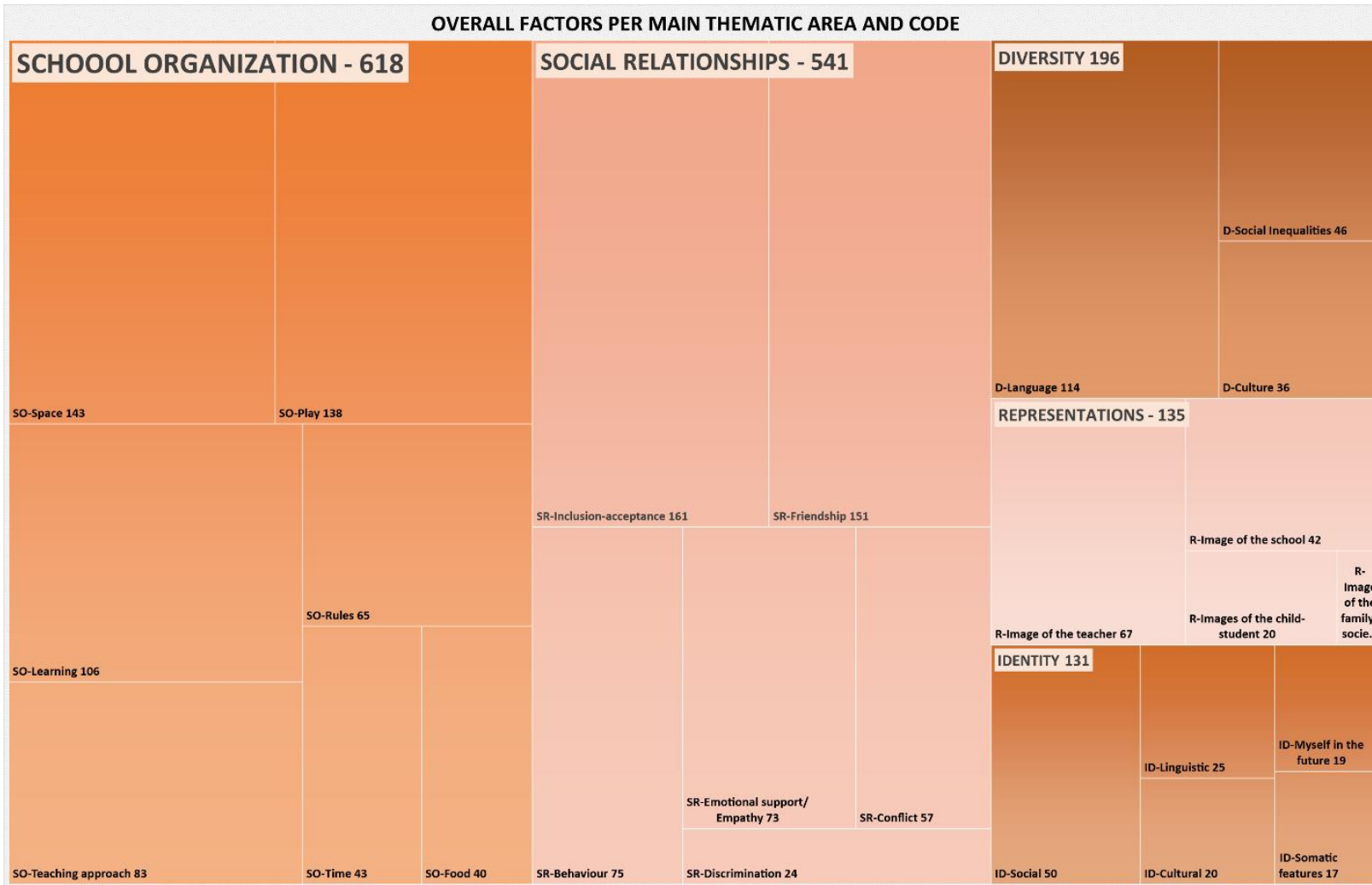


Figure 11. Overall factors per main thematic area and code

Many of the children in national studies expressed a positive image of school as a significant context ('my other home') for their well-being, for finding important relationships and opportunities for growth. With respect to well-being at school, the two thematic areas that emerged in a relevant way as salient with respect to all factors, all ages and contexts, were those regarding "School organization", the majority with respect to "Factors promoting well-being and Inclusion" and "Trasformative factors", and those regarding "Social relationships", the majority of which regarded "Factors undermining well-being and inclusion".

With respect to "**School organization**", the children showed particular attention to spatial and material dimensions, as well as to the characteristics of the activities, the curriculum, and teaching-learning.

From the analysis of the data, some basic themes emerged that were particularly salient in the experience of well-being and inclusion at school or, on the contrary, of discomfort, from the point of view of the children.

- In the first place, it emerged in a widespread way, both in contexts characterized by cultural and linguistic differences and those characterized by a disadvantaged population in socio-economic terms, that the **quantity and the quality of spaces and materials were considered very important factors for well-being and inclusion**. The quality criteria of the space and materials that emerged from the words of the children concerned first of all the physical characteristics of the spaces and objects: the children expressed their appreciation for large spaces for movement (gyms, gardens), but also for reserved, quiet and relaxing spaces, which were not always present in school structures, thus not allowing them to shelter themselves from crowded and chaotic places from time to time. The children talked about decorated, fragrant spaces, games and working materials available in sufficient quantities, especially in contexts where families may have difficulty in bearing the cost of purchasing materials, and materials and objects diversified for cultural and linguistic characteristics, especially in multicultural contexts. Among the material aspects, even tasty food, which might not be available at home, appeared to be a factor for well-being in sites of greatest economic hardship. In many other contexts of the research, food was presented as a symbol for sharing, exchange, welcoming even for newly arrived children, for mutual knowledge, due to discussions that take place during the meal, as well as the possible exchange of foods from different cultural and religious traditions.

Spaces and materials welcomed and accompanied, therefore, moments of community life that children appreciated very much and which they identified with: the school community was relevant in their eyes, experiences able to leave very positive memories.

However, spaces and materials were only a part of a context that children also considered in its **regulatory characteristics** (the rules of using spaces and materials) **and experiential** (the activities carried out). From this point of view, two major themes emerged that were relevant in the eyes of children in both pre- and primary school:

- **the desire to have greater freedom of choice, self-determination and self-regulation, both with respect to the use of spaces and materials, and to the timing of routines and activities during the day at school**. The contexts where we met children were certainly different from the point of view of freedom and the possibility for self-determination

given to the children. In different forms, their requests for greater self-regulation emerged in a widespread way. It could be simple access to materials (as in the case of Poland, where the teachers stated that they did not allow access to materials because the children did not know how to use them), or the possibility to use a space following their own ideas different from how the teachers allocated a place (for example, to play a symbolic game in a room where they generally did gymnastics and movement...). As effectively highlighted in the German report, the children expressed the need not only to feel part of a community, but to be able to participate actively, autonomously and competently in the use of spaces and materials;

- **The desire for more extra-curricular activities and more active, creative, 'non-traditional' activities.** The balance between play and work, play and learning, in the eyes of children seemed to be to the disadvantage of the former and there was not a sufficient balance, (especially in primary school) where it was possible to learn by playing and play while learning. Playing and getting involved in a variety of playful activities in the school context appeared to be important factors for well-being in many contexts and across ages, especially freely accessible play possibilities, and as crucial factors for strengthening inclusion and the well-being of newcomers. **Children wanted learning to become more enjoyable and interactive**, and activities to be carried out in an active, playful, group and dynamic way, including physically, both inside and outside school. Sitting at a desk for many hours generates demotivation and fatigue. In connection with this, the children expressed appreciation for all the spaces outside the classroom (such as the library, the art and crafts room, the computer and science lab, the gym, the playground) and school trips, and many of their proposals to change the indoor and outdoor spaces reflected their desire for more spaces. Specifically, inside school they suggested areas for recreational activities, dancing, relaxation in moments of fatigue and outside for plants, sports fields, playgrounds. If learning was perceived as a source of joy and enjoyment when connected to the possibility of learning new things, having new experiences, working together with other students, within “non-traditional” playful, play-like and creative teaching approaches, learning was frequently connoted by negative emotions such as boredom, nervousness, fear and also anxiety and stress, due to exams, grades and homework.

**Consistently, school spaces and times were crucial in building a context welcoming diversity:** many of the children’s transformative proposals concerned having spaces where writing and objects from different languages and cultures were visible; presenting the spaces, the activities that take place in them and the rules to newcomers upon their arrival so that they would not feel disoriented; organizing the school calendar in a more respectful way for the holidays from different traditions and religions. In the same way, **playing together and sharing games were indicated as forms for welcoming and socialization** considered fundamental to build friendships, even to overcome language barriers.

With respect to the **social-emotional dimension**, social relationships were among the main codes promoting well-being and inclusion. The **peer group and the sense of community** were central in the children’s representations of the school environment. All the research participants (both preschool, primary school and informal contexts) highlighted the importance of the socio-relational dimension of the school context as a main factor promoting well-being: this refers both to the teachers (i.e. in the teaching approach and in the relation with the students) and to

the peer group. The socio-relational dimension includes the importance of inclusion, emotional support and empathy both from teachers and from peers, and friendship among children. Two specific aspects can be highlighted:

- **Teachers had a fundamental role to play in promoting a good and inclusive relational climate:** much depended on how they related to the children themselves (kindness, availability, measured tone of voice, absence of punitive attitudes), the ability to propose activities that facilitated relationships and the creation of friendships, the approach to teaching, as we said, active, dynamic between spaces inside the classroom and the school, as well as outside, centered on the learning community of children rather than on individual work. **Teachers were also recognised as playing a significant role in supporting positive conflict resolution, especially if it was discriminatory, and in providing anti-discriminatory values and attitudes.** Children, especially in the informal context, expressed great dissatisfaction with those teachers who pretended they did not see or see what was happening before their eyes. If family, friends and society pushed towards racist or discriminatory ideas and attitudes, teachers might be the only point of reference for opening up to a different way of seeing things, as some children said.
- But above all, from the children's words it emerged that **the peer group and peer network were of great importance in dealing with difficulties and in feeling part of the local school community.** Friendship and making friends at school were perhaps the main factors of well-being at school, which made one feel part of the school community and protected and played a crucial role in the inclusion and welcoming of newcomers, children with minority backgrounds or those who did not speak the local language. Many of the children's proposals to make the school a warm, welcoming place on a relational level, and therefore inclusive because it was welcoming towards all differences (from somatic and physical differences to linguistic, cultural and religious differences), concerned different forms of promoting friendship and emotional support among children from their arrival at school. This could take the form of multiple gestures, some established as rituals and some entrusted to the initiative of individuals: from the simple friendship bracelets proposed by the preschool children, in recalling the sense of disorientation during the first days of school, underlining the importance of consoling, cuddling, hugging and playing with a newly arrived child, to the assignment of a 'buddy partner' who would be nearby during the first days and present the school, perhaps supported by a multilingual video-tour made by the children, by writing, dances and songs in multiple languages....

The social-emotional dimension was therefore connected to many of the children's reflections on the dimension of diversity, as seen in the detailed analysis of the data:

- **Student culture, language and food at school had a central place in the socio-emotional climate, in individual well-being and sense of identity.** To promote inclusion, children from different context have stressed the importance of the enhancement of cultural, linguistic and food traditions. On one hand, children stress the importance of showing to newcomers the majority culture and language and the institutional culture (by introducing newly arrived children to school organization, spaces and rules). On the other hand, children underlined the fact that all of the

children's cultures, languages and foods needed to be present in everyday life at school. Not only was the prohibition of speaking in one's own language of origin a factor that strongly undermined children's well-being in the school environment, but also the absence of language, culture and food from the children's origins was seen as a negative aspect in the long-term and their enhancement was present in children's proposals in all contexts.

Even in the English research, which has characteristics that differ in part from those of other studies, the interviews with children showed the perception of children. Although the family provided the ground for children to build their identity and embrace their heritage culture, experiences at school supported this or undermined it. Positive experiences with teachers, even bilingual, and peers provided children a safe space to cultivate their dual-identity, while negative experiences with peers or/and the unavailability of teachers/peers from similar backgrounds at school could lead to feelings of detachment, sadness, and shame.

- **Children demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the position of language to communicate with and include non-native speakers, in socialization at school, in building friendships, in general its potential role for both inclusion and exclusion.** They highlighted the importance of helping classmates acquire the language of the school as well as speaking the language of the classmate and making it visible in the school written in his or her own language 'to make him or her feel at home'. Linguistic difference is not in itself an obstacle to making friends, but the children pointed out how the recognition of the mother tongue makes it easier and more heartening to overcome the perception of extraneousness in a new context, as well as having a partner who helps to translate between the two languages, reducing the risk of discomfort that children saw linked to the language barrier during the early days (being excluded from groups and games, being teased about their accent and poor linguistic ability in the new language, having difficulties in learning). These risks could certainly be even more remote, according to the children, if there were a greater number of multilingual teachers, and if the possibility of using the mother tongue in class was never prohibited. There were a lot of proposals about language from both preschoolers and students of different countries, some proposed to show more solidarity and mutual help between classmates. finding ways to overcome language barriers with newcomers, some proposed to innovate the school curriculum using language awareness approaches as institutional practices at school.
- Alongside this, particularly in the studies with preschool children, it emerged in some countries that preschool children did not pay particular attention to the ethnic characteristics of their peers, but rather to those of gender, age and family (such as the presence of siblings in the school), and tended to emphasize the importance of being welcomed in their individuality as competent members of the community rather than dealing with aspects related to differences.

## Recommendations

Some recommendations can be drawn from the reflections and analyses carried out, both

for the sphere of school and educational practices and for those who deal with educational and social policies.

1. The study documented that **from an early age children have many ideas about the educational contexts they experience every day and that if put in a position to do so, they have the desire to express themselves and influence the improvement of these contexts, becoming promoters of innovation and change.** The first recommendation is to take this research evidence seriously and to put it at the centre of the debate on the quality of preschool and school services, and in teacher training.

2. With respect to the debate on the quality of educational and school contexts in terms of well-being and inclusion, results lead to focus, with an **increased awareness of the crucial role of participatory pedagogical models that include children's voices from an early age and involve them in the processes of decision making, in shaping pedagogical spaces, activities and times,** on both the proposals that can be presented by the children for the improvement of the school and on the effects on well-being, motivation and the development of skills and abilities for active citizenship that these forms of participation promote. We believe that this reflection becomes even more urgent in primary and secondary schools, also as a form of prevention of discomfort and early school leaving.

3. As highlighted, **this participatory and transformative research experience can have great educational value and models democratic life practice.** The reflection on the research methodology adopted and on the positive effects it had encourages further investment in these forms of research and urge the development of well-founded, complex skills in conducting research processes with children, paying attention to characteristics in relation to the phases of child development and to the many challenges and complexities that they present, illustrated in literature and to which we wanted to make a contribution.

4. At the same time, **teacher training in these forms of participatory research with children from an early age should receive more attention, especially through collaboration and action-research conducted with researchers.** The experience of participation in these forms of research can have significant repercussions, not only on children and on the quality of their school experience, but also on the professionalization of teachers, representing a powerful stimulus to review approaches to teaching, ideas regarding the role of children in school and of the school itself in children's lives. Teachers were able to experience a change in the image they had of children and re-evaluate their potential and skills. It is therefore crucial to train teachers to recognize the need expressed by children to take part in the life of the school community as competent members and to offer them progressively broader and more complex forms and ways of doing so.

5. The **material dimension of school, in its spaces and materials,** both in aesthetic terms and in the basic resources offered (from food to games and materials), emerged as a dimension to which children attributed great impact on their well-being, their attitudes towards the school environment and social and intercultural inclusion at school. We believe that it **represents a strategic area for intervention in policies and practices** addressed to schools and ECEC services, since it is a concrete aspect for investment that is more accessible and relatively simpler than other key components of school setting quality, and that can have a significant impact.

6. Positive relationships between children and friendships were identified as the most influential

factor in school well-being and the keystone of an inclusive social climate. In the light of the relevance attributed to the social-emotional dimension in the school, the study calls for **teacher training, both pre- and in-service, that includes a solid preparation in relational skills, starting from the awareness of both the role that children attribute to the teacher in the regulation of relationships between adults and children and in relationships between children, and the role that children attribute to the peer group in building a positive, warm and welcoming relational climate.** The promotion of positive relationships and friendships must become a priority in the pedagogical and didactic approach at all levels of the school system, especially where learning performances introduce sources of negative stress and emotions (such as anxiety, frustration, boredom).

7. Although learning is an unavoidably tiring and demanding process, **teachers should be sensitized in a renewed way to take care, in the teaching methodology and in the relational modalities, of emotions that children experience towards learning and the school performance required of them, because the emotional dimension significantly affects motivation, their sense of self-efficacy and the image that children have of themselves as learners.** School is a space to elaborate one's own social image and this is primarily linked to the trust that children have in being able to succeed at school as a form of emancipation from conditions of exclusion or economic-social minority.

8. On the subject of learning and, more generally, of life at school, **the children stressed the urgency for active, dynamic, interactive methodologies in large and small groups; for work spaces not only limited to the classroom, but diversified in multiple spaces inside and outside the school; for spaces that were not crowded, but private and quiet; for an offer of extra-curricular activities.**

9. On the issue of inclusion regarding linguistic, cultural and religious differences, from preschool on, children showed great awareness of the dynamics that can affect well-being at school or promote it, and showed that they can play a significant active and proactive role. Besides the many proposals made, we believe that **the enthusiastic participation of children is in itself a recommendation to follow up on forms of active involvement for students in welcoming newcomers and in promoting inclusion.** The process of building shared proposals to improve the school environment and reception practices, in addition to having produced a considerable number of sustainable and feasible proposals (some made during the study) also represented a significant path of awareness on the part of the children regarding aspects like the development of empathy, which we believe has important repercussions on the construction of inclusive contexts and well-being.

10. **To promote inclusion, children from different context have stressed the importance of the enhancement of cultural, linguistic, religious and food traditions,** that need to be present in everyday life at school. Although this issue is already present in numerous European and national guidelines and policy documents in many countries, it is important that the children themselves stressed the importance of the visibility and respect that each culture, language and religion must be able to see expressed in a tangible way in the school context. The dimension of reciprocity, of cultural exchange between those who arrive and those who are already part of a context, was placed at the centre, in a balanced way, recognizing the need of those who arrive to feel reassured both about the respect given to their cultural linguistic origins and about the need to understand the new context of arrival. Positive relationships and friendships can

blossom and be facilitated in the school context/environment where the enhancement of differences is concretely, explicitly and intentionally promoted in a widespread way in time, in space, in curricular content, in relationships.

**11. Language emerged as a crucial issue, both in relation to the enhancement of mother tongues and the acquisition of the language of instruction.** In particular, it is recommended to pay attention, in teacher training, to balancing these two aspects (teachers are often focused almost exclusively on the acquisition of a second language), to support children's biculturalization and bilingualism, who find the first and fundamental place of growth in the family, but who need to be supported by teachers and the school context as well; to pay particular attention to the painful experiences that the language barrier for those who come to school from a different linguistic context can generate in the dynamics of relationships, socialization and learning. Preschoolers and students from different countries made many proposals about language, both to show more solidarity and for mutual help between classmates, finding ways to overcome language barriers with newcomers and to innovate the school curriculum using language awareness approaches as institutional practices at school.

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ISOTIS

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