

## TOY Pilot Actions: Summary of the main trends and most interesting findings

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Over a period of 4 months a team of researchers from the TOY project supported a variety of tasks including the design, implementation and evaluation of 13 intergenerational pilot actions in 5 countries (4 in Italy, 3 in Poland, and 2 in Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands respectively). Each used a participatory approach.

A mixture of methods and a variety of instruments (e.g. focus groups discussion, interviews, observations, attendance sheets, evaluation forms, reflective diaries, field notes, audio and video recordings) were used to evaluate, inform and document the pilots. Children, older people, staff and the children's parents were involved in the assessment; practitioners and TOY researchers collected data.

### *Overall aim, scope, promoting entities, funding and networking*

The pilots were aimed at enhancing intergenerational relationships and learning, encouraging people to have fun together by involving young children and old people in a variety of experiences and exchanges such as playing games, learning about local culture and traditions, cooking, arts and crafts, sport, environmental and sharing knowledge on sustainable lifestyles.

All the initiatives were developed within local communities and promoted through municipalities, organisations, foundations and institutions (e.g., kindergartens, schools, care homes, home care and day care for older persons).

All IGPs (Intergenerational Programmes) were externally funded with contribution from TOY's budget and 7 pilots had additional internal funding from the promoting entities and partners. Although this support was not financial it was manifest through material resources and logistics. Networks and partnerships varied and were developed for different purposes depending on the needs and aims of the initiative, including: institutions (kindergarten, care home for older people, community centers), local government (municipalities, municipal library, cultural centres and museums), universities, media, NGOs and organisations (foundations and charities).

### *Activities, participants, recruitment and training*

The main themes were varied, but all initiatives focused on history and art (i.e., arts and crafts, traditional games and dance, memories and experience exchange). Other topics approached were: education – 1; environment – 5 (gardening, recycling and sustainability); health – 5 (outdoor and physical activity, healthy lifestyles); social inclusion – 1 (supporting people in difficulties); language – 1 (literacy).

The initiatives targeted a total of 589 young children (from 0 to 9 years old) and 169 older people (from 55 to 75+ years old) (see table 1). Other participants were also involved, namely: children and seniors' family members, community citizens and volunteers. A total number of 100 IG facilitators, with varied experience and professional backgrounds, were involved (see table 2): 25 senior volunteers (from 48 to 80 years old); 28 practitioners (e.g.,

kindergarten teachers, educators, gerontologists and health and social welfare professionals); and 47 institutional staff (e.g., auxiliary staff, cooks, employees, trainees and other volunteers).

Activities were implemented over 1 or 2 months, mostly on a weekly basis. The type of activities can be categorised as: friendly encounters (gatherings and eating together, study visits and trips); mutual creation (gardening, cooking, painting, physical activities, playing and performing); living together (IG summer camp); and transfer of experience (seniors showing children their passion/craft, shared skills and abilities).

Procedures for participants' recruitment included distribution of flyers, phone contacts, e-mail and face-to-face meetings. Facilitators' training included a workshop for intergenerational mediators locally organised by TOY partners; as well as meetings with staff involved to plan, organise and evaluate the initiatives.

### *Benefits, limitations, dissemination/products and suggestions for improvements*

Results were generally reported in terms of a variety of beneficiaries:

- Family/community: an opportunity to participate actively in the neighbourhood; improved social ties and relationships between people.
- Young children: new learning and abilities; empowered capacities by realising what they can do; social values, citizenship and awareness of ageing.
- Older people: wellbeing, happiness, new skills, validation of their knowledge; experience gained (and satisfaction) in addressing young children.
- Both young and older people: new social relationships and strengthened ties, value and respect for each other, breaking down age barriers and stereotypes, reawakening interest in culture and traditions.
- Institutions/schools: turned into a richer and more useful community resources; expanded new resources and more capable practitioners and staff; new perspectives and methodologies within pedagogical approaches, more open to networking and collaboration.

Limitations identified by practitioners and researchers can be organised in 3 categories:

- Planning (n=11): lack of availability in the institutions daily plan; senior transportation; project discontinuity due to the end of school year; limited activities/sessions duration; lack of time to properly involve family members.
- Staffing (n=3): low levels of commitment and availability; lack of skills and training; practitioners' over-involvement as facilitators not giving the seniors opportunity to lead the activity and freely interact with the children.
- Activity environment (n=5): practitioners are not always creating a familiar and friendly atmosphere for participants; group size and structure is not adequate to nourish meaningful IG relationships.

Related to these limitations, practitioners and researchers suggested improvements showed their intentions of repeating or continuing the initiatives:

- planning (e.g., to reach and involve more participants and volunteers; reduce the number of current daily activities and increase the sessions duration; carry out a working meeting to "profile" activities according to participants and practitioners expectations;
- activity environment (e.g., provide a proper space/room for the IG initiative

implementation (even if temporary), as well to store materials for the activity; reduce size and organised participants groups in a way to increase interactions between them; maintain individual predispositions and expectations of seniors; engage more male senior participants).

Dissemination and/or products were as follow:

- activities and events (e.g., celebrations, exhibitions, performances, neighbourhood gatherings, workshops),
- resources (e.g., cooking and recipes book, posters),
- artefacts (e.g., antique toys, games suitcase, costumes and decorations, board games and puzzles),
- word-of-mouth and media (e.g., local newspaper, article in virtual newspaper and *Facebook*).

Generally, all of the implemented IG practices accomplished their main goals and achieved relevant benefits in terms of intergenerational learning and relationships for all those involved. The main findings reveal successful strategies related to IG facilitators role (i.e., seniors and practitioners). Practitioners enjoyed taking the role of IG facilitators and are willing to organise other IG initiatives in future. For senior volunteers, energy, spontaneity and positive attitude were the key features in involving, motivating and guiding the children in activities. The acceptance by seniors' to actively participate was also witnessed, the opportunities which allowed them to be more active, grow in self-confidence and improve their social skills and life.

Table 1: Participants - Young children and Older people  
(number, age and gender)

Pilot Action	0-3 years old		4-9 years old		Total	55-74 years old		75+ years old		Total
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys		Female	Male	Female	Male	
Spain (a)	0	1	16	19	36	17	0	0	4	21
Spain (b)	0	0	11	17	28	7	1	0	0	8
Portugal (a)	0	0	53	35	88	0	0	10	5	15
Portugal (b)	0	0	26	19	45	4	0	4	0	8
Italy (a)	0	0	25	24	49	0	10	0	0	10
Italy (b)	3	2	0	0	5	0	0	2	3	5
Italy (c)	0	0	57	0	57	3	0	19	2	24
Italy (d)	0	0	22	14	36	0	0	9	3	12
Poland (a)	6	3	31	23	63	31	0	5	0	36
Poland (b)	0	0	13	16	29	7	1	1	0	9
Poland (c)	0	1	70	57	128	1	0	4	0	5
Netherlands (a)	0	0	4	4	8	0	0	7	2	9
Netherlands (b)	0	0	11	6	17	0	0	7	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>169</b>

Table 2: Facilitators (number and age range)

<b>Pilot Actions</b>	Practitioners (28 to 50 years old)	Senior volunteers (48 to 80 years old)	Institutional staff (25 to 63 years old)	Total
<b>Spain (a)</b>	3	3	4	10
<b>Spain (b)</b>	2	2	3	7
<b>Portugal (a)</b>	3	0	3	6
<b>Portugal (b)</b>	3	0	1	4
<b>Italy (a)</b>	1	10	2	13
<b>Italy (b)</b>	2	0	0	2
<b>Italy (c)</b>	4	0	5	9
<b>Italy (d)</b>	3	5	2	10
<b>Poland (a)</b>	0	0	9	9
<b>Poland (b)</b>	2	0	10	12
<b>Poland (c)</b>	1	5	2	8
<b>Netherlands (a)</b>	1	2	3	5
<b>Netherlands (b)</b>	1	1	3	5
<b>Total</b>	25	28	47	100

For more information about the TOY Pilot Actions, visit:

<http://www.toyproject.net/publication/toy-in-action/>