

YOUNG CHILDREN AND OLDER PEOPLE TOGETHER IN AGE- AND CHILD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Giulia Cortellesi, MSc
Senior Programme Manager, Early Years, International Child Development Initiatives – ICDI



INTRODUCTION

Social changes in Europe are affecting the lives, relationships and learning opportunities of both older people and young children. The growing **separation of generations** into same age institutions and spaces means that young children and older adults may miss out on opportunities for interaction, understanding and learning from each other.

As part of the ongoing programme called **Together Old and Young** or **TOY** (www.toyproject.net) research was conducted to explore the possibilities for the youngest and oldest groups in European society to learn and transform culture together.



Our particular interest was in shared experiences in non-formal and formal settings such as **libraries, parks, community centres, playgrounds and in early years and social care services**. We researched the necessary conditions to generate solidarity between young and old and how this may contribute to creating child- and age-friendly communities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What kind of **spaces** support solidarity between young children and older people **to create child- and age-friendly communities?**

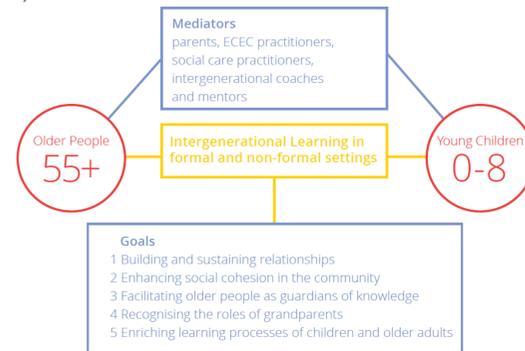
The TOY Project took place between October 2012 and December 2014.



METHODS

Research phases

FIRST PHASE: literature review on the **aims and nature of intergenerational learning (IGL)** initiatives in Europe involving young children (0-8) and older people (55 years+).



SECOND PHASE: case study research of **21 existing IG projects** in the seven participating TOY countries (Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain).

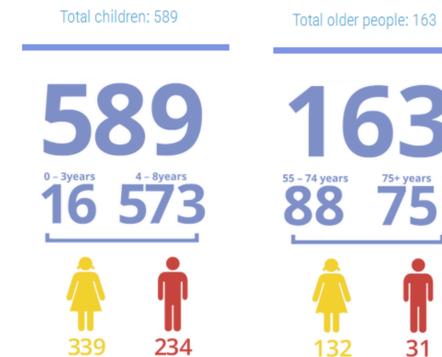


THIRD PHASE: established **13 TOY pilot IGL actions** in five of the countries, based on lessons learnt in the previous phases and documenting and evaluating their outputs and outcomes in order to inspire others to establish IGL initiatives.

Data collection

Data for both the case study research and the pilot actions were collected via **observation, photographing and group and individual interviews** with the participants in the IGL initiatives i.e. young children, their parents, senior volunteers, older people, educators and social care professionals.

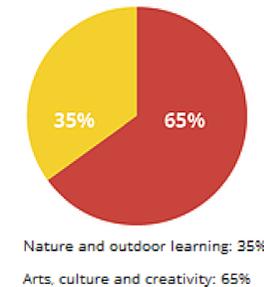
In the TOY Pilot Actions, a total of 589 children aged 0-8 years, 163 older adults (65 years+) and 101 facilitators participated.



FINDINGS

Themes

The majority of IGL initiatives were developed around **storytelling, art activities, cooking, seniors showing children their passions and hobbies. Outdoor activities and gardening** were also very common.



Frequency

The frequency of meetings was crucial for the success of the IGL activity. Young children and older adults **need time to build relationships, develop trust, overcome stereotypes** and share a sense of ownership and solidarity.



Benefits

For young children: new learning and competences; social values, citizenship and awareness of ageing.

For older adults: wellbeing, new skills, validation of their knowledge; satisfaction in interacting with young children.

For both young and older people: new social relationships and strengthened ties, value and respect for each other, break down of age barriers and stereotypes.

Limitations

Lack of planning, lack of commitment and availability, insufficient skills and capacities of staff on IGL.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1 Public or shared spaces** promote relationships and solidarity between generations through developing opportunities for IGL.
- 2 Specific skills and competences** are needed to design and implement successful IGL activities.
- 3 Children and older adults** should be at the centre of **urban policies**, considering their **similar sensitivity and attachment** towards their environment.
- 4 Child-friendly and elder-friendly planning** can be synergistic, producing positive outcomes for the greater good of all generations.
- 5** Social and planning policies should also pay attention to **the social as well as the physical aspects of urban living** in order to have even a greater impact on solidarity and cohesion.

'I learn from children how life can surprise you, so now I look at things with different eyes, from a different perspective.'

Senior volunteer (66 years old), School garden project, the Netherlands