DELIVERABLE D3.3

FINAL METHOD (6-12 years old)

Project number: 101100841

GOTALK

Inclusive children's councils leading to democratic exchange

CALL: CERV-2022-CHILD

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Technical References

Project Acronym	GOTALK
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PU = Public
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Disclaimer

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1	14/5/2025	Anouk Van Der Wildt	First version
2	7/8/2025	Rita Bertozzi	Description cross-border pilot
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4	14/8/2025	Anouk Van Der Wildt	Executive summary English

List of attachments

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List of abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation/Acronym	Meaning

1. A quick insight

1.1 Executive summary of the GOTALK project

The GOTALK project focuses on making decision-making processes in school and leisure more inclusive and sustainable. The project aims to look for ways to strengthen and render participation at school and in leisure time inclusive, impactful and sustainable. GOTALK is running in Belgium and Italy, but the GOTALK team wants to share ideas about child participation with other countries as well.

Earlier research demonstrated that, although child participation is organized with the best of intentions in different organizations, there are still children who do not get a chance to be involved or even heard. In addition, children's perspectives are not always taken seriously, which means that policymakers do not take their voices into account.

The two-year GOTALK project wants to change this and test various ways of child participation. In the first project year (2023-2024), a pilot project is conducted in elementary school in Flanders, focusing on organized leisure activities (BOA decree). At the same time, a pilot project is conducted in secondary education in Northern Italy, focusing on citizenship education. In both trajectories, facilitator-researchers will work with schools to connect and weigh in on policies together with the children. In the second project year (2024-2025), the participatory approaches are reversed. In Flanders the trajectory will run in secondary education, while in Northern Italy we work in primary education.

The goal of the research is to strengthen child participation, both in Northern Italy and in Flanders. Therefore, the GOTALK team wants to involve all possible partners in different networks, both at local and international level. GOTALK wants to try out and describe innovation in child participation so that it is accessible to as many organizations working with children as possible, also outside Flanders and Northern Italy. GOTALK is a project within the European CERV program 'Citizenship, Education, Rights and Values) and is co-funded by the European Union.

1.2 Executive summary of deliverable (English)

This deliverable is the result of two years of research and experiences with participation practices in pedagogical contexts (schools and extracurricular contexts). The GOTALK project conducted two rounds of pilot studies to investigate how the inclusiveness, sustainability, and policy impact of pupil councils and pupil participation can be strengthened.

In a first series of pilots (November 2023 to April 2024, at two primary schools in the city of Antwerp), the GOTALK team in Antwerp ran on extracurricular activities and childcare. The first series of pilots was based on a prototype participation practice in which five steps were followed (mapping the current situation, searching for different views, assembling different views, thinking of necessary adaptations, and broader consultation). After the first pilot project, the insights gained from the pilots in Belgium were incorporated into an adapted method and discussed with the GOTALK team in Italy. The adapted method opted for a more flexible five-step model and also integrated different levels of participation practice at a school (Why? How? What?).

Using the adapted method, the GOTALK team in Reggio Emilia set to work in one school and one out-of-school setting (November 2024 to March 2025). Testing the method yielded new insights that were integrated into the final method described in this deliverable. The new model also takes into account the ownership of each of the different steps, which is always balanced between adults and children and young people. In addition, the final model also places more emphasis on the flexible application of the various steps of a participation process.

Important insights are described at the end of this deliverable for each of the pillars of the GOTALK project:

Lessons learned by the GOTALK team about **inclusive participation** concern the use of the '100 languages' among children and young people as well as adults. This reveals a wide range of perspectives. It is essential to listen genuinely and deeply: to slow down, ask active questions, and value all forms of expression, including less conventional ones. The 'living wall' supports this process as a collective, reflective tool for gathering voices and connecting perspectives.

Sustainable participation requires the explicit exchange of ideas between children, educators, and policymakers. Pedagogical documentation can help make sensitive topics discussable. Children and young people must be involved from the outset to ensure sustainable results. Participation requires support from the entire organization and relevant external stakeholders. Clear structures make a pupil council more sustainable. Differentiation in forms of participation increases engagement. An external perspective stimulates reflection, breaks through blind spots, and supports joint vision development.

Young people are uncertain about the commitment of adults and institutions to **impactful participation**. Genuine involvement requires open discussions about representation and power. Adults can critically examine their role as gatekeepers: giving space, not controlling too much, having realistic expectations, and making sensitive topics discussable. Institutionalization provides structure but can also stagnate participation. Balance between roles, tasks, and communication is crucial. Written agreements and ongoing follow-up by adults are necessary to ensure participation.

GOTALK makes it clear that adults play a crucial role in how young people experience participation and engage with it. The GOTALK project supports and inspires adults to take responsibility, listen deeply, and work with young people to strengthen their voice, self-confidence, and influence. Adults in education and leisure hold the key: they can help children and young people experience that their perspective is important.

1.3 Executive summary of deliverable (Dutch)

Dit document is het product van twee jaar onderzoek en ervaringen met participatiepraktijken in pedagogische contexten (scholen en buitenschoolse contexten). Het GOTALK-project voerde twee rondes van pilootstudies uit om te onderzoeken hoe de inclusiviteit, duurzaamheid en beleidsimpact van leerlingenraden en leerlingenparticipatie kunnen worden versterkt.

In een eerste reeks pilootstudies (november 2023 tot april 2024, op twee basisscholen in de stad Antwerpen) heeft het GOTALK-team in Antwerpen zich gericht op buitenschoolse activiteiten en kinderopvang. De eerste reeks pilots was gebaseerd op een prototype participatiepraktijk waarin vijf stappen werden gevolgd (in kaart brengen van de huidige situatie, zoeken naar verschillende visies, samenbrengen van verschillende visies, nadenken over noodzakelijke aanpassingen en bredere raadpleging). Na het eerste pilootproject werden de inzichten uit de pilootprojecten in België verwerkt in

een aangepaste methode en besproken met het GOTALK-team in Italië. De aangepaste methode koos voor een flexibeler vijfstappenmodel en integreerde ook verschillende niveaus van participatiepraktijk op een school (Waarom? Hoe? Wat?).

Met behulp van de aangepaste methode ging het GOTALK-team in Reggio Emilia aan de slag in één school en één buitenschoolse omgeving (november 2024 tot maart 2025). Het testen van de methode leverde nieuwe inzichten op die werden geïntegreerd in het definitieve model die in dit rapport wordt beschreven. Het nieuwe model houdt ook rekening met de verantwoordelijkheid voor elk van de verschillende stappen, die altijd in evenwicht is tussen volwassenen en kinderen en jongeren. Bovendien legt het definitieve model ook meer nadruk op de flexibele toepassing van de verschillende stappen van een participatieproces.

Aan het einde van dit rapport worden belangrijke inzichten beschreven voor elk van de pijlers van het GOTALK-project:

De lessen die het GOTALK-team heeft geleerd over **inclusieve participatie** hebben betrekking op het gebruik van de '100 talen' onder kinderen en jongeren, maar ook onder volwassenen. Dit onthult een breed scala aan perspectieven. Het is essentieel om oprecht en aandachtig te luisteren: vertragen, actieve vragen stellen en alle vormen van expressie waarderen, ook de minder conventionele. De *living wall* ondersteunt dit proces als een collectief, reflectief instrument om stemmen te verzamelen en perspectieven met elkaar te verbinden.

Duurzame participatie vereist een expliciete uitwisseling van ideeën tussen kinderen, opvoeders en beleidsmakers. Pedagogische documentatie kan helpen om gevoelige onderwerpen bespreekbaar te maken. Kinderen en jongeren moeten vanaf het begin bij het proces worden betrokken om duurzame resultaten te garanderen. Participatie vereist ondersteuning van de hele organisatie en relevante externe belanghebbenden. Duidelijke structuren maken een leerlingenraad duurzamer. Differentiatie in vormen van participatie vergroot de betrokkenheid. Een extern perspectief stimuleert reflectie, doorbreekt blinde vlekken en ondersteunt de ontwikkeling van een gezamenlijke visie.

Jongeren zijn onzeker over de inzet van volwassenen en instellingen voor **impactvolle participatie**. Echte betrokkenheid vereist open discussies over vertegenwoordiging en macht. Volwassenen bekijken hun rol als *gatekeepers* best kritisch: ruimte geven, niet te veel controleren, realistische verwachtingen hebben en gevoelige onderwerpen bespreekbaar maken. Institutionalisering biedt structuur, maar kan participatie ook doen stagneren. Evenwicht tussen rollen, taken en communicatie is cruciaal. Schriftelijke afspraken en voortdurende follow-up door volwassenen zijn noodzakelijk om participatie te waarborgen.

GOTALK maakt duidelijk dat volwassenen een cruciale rol spelen in hoe jongeren participatie ervaren en ermee omgaan. Het GOTALK-project ondersteunt en inspireert volwassenen om verantwoordelijkheid te nemen, goed te luisteren en samen te werken met jongeren om hun stem, zelfvertrouwen en invloed te versterken. Volwassenen in het onderwijs en de vrijetijdssector spelen hierbij een sleutelrol: zij kunnen kinderen en jongeren helpen ervaren dat hun perspectief belangrijk is.

1.4 Executive summary of deliverable (Italian)

Questo rapporto è il frutto di due anni di ricerca ed esperienze con pratiche di partecipazione in contesti pedagogici (scuole e contesti extrascolastici). Il progetto GOTALK ha condotto due cicli di azioni pilota per indagare come rafforzare l'inclusività, la sostenibilità e l'impatto politico dei consigli dei bambini e della partecipazione degli alunni.

In una prima serie di azioni pilota (da novembre 2023 ad aprile 2024, in due scuole primarie della città di Anversa), il team GOTALK di Anversa ha lavorato su attività extracurricolari e con consigli dei bambini. La prima serie di progetti pilota si basava su un prototipo di pratica partecipativa in cui venivano seguiti cinque passaggi (mappatura della situazione attuale, ricerca di punti di vista diversi, raccolta di punti di vista diversi, riflessione sugli adattamenti necessari e consultazione più ampia). Dopo il primo anno pilota, le conoscenze acquisite dai progetti svolti in Belgio sono state incorporate in un metodo adattato e discusse con il team GOTALK in Italia. Il metodo adattato ha optato per un modello in cinque fasi più flessibile e ha anche integrato diversi livelli di pratica di partecipazione a scuola (Perché? Come? Cosa?).

Utilizzando il metodo adattato, il team GOTALK di Reggio Emilia l'ha utilizzato in una scuola e in un contesto extrascolastico (da novembre 2024 a marzo 2025). La sperimentazione del metodo ha fornito nuove intuizioni che sono state integrate nel metodo finale descritto in questo documento. Il nuovo modello tiene conto anche della titolarità di ciascuna delle diverse fasi, che è sempre equilibrata tra adulti, bambini e adolescenti. Inoltre, il modello finale pone maggiore enfasi sull'applicazione flessibile delle varie fasi del processo di partecipazione.

Alla fine del presente documento sono descritte importanti intuizioni per ciascuno dei pilastri del progetto GOTALK. Le lezioni apprese dal team GOTALK sulla **partecipazione inclusiva** riguardano l'uso dei "100 linguaggi" tra bambini, giovani e adulti. Ciò rivela un'ampia gamma di prospettive. È essenziale ascoltare in modo sincero e profondo: rallentare, porre domande attive e valorizzare tutte le forme di espressione, comprese quelle meno convenzionali. Il "muro vivente" sostiene questo processo come strumento collettivo e riflessivo per raccogliere voci e collegare prospettive.

La partecipazione sostenibile richiede uno scambio esplicito di idee tra bambini, educatori e responsabili politici. La documentazione pedagogica può aiutare a rendere discutibili argomenti delicati. I bambini e i giovani devono essere coinvolti fin dall'inizio per garantire risultati sostenibili. La partecipazione richiede il sostegno dell'intera organizzazione e delle parti interessate esterne. Strutture chiare rendono più sostenibile un consiglio dei bambini. La differenziazione nelle forme di partecipazione aumenta il coinvolgimento. Una prospettiva esterna stimola la riflessione, supera i punti ciechi e sostiene lo sviluppo di una visione comune.

I bambini sono incerti sull'impegno degli adulti e delle istituzioni nei confronti di una **partecipazione efficace**. Un coinvolgimento autentico richiede discussioni aperte sulla rappresentanza e sul potere. Gli adulti possono esaminare criticamente il loro ruolo di gatekeeper: dare spazio, non controllare troppo, avere aspettative realistiche e rendere discutibili argomenti delicati. L'istituzionalizzazione fornisce una struttura, ma può anche stagnare la partecipazione. L'equilibrio tra ruoli, compiti e comunicazione è fondamentale. Per garantire la partecipazione sono necessari accordi scritti e un follow-up continuo da parte degli adulti.

GOTALK chiarisce che gli adulti svolgono un ruolo cruciale nel modo in cui i giovani vivono la partecipazione e si impegnano in essa. Il progetto GOTALK sostiene e ispira gli adulti ad assumersi la responsabilità, ad ascoltare attentamente e a lavorare con i bambini e giovani per rafforzare la loro voce, la loro autostima e la loro influenza. Gli adulti nel campo dell'istruzione e del tempo libero hanno un ruolo chiave: possono aiutare i bambini e i giovani a capire che il loro punto di vista è importante.

2. GOTALK: Foundations of the project

2.1 Children's participation

Children have a right to participate in those decisions that affect them. That is stated in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (UNCRC, 1989)

Children and young people do indeed participate in various councils and share their views about their surroundings. However, this participation is unequally divided among children. The European Study on Child Participation, published in 2021, concluded, for instance, that vulnerable children and children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate systematically in political and democratic life, as are children younger than twelve years old. (European Commission. Directorate General for Justice and Consumers. et al., 2021)

Although nearly every country on the globe has ratified the UNCRC, it does not mean that participation itself is taken for granted. Historically, the UNCRC took root in another social and political timeframe and mindset, when the belief that democracy would prevail globally was far greater than it is now. Democracies internationally are vulnerable nowadays. Additionally, children's right to participation has not always been easily implemented. In a much-cited paper, Laura Lundy stated for instance, that adults' knowledge about the width of Article 12 UNCRC is lacking, and that the enactment of this article needs the support of a strong use of other rights[1] covered by the UNCRC. (Lundy, 2007) The participation right needs to be supported by a sound attention to four cornerstones: space (the opportunity to express a view); voice (the support to express a view); audience (the view must be listened to), and influence (the view must be acted upon).

In this context, the GOTALK consortium wanted to test a specific approach to strengthen participatory practices in organized contexts, such as schools. The GOTALK team believes it is particularly important to offer children enough solid experiences to allow them to experience participation and democracy. Schools as pedagogical systems have to play a role to support this participation right of young people. Not only because school is one of the most important environments where children spend a lot of time, but also because participation does not necessarily come naturally. Not for children, but not for adults either.

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[1] Lundy points specifically to the following rights: Art.2: Non-Discrimination; Art. 3: Best Interests of the Child; Art.5 Right to Guidance from Adults; Art.13 Right to Information; and Art. 19 Right to be Safe. (Lundy, 2007, p. 932)

2.2 Three GOTALK challenges: inclusiveness, sustainability and policy impact

The GOTALK project experimented with formal participation in schools and youth organizations. Eight piloting contexts took part in the project, four for children between 6 and 12 and four for young people between 13 and 18 years old. In Belgium, the schools had a pupil council; a representative body of around 20 pupils that convened regularly to discuss school activities and policy recommendations for the school. In Italy, these representative bodies were not organized at the level of the school. But there, the GOTALK facilitator-researchers worked with young people around the same topics; participation and policy influence by and with children. Policy documents and previous research show that participatory trajectories with young people, suffer from various challenges (e.g. ChildFund Alliance et. al., 2021; Peleman et.al., 2014; UNICEF & Eurochild, 2019). The main goal of GOTALK was to address three specific and problematic challenges in adolescents' and children's participation in decision-making: inclusiveness, sustainability and tangible impact on decisions.

1. Inclusiveness: Pupil councils do not ensure participation for every pupil

Although not intentional, there are a lot of barriers to pupil councils that make participation not always inclusive and accessible (Van Daele et.al., 2021). Not all pupils find it equally easy to have their opinions heard, while others feel very comfortable during a pupil council. It is often the older, white pupils who have the school language as their home language who make their voices heard. Younger pupils, children from families with a background in migration, pupils with a different home language or pupils with special needs are less likely to be heard (EC, 2021). This is unfortunate, because every voice and perspective is needed for an honest discussion.

2. Sustainability: Pupil councils are fragile

For children's participation rights in decision-making to work, a clear governance model is needed for sustainability and continuity (Van Daele et.al., 2021). In schools, there are a lot of tasks to divide, and pupil participation is seen as one of the tasks teachers can fulfil at school. However, how sustainable is a pupil council when those teachers are absent? Although schools are required to involve their pupils in decision-making (Flemish Participation Decree, 2008), continuity is not evident due to staff capacity and training (Childfund Alliance et.al., 2021). The art of sustainability might be to find more team members to support the pupil council and embrace the pupil council as an obvious aspect of school life. For participation to be sustainable, it cannot be treated as an isolated project or the responsibility of individual school staff and pupils. A clear governance model is needed, adapted to the scale of a school or youth organization.

3. Policy impact: Children meeting in a council does not mean their voice also has impact.

Children's participation tends to be restricted; they are not often involved in agenda setting and their recommendations remain merely non-binding (EC, 2021). Children are quick to recognise when their involvement is merely symbolic, and repeated experiences of empty consultation can lead to disillusionment and withdrawal. In a study by Peleman and colleagues (2014) more than half of children indicated they felt the staff listened to their opinions but less than 1/3 of children stated they could participate to decision-making. To ensure that participation is both credible and effective, it must be structured around clear goals, supported by decision-makers with the authority to act, and followed up with feedback that shows how children's input has influenced outcomes.

2.3 Pedagogical views and practices supporting participation

The GOTALK project assumed that several conditions have to be met to make participation 'work'.

Firstly, children's *right to participation is the core of the project*, meaning that time and again the GOTALK team of facilitator-researchers needed to reflect on the activities and pilots as they were deployed. Issues of tokenism, symbolic participation have been documented and discussed in practical and scientific literature (e.g. Cahill & Davdand, 2018; Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2001; Lundy, 2007). Therefore, the project team needed to make sense of the question: Is what happens here conducive to or restrictive of participation? For this, the GOTALK team experimented with participatory practices within the piloting activities inspired by scientific work from different fields.

The work of different scholars to conceptualize children's participation in programs led the GOTALK teams not to take the meanings of participation for granted.

Hart's (1992) '**Ladder of Participation**' and the subsequent reworked models support a wider questioning of participation discourses (Treseder 1997; Lansdown 2001). These later approaches proposed a non-hierarchical order of the degrees of participation, or focused on the effect(s) of participation, rather than just on its modality, and on the role that surrounding adults and institutions play in shaping 'pathways' to participation (Shier 2001), and focused on the fluid nature of participation, with its ongoing responses to context, circumstances and to the shifts in relational power dynamics that can evolve, ebb and flow within a given experience (Cahill and Davdand 2018). Our field work and reflections have brought to independently develop a synthesis representation that has several points in common with Cahill and Davdand's **P7 model** that represents a thinking tool

for youth participation, assembling seven inter-acting domains i) purpose, ii) positioning, iii) perspective, iv) power relations, v) protection, vi) place, and vii) process. The purpose of the initiative is understood to orient all other domains, but activity in one domain influences what happens in other domains. For example, if power relations are managed well, diverse perspectives will be included and valued.

The work of Karen Lundy also shaped thinking about participation. Her **rights-based approach** describes that participation rights are so much more than inviting children to 'give their voice' (Lundy, 2007). Children's participation should be supported by adults, by granting space, an audience and influence to children. During the piloting experiences, the framework of **child-friendly information** by Stalford, Cairns and Marshall (2017) also proved supportive. They state that the right to information (which is a crucial cornerstone for the right to participation), implies more than giving children procedural and practical information. They coin the term 'agency asserting information'.; Information should not only be given, it should be given in such a way that children can use the information in real life situations that matter to them. (Stalford et al., 2017: 212).. The concept of **boundaried participation** (Waters-Davies et.al., 2024, Murphy, A. et al. 2022) turned out to be very helpful for the GOTALK team as well. Participation can only 'work' insofar as adults that are involved in participatory processes have the idea that children are capable beings. (Instead of, for instance, beings that are considered too young, or too unknowing.) Participation becomes boundaried when adults work from a more restrictive set of beliefs about children in their agency and capabilities.

This circumstance, in our view, further contributes to validate our conclusions on the importance of key factors and on the fluidity of the participatory process.

Secondly, the GOTALK consortium employed a pedagogical approach that is based on ideas and fosters participation. In general, the idea of the GOTALK project is rooted in the **pedagogy of Reggio Emilia** (Fleet & Machado, 2022; Malaguzzi, 1996; Rinaldi, 2021). This pedagogy adheres to the idea that children are agents in their own lives, that their views are important and that community-building is part of pedagogy. Moreover, the Reggio Emilia Pedagogy employs methods that encourage participation and foster it. One core element of the pedagogy is the idea that children have 'a 100 languages' (Malaguzzi, 1996; Rinaldi, 2021, Gardner, 2011). Children do not only express themselves with words and adults should remain attentive to understand any 'other language' that children also 'speak', such as mimics, gestures, body language. This idea was used to enhance the inclusiveness of participatory processes. A second core element in the pedagogy or Reggio Emilia, is the practice of 'pedagogic documentation', which is in essence a cycle of *observation, documentation and interpretation*. Used first and foremost as a practice to reflect on children's learning, the project team

wanted to use the practice to shape profound participatory practices. The practice of pedagogic documentation could strengthen the inclusiveness, the sustainability and the policy impact of participatory processes. Central in GOTALK was the planned use of a *Living Wall*, (Bjartveit, Carston, Baxtor, Hart & Greenidge, 2019), a place where the participatory process would be documented, and that could make the voices and opinions of children visible and invite several participants to consider their perspective (Van Daele & Piessens, 2021).

The Reggio Emilia Pedagogy in the GOTALK project proposal (Van Daele et al., 2022) was strengthened by the use of the validated '**mosaic approach**' (Clark & Moss, 2011), a participatory method that puts the agency of children and other participants central and invites them to partake in decision-making processes following a photo voice and pedagogic documentation design. It has the potential of involving young children, children with specific needs and children, families and stakeholders from different linguistic backgrounds, strenghtening the probability of inclusiveness of the participation trajectories.

Thirdly, the GOTALK project looked into the role of **governance** as a strengthening or undermining force for children's participation. The GOTALK project started from the observation that a clear governance model strengthens strong mechanisms for participation and mostly functions at a broader level than schools or youth organizations (Van Daele et.al., 2021). However, some sort of governance is needed in schools to guarantee participation for pupils, as pupil participation often suffers from issues of sustainability due to a shortage of staff and resources (Childfund Alliance et.al., 2021). Children's participation gains in sustainability when procedures are put into place to facilitate, protect and ensure participation. Cahill and Dadvand (2018) advocate for a balanced protection: when it comes to procedures put into place to protect those participating, we should be careful not to overprotect young people as this might hinder them in their participative opportunities. Shier (2001) focused on the importance of necessary resources for participation, and categorizes openings, opportunities and even obligations for organizations: When procedures and policy requirements are put into place, there is no option of not letting young people participate. In that way, school workers can make sure the system of their school is ready for participation.

3. Piloting experiences

3.1 Insights from the first piloting year

3.1.1 Method prototype

The first year of the GOTALK project started with finding and motivating two school teams to join the project. The actual piloting experience started in November 2023 and coincided with the development of a first prototype for formal participation in primary education. The first prototype (D3.1) focused on the functioning of the children's council and entailed a six-step model for pupil participation in formal councils. The six steps were designed to enhance inclusiveness, sustainability and policy impact for children's councils. These steps indicated the sequence the GOTALK team proposed a participation process at school can follow:

1) Understanding the context

2) Mapping the current situation

3) Searching for different views

4) Assembling different views

5) Forming policy advice

6) Sharing policy advice

These steps however should be interpreted in a flexible way, as every school context and participation trajectory is different. It might be necessary to jump a few steps and prioritize a step that shows up later in the sequence. However, all steps are important and the process of participation that goes through all of the steps will most certainly be richer than only investing in one or a few isolated steps.

3.1.2 Piloting experiences

In the first year of the project, piloting methodologies for children's participation in two primary schools in Antwerp have inspired the adaptation of the prototype proposed by GOTALK.

The piloting experiences brought insights on different levels:

On the one hand, the pilots informed on how to organize a children's council meeting: Insights on the role of the facilitator for a children's council made clear that the pedagogy of teaching and the pedagogy of participation have fundamental differences which should be made explicit. As Fleet and Machado (2022, p. 180) stated "…it is necessary to develop a pedagogical mediation that knows

how to silence itself. This means that practitioners suspend their voice to make room for the children's voice." A pedagogy of participation does not need a teacher in front of the class, does not require pupil's to listen in silence, but rather needs facilitators that sit with children and encourage them to speak more from a place of curiosity. The duration and frequency of the children's council do not always harmonise with the pace of children. It also provided insights into the use of 100 languages for pupils to express their points of view and the importance of ensuring pupils are comfortable with the language used in the pupil council. The pilots also emphasised the importance of encouraging pupils to dream big and not to rush into challenges too quickly.

On the other hand, the GOTALK team felt obliged to zoom out and reframe the focus of their endeavours beyond the activities in the pupil council. Work had to be done at the level of the school, for instance, to work on aligning the policy makers at school with the pupil council. Another aspect that demanded the team's attention was to rethink the distribution of responsibilities between children and teachers' staff, for instance, when bridging the pupil council meetings with the classmates that were not included during the council meeting. In general, assumptions about the pedagogy of participation and how it differs from a pedagogy of teaching were discussed and clarified.

3.1.3 Adapted method

Based on the insights gained from the piloting experiences, the method prototype was adapted and enriched through a layered approach. The adapted method distinguished between three levels of intervention parallel to the 'Golden Circle (Sinek, 2011):

1) The participation process with the pupil council (WHAT?)
2) The procedures in school that either support or hinder the pupil council (HOW?)
3) The school's views on the core concepts of a pupil council. (WHY?)
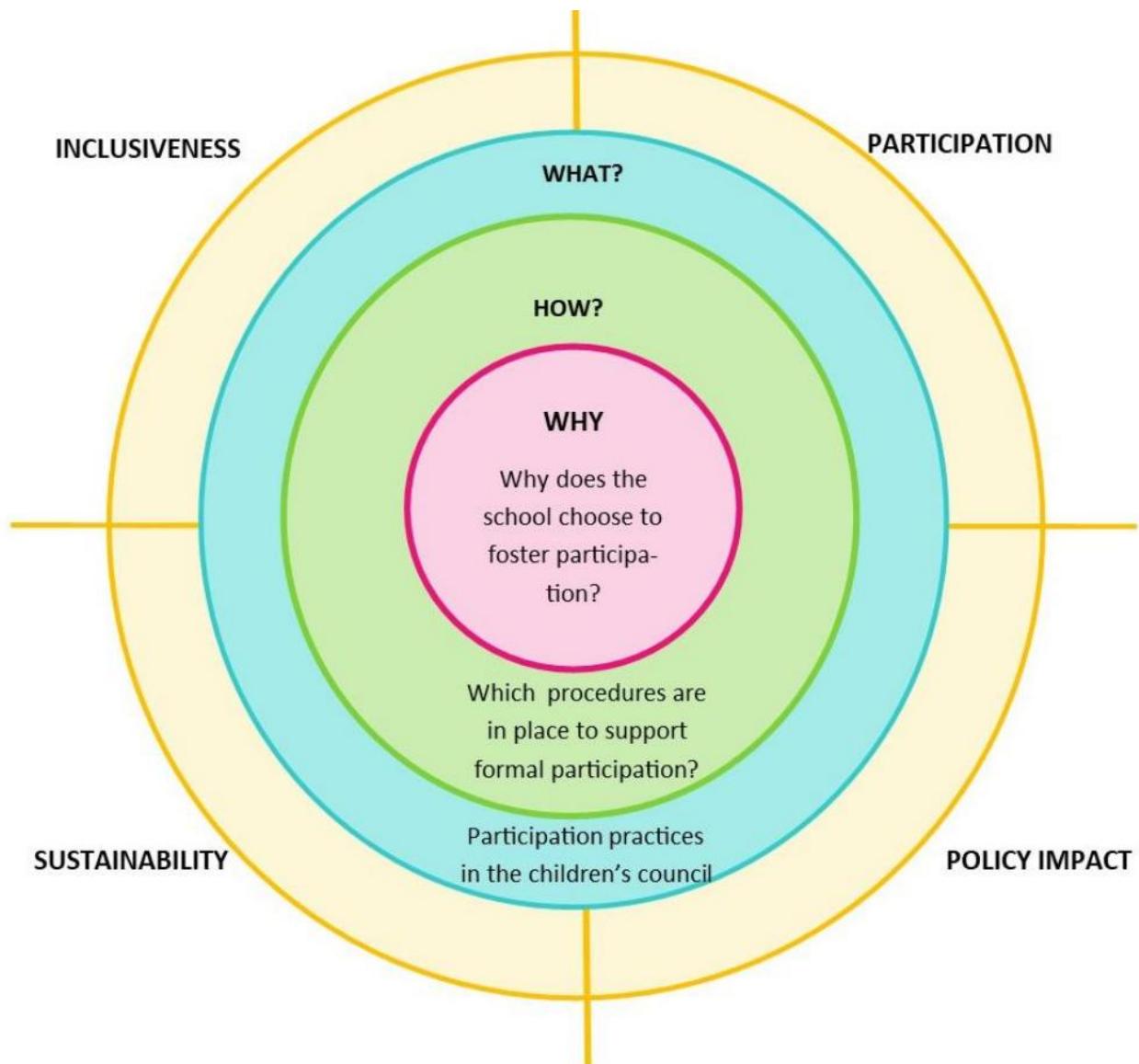
Figure 1: GOTALK levels of intervention

For a more detailed report on the first piloting experiences and the adapted method, see D3.2. For an insight into the selection of the piloting settings, see D3.4.

3.1.4 Lab 2 and Sanremo partner meeting

The design of the project, provided with a lab to ensure sound cross-border exchange before initiating the cross-border pilots. Therefore, the team organised a lab and partner meeting in October 2024 in Sanremo. Not only team members, but also school staff from the schools participating in the first and second rounds of pilots, joined.

During this session, it became clear that although targeting other age groups and taking place in different countries, the insights from both the Belgian pilots and Italian pilots had a lot of

commonalities. For both settings, the GOTALK levels of intervention were applicable. On the other hand, the GOTALK team, in both contexts, concluded after the first piloting experiences that the focus should also be on the pedagogical view of pupils, alongside the methodologies of participation. Another point linking the two contexts together was the idea that the participatory path should be flexible and include the various sequential steps to be successful.

After this meeting, the GOTALK team agreed to update each other thoroughly through a digital visualization of the cross-border pilots and intervision meetings on the piloting experiences.

3.2 Cross-border pilot experiences (year 2)

3.2.1 Cross-border testing of GOTALK methodologies

In the second year of GOTALK, the Italian working team, as mandated by the project, took over from the Belgian group to apply the adapted method with subjects aged 6-12 in Reggio Emilia. A discussion was initiated to understand how and what to propose in the Italian context, starting from the results of the experiments conducted by both research groups.

To decide how to proceed, it was essential to hold a joint planning meeting at the international meeting in Sanremo, which was attended not only by the Unimore facilitator-researchers but also by some professionals who would be working on the project in Reggio Emilia in the second year. At that meeting, it was possible to systematise the two adapted models, as well as to share in a broad and in-depth manner what had happened in the respective contexts, to understand strengths, similarities, transferable elements, and peculiarities that could not be extended to other contexts. With a view to transferability, the discussion between project partners made it possible to combine tools and methodologies, thereby expanding the methods of intervention and promoting deeper participation.

The difference between the two contexts was confirmed: in Italy, there are no structured pupil councils for the 6-14 age group. Some contexts offer experiences similar to those of the children's councils encountered in Antwerp, but not typically within schools. In any case, at the time of the experiment, there were no such groups active in Reggio Emilia.

On the other hand, there were many similarities with the work carried out in Antwerp. In particular: awareness of the crucial role of adults (difference between teaching and education for participation, consistency, facilitation function); the limitations linked to the organisational rigidity of schools; the importance of valuing the 100 languages and giving children a voice and taking them seriously.

The Reggio Emilia research group therefore, set up the cross-border pilot by combining the three areas of reflection identified in the model adapted by the Belgians with the tasks for applying the participatory process followed in the Italian pilots (D3.2, D3.3):

− Why? Why does the school choose to foster participation?
− How? What procedures are in place to support formal participation?
− What? Participation practices in the children's council

Regarding tools and methodologies, in addition to confirming the choice to work with the 100 languages, it was decided to propose, more broadly and systematically than in the first Italian year, two tools that characterised the work in Antwerp: the living wall and peer interviews.

The tools and interpretations tested in Belgium with children were therefore linked to those developed in Italy for the 13-18 age group (illustrated in D.4.2).

As illustrated in deliverable 4.3, the model incorporates the six steps hypothesised in the initial prototype and tested in the first year, expanding and repositioning them in a logic that is no longer sequential but 'three-dimensional', consisting of six tasks, as illustrated in the following summary chart:
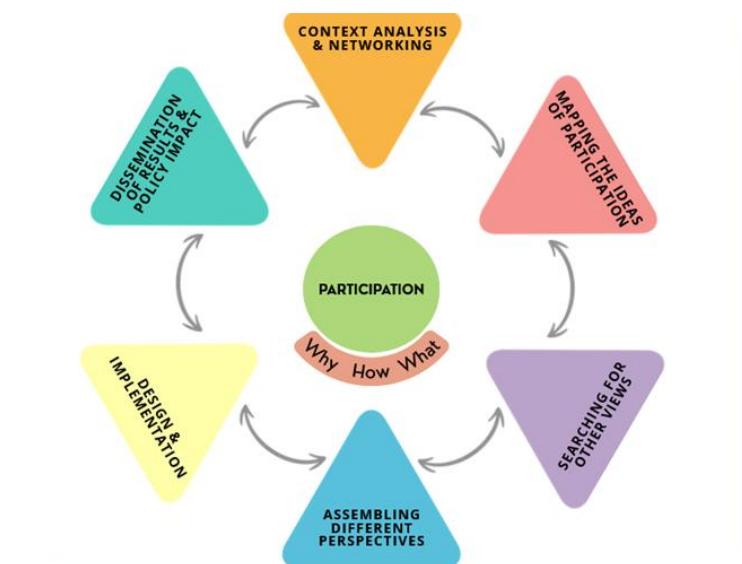
Participation is central to the model. It is the starting point and end point of any project aimed at promoting it and, at the same time, it is structured and defined during the project itself.
 Six other tasks revolve around the focal point of participation, all equally essential for supporting and developing participatory processes:

1. context analysis and networking stakeholders;
2. mapping the ideas of participation in the group;
3. searching for other children's views;
4. assembling different perspectives;
6. design and implementation;
7. dissemination of results and policy impact.

Each task is independent and can be developed to a greater or lesser extent depending on the characteristics of the environment and the protagonists of the participatory process. The tasks can be tackled one after the other, but they are not sequential; rather, they are interconnected: as will be seen in the following paragraphs, they may have direct links between them, or they may be linked through the central focus of participation or through other points. They can also overlap and/or repeat themselves during the process. In the design phase, given that the starting point in terms of meaning is the focus of participation, it is possible to start from any of the six points, depending on the needs of the group and the contextual constraints and facilitations.

Each task contributes to the whole process through the three levels of intervention: Why, How, What. The 'Why' allows us to focus on the reasons and meanings that schools, contexts and stakeholders attributed to the participatory process activated, together with the expected results. The 'How' allows us to pay attention to the procedures activated and how the groups of young people were supported or hindered. The 'What', allows us to pay attention to things happening: tools, actions, practices that were available and came into play or were structured during the pilot. Both children and adults play a leading role in each task. The weight of their role may vary depending on the characteristics and needs of the project, but it is important to observe how both are active in the process, also considering the three questions (Why? How? What?). In order to develop the work in the tasks in the best possible way, ensuring inclusiveness and full participation of all, it is important to propose active tools and methodologies: the choice to propose work that values the 100 languages and uses Socratic dialogue, routines and observation of processes, already tested in the first year, is confirmed.

Here below, there is a summary and analysis of the process, starting with the tasks that make up the adapted model. As mentioned, the various points have not been developed in a sequential manner. For the sake of clarity, we have chosen to start with core 1 (context analysis and networking stakeholders), which was the first step in the second year of GOTALK. The development of this point will allow us to describe the groups involved, starting from the process that led to their identification. This will be followed by task 6 (design and implementation), which in chronological terms was tackled roughly halfway through the process, but which provides a better understanding of all the other tasks, which were tackled at different times, sometimes even simultaneously, or by returning to tasks already developed, in order to add details and achieve the outcome of the participatory process.

3.2.2 Piloting contexts

3.2.2.1 Context analysis and networking stakeholders

The choice of contexts in which to pilot the model in the second year in Reggio Emilia was made exclusively by adults: the local GOTALK team consulted with international partners and local stakeholders, in particular with *Officina Educativa*, the Reggio Emilia municipal service that deals with educational projects in schools and outside schools. This service saw GOTALK as an opportunity, as one of its aims is to encourage young people to participate in school and city life as a means of growing and finding their place in the world. To this end, the municipality coordinates and funds projects for young people, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable, and provides professionals who work in schools and afternoon educational services.

In this step, it was decided to involve girls and boys attending lower secondary school, aged 11-13, in the piloting action.

Both at a general level and with respect to the specific educational and didactic offerings of the area, in secondary school the need for pupil participation, listening and appreciation appears more marked. This school level, as the junction between primary and upper secondary school, is the place where pupils begin to feel more strongly the need to be part of a peer group, to experience greater autonomy and to make crucial choices for their future. This is precisely why it is essential to provide them with opportunities to acquire or consolidate skills related to inclusiveness and participation. Moreover, in secondary school, girls and boys are called upon to experiment first-hand with delegation and representation: it is precisely the first-year pilots in secondary school in Italy that have highlighted the lack of skills in this regard and the difficulty, explicitly expressed by pupils, in taking an active part in unknown and little-understood participatory

mechanisms. Starting to experiment with them already in the previous school order, therefore becomes an interesting opportunity to increase girls' and boys' awareness and agency skills.

It was also decided to proceed in continuity with the first year of experimentation and to work with a school and an out-of-school context. This was done to further explore the difference between the two settings in terms of constraints, flexibility, and different attitudes of the professionals involved. In addition, the different characteristics of the groups made it possible to further investigate the ways in which girls and boys responded to the proposal: on the one hand, participation in a school project, which involved the class during curricular hours and therefore with an obligation to attend, but with no constraints linked to assessment; on the other, involvement in an activity proposed by an optional afternoon service and chosen by the boys and their families.

During the summer of 2024, the GOTALK team met on several occasions with local officials responsible for educational interventions in schools and out-of-school activities and illustrated the project and its objectives. Two groups were chosen because they were strongly interested, for different reasons, in the topic of participation: a school and an out-of-school centre. The presence of both in the same area made it possible to broaden the view, also opening up possible interconnections between the two realities. In this sense, it was decided to open a tool for communication between the two groups through the creation of an external notice board that would put the two contexts in dialogue. The tool of the living wall, chosen from those experimented in the first year, made it possible to broaden the view and valorise the single experience of each pilot.

The 'Dalla Chiesa' lower secondary school is in a neighbourhood of Reggio Emilia characterised by the coexistence of social housing, inhabited by families with a lower socio-economic status and a migrant background, and the homes of middle-class families. In the past, the school has seen a high number of enrolled pupils with different backgrounds. In recent years, however, it has seen a decline in enrolment, with an over-representation of vulnerable pupils, mainly due to their foreign origin or special educational needs.

The school head and the educational staff of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia enthusiastically welcomed the GOTALK project, identifying it as an opportunity to give a voice and a listening ear to these frailties and, at the same time, to highlight the resources and opportunities that the school and its pupils have.

The "Spazio 11" is one of the educational services promoted by the Municipal Administration of Reggio Emilia for girls and boys aged 11-14. These services are present in the city's neighbourhoods and are offered within school spaces but maintain their autonomy with respect to the school context. In this case, this service is present next to the Dalla Chiesa school and accommodates about 30 girls and boys with very varied family and socio-cultural backgrounds. There are many users with a migrant background or with disadvantages. The service is managed by three educators and a coordinator, who accompany the group with numerous proposals ranging from shared meals and homework space to the offer of workshops and the planning of activities within the service or in the area.

Spazio 11 accepted the proposal to try out the GOTALK method with its young people because it found it in line with the educational approach of the service and because it believed that this project could help the young people to open up to the outside world, to the local area (to learn more about its strengths and weaknesses and to give the young people the opportunity to participate actively in other contexts), but also towards the nearby school (which also has Spazio 11 users among its pupils and with which, unfortunately, it is difficult to build synergies that increase the possibilities for activation and participation for the young people).

3.2.2.2 Design and implementation

There were two steps in the development of the 'design and implementation' task.

a) The first step involved designing the participatory process and involved only adults: during the initial planning stage, GOTALK facilitators, educators, teachers, the head teacher and municipal officials decided which children to involve in the project and how.

b) The second involved both adults and children and concerned the various actions devised and implemented by the groups during the trial to give concrete form to their participatory process.

a) Who participates

The planning of the two pilots was started before the meeting in Sanremo in October 2024 but benefited from it because it was attended by the head teacher at the selected school and an educator from the youth centre. This made it possible to start reflecting, together with all the project partners, on the characteristics of the work in the two pilots of the second year. In November, teachers and educators designed the participatory process and the piloting experiences started in December 2024 and ended in March 2025.

In Reggio Emilia, there was no pupil council in the selected school; however, numerous activities were carried out in the past to encourage participation in school life, thanks also to educators for inclusiveness (educators paid by the municipality who work in schools to support the inclusion of pupils with special needs). The GOTALK project aligned with these actions and was therefore presented as an opportunity to move forward together towards school improvement.

After discussing the different possibilities for involving the boys and girls (setting up a children's council, working with girls and boys identified by the school in each class) with the headteacher, it was decided to extend the proposal as far as possible. The presence within the school of a group of educators made available by the municipal administration made it possible to place an educator alongside the GOTALK facilitator. The school was therefore able to involve all the pupils of the first three classes, who worked in parallel and with the same stimuli and tools, and then arrived at different results based on what emerged in each of the three class paths.

The decision to work with the first classes (11-12 years old) was in response to the need to give continuity to the project. Lower secondary school lasts three years, so these boys and girls will have another two years ahead of them to give continuity to the experimentation, both by continuing the actions started in the project and by experimenting with participation in new project actions.

In addition to enhancing peer involvement, an effort was made to support continuity and expand the process to the entire school through discussions with teachers and peers. In one class, the activities took place at different times to enable several teachers to take part in the project. In the other two, a single teacher per class worked on the project, but the children's work was taken to the teacher's class council to involve other adults in the process and choices.

There is no children's council in the extracurricular service either, although a moment of assembly discussion was already planned and consolidated before the start of the activities in the group meetings. This moment was the starting point for the structuring of the GOTALK project. After an initial meeting proposed to the entire group, in which the project was presented and the objectives were explained, girls and boys met in assembly and each of them decided whether or not to participate in the project, giving reasons for their choice. A sub-group of girls and boys was formed who declared their interest in participating and who undertook to keep the large group informed of developments.

<u>b) What can we do?</u>

All the groups involved in GOTALK, at a certain point in the process, came up with a concrete project. This meant that the central focus of participation for each group developed across all three levels envisaged by the theoretical model: participation as a prerequisite (belonging to the working group), participation as a process (the GOTALK programme), participation as an objective (achieving something that brings about change through the involvement of young people).

In the out-of-school centre, in response to the adults' decision to broaden their view of the area, the young people were shown a map of the neighbourhood and asked to express what they knew about the place. The group spent a long time on this first effort, without immediately finding a meaning or a hook to proceed with the work. At a certain point, the perspective emerged: GOTALK would be an opportunity to show everyone (first and foremost the other project partners and the EU) the beauty of the neighbourhood where the young people live. The group therefore decided to design and create a map, like tourist maps of the city centre, indicating places that were significant to the young people in the group and suggesting that they discover them through a small gastronomic itinerary: the 'ice cream tour'.

At school, the project responded to the needs of adults (headteacher, teachers and educators) to promote active participation and a sense of belonging among their pupils, highlighting and communicating their strengths and supporting inclusiveness, the development of the children's skills and listening on the part of teachers. For this reason, it was decided to ask the three classes to observe the school premises and recount what their older classmates had done in previous school years, with the help of the educators, to give the children a say in the care and management of the school. Following this, when asked by the project team 'What can we do here at school?', the three classes converged on a common goal: to improve the school. The three paths then developed in different ways: one class, 1B, chose to focus on the care and maintenance of the bathrooms (many of which were in a state of disrepair), while the other two classes decided to design themed classrooms for teaching different subjects (languages, technology, geography and history).

The final products implemented by the groups were as follows:

− the map 'Go-walk. Il quartiere per noi' (Go-walk. The neighbourhood for us), distributed in digital and printed format and made available to users of the Spazio 11 service and the nearby Dalla Chiesa school. At the request of the group, the research team undertook to send it to the EU, attaching it to the GOTALK project documentation materials;
− the 'Rispetto più rispetto' (More respect) project, in which class 1B proposed an agreement between adults and children at the school, whereby everyone commits to doing their part to improve the school's toilet facilities and to take care of them;
− the projects to improve the language classroom, to set up technology and geo-history classrooms and to manage their use by everyone and the movement from classrooms to themed classrooms, which emerged from the work of the other two first-year classes.

3.2.2.3 Mapping the ideas of participation

The task of gathering views by children on the ideas of participation within the group is the one most directly linked to the core concept of participation. This step in the model is strongly linked to the results of the first year of experimentation in the Italian contexts when, with the adolescents in Reggio, it became clear that it cannot be taken for granted that all young people have the same idea about participation, nor can we assume that all adults have a rich understanding of participation or the same understanding as young people. In order to support participation with respect and effectiveness, it is therefore important to take all the time necessary to clarify all points of view on the concept. This task is also closely intertwined with that of 'Searching for other children views'. The difference between the two points lies in the fact that in this step, the focus is not on ideas in general or on awareness of the possible plurality of viewpoints, but on the meaning that each person attributes to participation and the choices that follow, as a starting point for the journey.

There were numerous opportunities to give space to the meaning and points of view on participation. Some had to do with the methodological plan (tools and techniques suitable for encouraging participation), while others emerged during the design and implementation of the project, as a result of discussions with the young people and adults and the way they acted and reacted to the stimuli provided by GOTALK.

In Spazio 11, the first opportunity to gather views on participation was the meeting in which the young people attending chose whether or not to take part in the project. The group discussed the issue and then the educators and the facilitator asked everyone why they had chosen to participate or not. The reasons were very varied and reflected different ideas about participation. Those who did not join did so because they were tired, because they were already involved in GOTALK at a nearby school, because they had access to other more interesting or more urgent activities (e.g. homework), or because they were not very interested in the topic. Those who did participate did so because of their interest in something new, curiosity, the advice of educators, and the desire to do something that was already being done at school in order to see the differences. The group wanted to make it clear that it was possible to change one's mind, considering it an opportunity when choices are made consciously and not lightly.

At the Dalla Chiesa school, on the other hand, at the start of the project, it was decided to devote time to reflecting on how pupils participate in school. Following the observation in the first year of piloting in Italy that for some children, participating in school life meant only raising their hands to ask questions during lessons, the classes were asked to take part in a theatrical improvisation to highlight the ways of participating during a lecture and, from there, to try to hypothesise others, starting from a change of position and direction of gaze in the space. The group work revealed that there are many ways to participate.

Following this, in numerous opportunities for dialogue, the facilitator asked the groups to pause for a moment to observe the mechanisms of participation during the dialogue itself and in decision-making processes. A plurality of points of view and expectations emerged: from those who believed that participation was the answer to teachers' requests, to those who argued that in order to participate it was important to assert one's own ideas, even over those of others. Some tried to lead the group to observe minority and divergent points of view, while others called for clear and binding rules. Some feared contradicting adults, while others sought common ground and mediation between conflicting or divergent opinions and requests.

On several occasions, the groups found themselves having to decide on roles, the creation of subgroups, and the choice of leaders or representatives. When the facilitator asked them not to delegate to adults but to do it themselves, defining criteria and then identifying the right people, some were taken aback, but in the end, everyone accepted the challenge. This allowed various points of view on participation, representation and delegation to emerge once again: in order to choose who should fill a particular role, some felt they should rely on chance (drawing lots, counting), others felt they should ask adults, while others tried to suggest criteria related to skills (to be a spokesperson, you need to know Italian, be outgoing, know what you are talking about and have the trust of others). In some cases, conflicts arose, and tensions rose within the group ('he's not listening', 'she's not able to stay with us all the time', 'he's acting like a dictator'). With guidance in managing these dynamics, the young people were able to address and overcome them with respect, coming to accept the decisions resulting from the group's work and discovering new meanings and mechanisms regarding participation.

The content that emerged during the conception and design phase, which was carried out by the young people themselves, also allowed different ideas of participation to emerge.

At Spazio 11, when describing their neighbourhood, the young people explained that in order to enjoy living there, they need spaces to play, hang out and entertain themselves, but also practical services that allow them to stay there and not have to go home (places to eat that are suitable for young people, places to charge their phones). For others, participation means actively using services such as the library, parks, swimming pools, theatres and workshops. For others, it means paying attention to dangers (unprotected river, potholes), but also to others (you can't participate well where there is rubbish or noise and confusion). For others still, participating in neighbourhood life means knowing where others live and proudly showing where you live.

At school, on the other hand, ideas for participation all revolved around the challenge of improving the school, and there were many of them. The most interesting for the classes were related to the use of school spaces (possibility of movement, use of outdoor space, availability of a space to hang out during free periods), had to do with relationships (spaces to meet, spaces to talk about one's problems, not only personal ones, but also those related to being part of a group, spaces and symbols that express the various affiliations of the pupils, school tracksuits or T-shirts showing their shared identity) or referred to improvements to spaces related to well-being, beauty and care (themed classrooms, toilets, lockers). All the proposals that emerged highlighted a dual perspective: on the one hand, ideas of participation linked to sharing spaces, thoughts and goals with others; on the other, a concept of participation that responds to the individual need for belonging and self-expression.

The starting point in all groups, and a prerequisite for exploring other people's points of view, was to clarify the views of the pupils in the classes involved and the extracurricular group. This was to ensure that the exchange with others was as enriching as possible and not conditioning or inductive. For this reason, the first meetings focused on exploring the context through dialogue and physical activities, so that participants could express their own points of view.

The starting point for everyone was wonder.

At Spazio 11, an amazing experience was proposed: the group had already worked on maps of the city in the past to discover the opportunities available to them, especially in the central area of the city, which is less frequented by users of the service (museums, workshops, theatres, etc.), but they had never had the opportunity to look at the neighbouring district. Finding the digital map of the block projected on the wall was the starting point. The question 'What works and what doesn't work in the neighbourhood?' elicited numerous responses, which were posted on the map using post-it notes (with drawings and words). In this way, the presence of numerous points of view on the neighbourhood materialised on the wall before the group's eyes, which amazed the young people. This gave rise to the desire to proceed in two directions: cataloguing everyone's points of view in order to produce a more manageable summary; and working on the wall to transform the anonymous Google map into a personal map created by the young people of Spazio 11.

At the Dalla Chiesa school, too, wonder was the key to bringing out the group's points of view on the school and helping everyone to break out of the predictable and the usual in order to find new perspectives and interpretations of the existing world within themselves. After an activity in which, through drawing, words and movement, everyone communicated to the others what they liked and did not like about the school experience, the three classes at re asked to listen to a simplified text by Aristotle on wonder as the driving force behind questioning. Presenting an original text by a philosopher using language appropriate for the audience was in line with the decision to focus on the 100 languages and the inclusiveness of everyone in the group. After listening, the groups first explored the classroom and then the school, observing it from different perspectives (from sitting in front of the teacher's desk to moving around the space, changing position and allowing themselves to be intrigued by details). In small groups, they photographed what had surprised them and wrote down any questions that arose as a result of their amazement on a card.

3.2.2.4 Searching for other views

Participating necessarily leads to interacting with others, intertwining points of view, understanding and supporting one's own perspective in relation to that of others. This leads individuals and groups to learn about, express and process reflections and choices regarding emerging issues, objectives and ideals.

During the GOTALK experiment in Reggio Emilia, there were numerous opportunities to pause and reflect on the perspectives of others. The importance of listening and inclusiveness was one of the premises of the group work: taking on the point of view of others and combining it with one's own allows for participation, as it fosters critical and divergent thinking in individuals and groups, and opens up unexpected possibilities. Seeking other points of view allows us to change our minds, support our own in a more informed way, or synthesise different perspectives.

For this reason, from the outset and throughout the experiment, it was decided to offer the groups opportunities to meet other people (peers or adults) with whom they could engage in dialogue and listening

through interviews (as was the case in Belgium), but also through any other tools that might emerge from the work with the individual groups.

Working on their points of view allowed the young people to listen more consciously to the points of view of those who were not part of the group but could still contribute meaningful ideas on the issues at hand. It was therefore decided to gather the views of other young people of the same age.

The first opportunity to gather other people's points of view came during the opening meetings, when the groups were told about what had happened in the first year of GOTALK in both Italy and Belgium. The young people were able to listen to the meanings and motivations expressed by their peers on the theme of participation and inclusiveness and learn about the concrete actions that had been conceived, planned and implemented previously. In addition, some girls from the third year took part in the meetings to talk about what they had done in previous years with their classmates to set up corners in the school corridors and halls where pupils could stop both during school hours and independently after school. In both cases, the groups listened, looked at documentary images and asked questions to better understand and satisfy their curiosity. In a symbolic passing of the baton, the younger ones started to think about how they too could be active participants in this improvement process.

Also at the school, when the children presented their various project ideas to all the classes in preparation for the vote on the most significant project, they took the opportunity to ask their classmates for their opinions and suggestions.

The young people from Spazio 11, on the other hand, accepted the adults' invitation to talk to other young people in the neighbourhood to gather as many points of view as possible. After analysing the opinions of their peers belonging to the service (which had been placed on the digital map projected on the wall), the young people went to another youth centre operating nearby to conduct short interviews. The questions for the interviews had been previously devised by the group and concerned both the places identified by the young people as significant or problematic and their personal opinions on the neighbourhood and its services. The group prepared an interview form and the research team provided cameras to document the collection of opinions. The availability of cameras proved to be an unexpected opportunity to further develop the core of the 'searching other views' approach. The neighbourhood itself became an interlocutor: streets, buildings, shops, parks and services spoke to the young people, who spontaneously used the cameras to capture images of everything that reminded them of aspects of the neighbourhood that they had not thought of during the initial discussions or that they did not know about at all.

In addition to their peers and the environment, adults were also identified as interlocutors for gathering information or discovering different points of view. At Spazio 11, for example, the young people visited various ice cream parlours and interviewed the ice cream makers to learn about the peculiarities of the different artisan workshops, which would be useful for creating the 'ice cream tour'.

At school, on the other hand, the young people felt the need to talk to adults when their plans were taking shape. Hearing the teachers' opinions on their ideas and working hypotheses was a high priority for them because some of them felt the need to avoid conflict with school rules and teachers' expectations. In addition, in order to better understand how to design and implement their proposals, the pupils expressed the need to communicate with both their teachers and, above all, with the head teacher and the municipal administration to obtain feedback on the feasibility of their proposals and the possible contribution of adults. This dialogue took place in two ways: through the mediation of the GOTALK team, which acted as a spokesperson for the pupils with the headteacher, teachers and municipal officials and then reported back to the classes on what had emerged from the discussion; and through meetings in which the classes were able to speak directly with the headteacher, municipal officials and class councils.

The teachers' and educators' views on the activities

The idea of participation was also explored among adults. In both contexts, the great motivation to promote and support the participation of young people was repeatedly emphasised, and all the adults involved dedicated time, energy and thought to the project, in which they believed from the outset.

In the practical implementation at school, however, some critical issues emerged that highlighted a difference between theory and practice in promoting and supporting the participation of young people. In some cases, there was a perceived lack of consistency between the GOTALK engagement agreement and the actions of teachers who, at a theoretical level, repeatedly emphasised the importance of everyone participating in school life (and in the implementation of GOTALK), dreaming big and contributing, but then, in practice, they rejected certain proposals outright or were inductive or conditioning when the children had to develop their own thoughts or make decisions together, or finally, they tried to impose roles and decide independently who to involve in certain stages of the project.

During the experiment, there was a need to create more discussion among adults to reflect on what idea of participation emerged from the content and questions brought up by the young people. An increase in the number of project hours allocated to monitoring meetings did not exhaust the forms of coordination. The GOTALK team developed an observation form that was given to all teachers who were present during the classroom activities. The form asked them to express their point of view for each moment of the meeting, with a focus on inclusiveness (how much and how this experience was inclusive for the whole group and how much and how for those with special needs) and transferability (what aspects of the experience I think I can replicate in my teaching and why). With the educators at Spazio 11, on the other hand, we chose to keep the discussion between the different professionals open through pedagogical documentation: images, excerpts from dialogues, materials produced, and brief reports of the interventions built a detailed account of the process, both with a step-by-step description and with some reflections and analyses.

3.2.2.5 Assembling different perspectives

This task in the model is closely linked to the previous tasks. Gathering different points of view is not enough if you do not proceed to reason and take a position. At the same time, bringing together different perspectives often leads to new questions that require further discussion with others. The two points have therefore developed in parallel and intertwined, but with different meanings. If seeking new points of view allows us to broaden our perspectives, it is then necessary to synthesise, reinforce personal points of view, allow the unexpected and the new to emerge, and think the unthinkable.

There have been many opportunities and tools aimed at developing this area.

First and foremost, the living wall: each class had its own in their respective classrooms. The classes had never used a tool of this kind before in the school. Spazio 11, on the other hand, was familiar with panels for educational documentation and chose to dedicate one of its notice boards to GOTALK: in this way, in the service corridor, the living wall was placed alongside the other notice boards documenting the various activities in progress. Finally, a large panel at the school entrance was used as a general living wall: all four courses (the three classes and Spazio 11) were documented in this space, allowing for sharing between classes and the entire school, as well as connecting the two organisations involved in the experiment. The living walls were first and foremost a tool for asking each group to stop for a moment and summarise what had happened in each meeting, highlighting the main content and key points. Secondly, they allowed communication with people outside the group, updating everyone on what was happening during the project so that anyone who wanted could suggest their point of view. To facilitate communication with everyone, and consequently inclusiveness, the texts on the notice board were also written in AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication).

There were numerous occasions on which the groups engaged in dialogue to reflect on input from those who did not belong to the pilot groups. At Spazio 11, in addition to the Socratic dialogue sessions offered at each meeting, the young people updated the large group and took on board their peers' points of view during the routine assemblies held at the beginning of the educational service meetings. On these occasions, when deciding what to do during the meeting, the young people also devoted time to GOTALK and its development. This ensured that the voices of those outside the project were heard and valued and, as a result, everyone participated in the process in some way, even if indirectly or through their peers.

At school, the opinion of those who were not part of the group was decisive, especially when, after identifying a shortlist of three or four proposals for improving the school, the group had to choose one to implement. The GOTALK team invited the three first-year classes to ask their older classmates for their opinions: they knew the school's needs better (the three first-year classes had only started at the school a few months earlier) and were therefore able to give an interesting opinion. The classes gladly accepted the proposal, stating that this would make the decision fairer because it would take into account the opinions of everyone in the school and not just the wishes of a small group. Real votes were therefore held, with the presentation of projects, ballot boxes, ballot papers, counting and the official announcement of the results via a living wall. In this case too, AAC was used alongside words to include those with communication difficulties in the voting.

About methodologies, we chose to offer different ways of discussing and combining different points of view. In some cases, time was devoted to individual work, while in others (the majority), work was carried out in subgroups or as a whole group. The main space for the development of this task was Socratic dialogue, with its rules aimed at limiting the emergence of individualism in favour of listening to others and the centrality of the group. The dialogue was always accompanied by practical activities that promoted awareness of the

content and visualisation of the decision-making process. In the three classes of the school, the process of identifying the shortlist of proposals to be voted on was a significant example: the first step was individual, with each pupil thinking about what they liked and disliked about the school; in the second step, the class was divided into subgroups that developed ideas and proposals in light of the discussion with others and observation of the environment. Finally, when the classes were asked to decide on the proposals to be put forward, it was decided to hold an initial internal vote preceded by a detailed presentation of each proposal that had emerged in the subgroups. Only after the presentation and subsequent discussion did the pupils return to the individual level and, using Lego bricks, vote for the proposal they considered most significant: in many cases, after the discussion, the pupils voted for other people's proposals.

At Spazio 11, it was the map that provided the opportunity for the group to bring together different points of view. This happened at various stages. First of all, at the beginning, when the group of young people who had chosen to join the GOTALK project found themselves having to uphold the agreement made with the larger group and, therefore, also having to take into account the opinions of those who were not directly involved. To do this, the group catalogued all the post-it notes with writings or drawings about the neighbourhood (critical issues and strengths). After an initial reading, the group defined the criteria for cataloguing and published an analytical summary of the contents on the living wall. The transition from the virtual map to the real map was also an opportunity to consider other people's points of view in the process. The final locations on the map were only defined after consultation with the other youth centre and a visit to the neighbourhood to collect images. Finally, the Spazio 11 assemblies brought to light a critical issue that changed the layout of the map: the gastronomic itinerary had been proposed by a young man and revolved around various places selling a typical local dish, 'gnocco fritto' (gnoccotour). However, some young people pointed out that this proposal would exclude some people because it involved eating pork, which is not compatible with the diet of Muslim children. At this point, the group saved the idea of the gastronomic tour by taking up the suggestion of another girl, who had indicated an ice cream parlour as her favourite place in the neighbourhood. The 'gnoccotour' thus became an ice cream tour, and the group waited until the end of Ramadan to go on it together for the first time.

In their schoolwork, an important opportunity to experience the intertwining of different points of view was the planning stage, both in the class that won the proposal to improve the toilets and in those that were given the task by their classmates to work on the themed classrooms. Once the results of the vote were known, the research team asked to return to the school to gather specific information that would enable them to plan the project in the best possible way. Facilitators then provided the three classes with a grid in which, first in subgroups and then as a whole, the pupils identified all the possible resources and obstacles to the development of the project. Here too, it was essential for the groups to mediate between different points of view and between the enthusiasm and fears of the pupils and teachers. The pupils focused their attention on what they could do independently and what required the contribution of their peers and adults, both within and outside the school (parents, officials), and identified a range of possibilities ranging from a small intervention that could be carried out immediately with the class's resources alone to a larger project that required more resources and time. This outline was taken up by the adults (the head teacher and teachers responsible for the project), who in turn expressed their views on obstacles and resources and proposed that the classes work on the basis of an agreement between children and adults. From there, the groups set out to define what could be achieved immediately and what would need to be developed after the end of GOTALK, with a view to the future and with attention to the agreement established together.

The role of adults in this task proved to be the most critical point. More than in the comparison with their peers, the invitation to bring together different points of view was difficult when the groups, at school, had to deal with the teachers' point of view and the official and implicit rules of the school. On several occasions, the children felt that their goals and desires were not entirely in line with the school's orientation or that, in

any case, their requests could not be formulated or would not be accepted. Two episodes in particular highlighted this critical issue: in one class, during the initial planning stage, some pupils expressed a desire to be able to move around the school independently, particularly in the hallways and outdoors, during break time. Part of the class immediately stated that this request would not be accepted by the school because it was against the rules, and the teacher herself made it clear during meetings and in her lessons which ideas would be accepted by the school or even welcomed and which would not be accepted under any circumstances because they were against the rules. This created moments of great tension in the class, with episodes of crying and bickering. The group was divided between those who were afraid to go against the teachers' positions or who did not see the point because, although they agreed with the idea, they believed that proposing it would be a waste of time, and those who felt they could trust the invitation to 'dream big' given by the adults at the start of GOTALK and therefore thought they could propose any idea, even though they were aware that they would then have to face reality and, perhaps, rethink the proposal. In another class, the school's observation led the group to wonder why only the Italian flag was flying outside and there was only a crucifix inside, despite the fact that there were pupils of different nationalities and religions in the school. Following this question, the teacher spent a lot of time discussing the issue with the class, starting by explaining why in Italy the Italian flag appears in public buildings alongside the EU and regional flags (and no other flags are allowed in that position), before going on to illustrate the historical and cultural reasons for the presence of crucifixes in schools. In conclusion, since the issue of religious symbols had been the most significant in the discussion, the teacher accepted the class's request to include among the projects to be voted on the proposal to 'question the presence of only the crucifix in the classroom', possibly opening up the possibility of adding other religious symbols in order to represent all those present in the school. However, when the ballot papers were seen, the teacher argued that this point was not significant for the class and the headteacher asked for it to be removed from the ballot because it was a political and administrative issue that would be complicated to manage. The proposal was removed, and the classes chose from other options, which were actually more popular with the class in question. Nevertheless, the two incidents made some of the children feel that they were not in line with the school and that they were unable to exercise critical thinking, highlighting the inconsistency between the rigidity of non-negotiable rules and the repeated invitation, even by teachers, to feel free to propose anything, while remaining open to dialogue on how to achieve what was requested.

On the other hand, the interaction with adults also allowed the pupils to enjoy the pleasure of being taken seriously by adults, sometimes in ways they did not expect. For example, the pupils were amazed that officials, the headmaster and the class council actually met them in person: they did not just send them a written communication, but sat down with them, listened to them, gave answers, took on board some proposals and explained why some were accepted and some were not. At Spazio 11, too, amazement at the adults reared its head when the whole group went on the long-awaited ice cream tour. Some of them, accustomed to not being taken seriously by adults, were incredulous that the ice cream tour would actually happen, and finding themselves with an ice cream cone in their hands ready to eat was an amazing surprise that made them say, 'There are adults you can trust!'.

3.2.2.6 Dissemination of results and policy impact

The dissemination of results and policy impact are undoubtedly linked to the adults promoting the project (funders, developers, operators and stakeholders), who are therefore responsible for monitoring it as it progresses and disseminating the results at the end. In addition to this, however, the young people participating in an experience can also promote it externally.

In the case of GOTALK, certain moments during the pilot project provided real opportunities to support the participation of young people and their capacity for agency and intervention in social processes. Specifically,

this took place in three ways: communicating their objectives and proposals to policy makers and peers, identifying possible prospects for continuing, and communicating the results of their work to other peers.

For each of these points, a significant example can be given.

Regarding the first point, the class that focused on improving the toilet facilities chose, with everyone's full consent, to seek out their own interlocutors and propose a joint responsibility agreement, which the young people decided to call 'More Respect'. For this reason, in order to involve all their classmates and call on them to take responsibility for their part, the pupils proposed the agreement via the living wall and placed numerous signs in all the bathrooms, inviting people to take care of the facilities, furnishings and materials in the bathrooms. What the pupils had seen in the bathrooms had disturbed them greatly, leading them to say that such disrespectful use of common areas was unacceptable and that rules, sanctions and remedial measures were needed. On the other hand, some of the better-kept bathrooms had led some to believe that there were people capable of care and respect. The signs, which highlighted and promoted positive behaviour while harshly criticising dysfunctional behaviour, were the tool used to act on the context and encourage change, as young stakeholders and active members of the school community. On the policy-maker front, the young people took action by writing a precise and well-argued letter in which they asked adults to assume their share of responsibility within the pact: they asked the school they already knew (headteacher, teachers, school council) for help in promoting and enforcing the rules of respect and care for common property; they asked those who they understood to have power to act on school buildings (headteacher, school board, municipal officials) to take responsibility for routine and extraordinary maintenance and to contribute, where possible, to improving the school.

With regard to the second point (identifying new perspectives), it is interesting to note what happened at Spazio 11 when the young people discussed the issue at a meeting and, while thinking about new activities to propose for the service, said they appreciated the opportunity to stop and think together about certain issues and objectives. For this reason, the group of young people decided to introduce 'TeaTalk space' into the service, a time when they can discuss issues important to the group over a cup of tea, without the pressure to achieve anything, but simply to explore them together in different ways. The small working group, on the other hand, chose to make the most of the map created during the project by printing several copies so that they would not be just for them, but could also be given to all users of the service and the nearby school, allowing as many people as possible to explore the neighbourhood through their eyes.

The results were communicated in two ways: by the operators and the young people via the central living wall, which connected all four groups with each other and with the outside world. The young people then had the opportunity to present the project at GOTALK's Lab3, held in April at the University of Reggio Emilia. In addition to the stakeholders and professionals who had worked on the project over the two years, a number of young people and parents were also involved. A small group of teenagers from the first year of the project, a larger group from the Dalla Chiesa school and the entire Spazio 11 group responded to the invitation. The occasion was invaluable for the young people: in a place that seemed important and prestigious to them, but also welcoming and concrete, they were able to first of all talk to their peers about their experiences and the issues they had dealt with over the two years. Afterwards, they took to the stage, not just metaphorically, but literally, sitting on chairs in the auditorium, and told the adults what they had done, paying particular attention to what they had gained from the experience in terms of content, skills, emotions and relationships, in other words, participation.

3.2.3 Evaluation and reflection on the pilot experiences

3.2.3.1 Responsive evaluation with school team members

During the second year, time was also devoted to monitoring the pilot projects through a series of responsive evaluation sessions involving those directly involved in the experience. In both groups of young people, time was set aside at the end of each meeting for review and discussion in two ways. First, in a plenary session, all those present (young people and adults) placed their clothespin on the living wall. They described their participation in the experience in one word (expressing an emotion, a concept or the name of an activity). This was followed by a small group of three or four young people, who took turns talking to the GOTALK facilitator to summarise the meeting, starting with four short questions asking them to give a brief account of the activity, adding a personal comment on what they had taken away from it, what they would discard and what had surprised them. The content that emerged was then communicated to the others via the living wall, both to keep track of it and to broaden the discussion and invite evaluation of the process.

The adults were also asked to contribute to the two review sessions, sharing their closing thoughts in the circle and answering questions about what they had taken away, what they had discarded, and what had surprised them about the meeting. In this case, however, the answers were individual and not shared with the children, to avoid mutual influence. Starting from the third meeting, the school teachers also completed an observation grid, which allowed them to focus on the activities as they took place and provide initial feedback on the tools and activities, as well as their transferability and effectiveness.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation meetings were held with teachers and educators to review the project's objectives, particularly its effectiveness in terms of participation and inclusiveness, sustainability, and impact on the school and the service. In some cases, these were informal discussions between the facilitator and the teachers and educators directly involved in the project, which took place in person at the end of each meeting or remotely between meetings. In addition to these moments, some more structured monitoring and verification meetings were scheduled, attended, depending on the topics on the agenda, by other professionals from the GOTALK group and, for the school and Spazio 11, colleagues from the service, teachers and educators for inclusiveness, the head teacher, service coordinators and representatives of the municipal administration. Initially, three meetings were planned (one at the start, one during the project and one at the end). Still, during the project, it was deemed necessary to schedule additional meetings to explore specific emerging issues in greater depth.

3.2.3.1.1 General reflections on the pilot experience

As regards the content that emerged at the end of the meetings, the various responses from children and adults were closely linked to their individual experiences, with a strong focus on the emotional dimension. Especially for the children, the closing circles and small group responses were an opportunity to emphasise their well-being, sense of self-efficacy and satisfaction when they were able to perceive the meaning and value of what they were doing and their capacity for participation and agency. At the same time, conflicts or differences of opinion emerged in the closing sessions, following activities that had created tension, and participants were given the opportunity to express their feelings and identify the concepts and content. This moment allowed them to pause and reflect on the meaning of difference and plurality within a group and on the efforts and potential inherent in participation when the group is large and diverse.

The decision to ritualise the opening and closing moments of each meeting (calling everyone present by name, valorising the help of pupils who had more difficulty due to cognitive, relational, or language deficits , and asking everyone to share their feelings and, at the end, what they were taking home and what they were leaving behind from the experience) created a precise framework that allowed everyone to take their place in the experience. Declaring one's point of view each time, however situated in the here and now, allowed everyone to remain connected to their broader idea of participation. Rituals, especially in schools, where opportunities for formal and structured discussion and planning are less common, highlighted that this was a moment of participation and that everyone had the chance to seize this opportunity if they wanted to.

The discussion with adults was wide-ranging and intense, with somewhat different outcomes and methods in the two pilot projects. The decision to involve not only the professionals directly involved with the groups, but also managers, coordinators and some colleagues in some of the planning and evaluation stages made it possible to broaden the perspective, add food for thought and, for specific issues, intertwine the two pilot projects and understand how differences in context determined the functioning and outcomes of the project.

An analysis of the questions asked at the end of the meeting and a reading of the observation grids completed by the teachers involved in the school meetings revealed the adults' curiosity and interest in the GOTALK programme, with an initial difference between the school teachers and the Spazio 11 educators. While the latter focused extensively on the needs and issues expressed by the young people and on the process being built with them, the teachers almost always focused their attention on the relational dynamics and how individuals participated, adopting an evaluative approach, so to speak.

The comparison between the operators revealed that the possibility of encouraging children's participation is closely linked to the ability of adults to participate themselves in an active and non-fragmented manner. In the team of educators at Spazio 11, only one educator participated in the entire project; however, the whole group shared the journey through the planning sessions scheduled for GOTALK, as well as through the discussions the team had, regardless of the project. This had a positive impact on the development of the pilot, as the young people perceived continuity between their work and the broader scope of the service, as

well as consistency among the adults regarding their view of the project. In the school, this possibility proved to be more limited, and the teachers involved in the project repeatedly stated that the development of the programme was partly or totally disconnected from other activities, despite attempts to communicate via the living wall and to bring the children's content and requests to the class council and the headteacher.

The facilitator- researcher also confirmed this perception, and the invitation to reflect on the transferability of the project was only partially taken up (also highlighted in the observation grid through questions asking what the teachers thought they could replicate in their teaching). The teachers often stated that what was proposed in the project was no different from what they already did in their lessons, but then contradicted themselves in some cases, both when they were asked to lead some activities themselves and were unable to do so independently, and when the pupils stated that what was proposed during GOTALK was very different from what happened during other lessons and that the teachers' statements, in some cases, confused them because they were different from what they had heard at other times.

For this reason, during the planning and monitoring meetings, it was decided to devote time to discussing certain moments and issues that had highlighted these discrepancies. In discussions with the school, for example, we spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on what it means to say no to the children's requests (e.g., when one class suggested displaying symbols of all religions in the school or another asked to be able to move freely around the school). In discussions with the headteacher, the importance of listening, taking the children's requests seriously, explaining the reasons for saying yes or no, and working with them to find alternatives and common ground was highlighted. Even in discussions with Spazio 11, where the importance of consistency and listening to young people was more clearly perceived, ample space was given to reflection on how to respond to children's requests and plan participation for them and with them, in a consistent manner and valuing both the contribution of young people and the role of adults.

The discussion between adults also allowed for forward thinking, evaluating what paths could be opened up with GOTALK. An initial realisation came from the understanding that the project's work could not be separated from what had already happened in the past within the two contexts. At Spazio 11, the children worked on exploring the local area because this topic was already of interest to them thanks to other activities carried out by the service. In conclusion, the neighbourhood map appeared to be a valuable tool for continuing the dialogue with people outside the service, as well as for welcoming those who will join us next year. At school, too, the possibility of improving the space was considered feasible because work had already been done on this issue in the past. The decision to work on the decor of the toilets and the layout of classrooms dedicated to specific subjects involved a commitment on the part of everyone (young people, school, municipal administration) to take new steps, realising other objectives that were already present in the ideas that emerged from GOTALK.

Considering the children's role in the project, several key points emerged during the evaluation.

First and foremost was the pleasure and satisfaction of being taken seriously. The GOTALK meetings were eagerly awaited by the children, especially those at school, who saw the project activities as an unexpected, unusual and vital opportunity to be seized. Feeling like protagonists and free to express their opinions and make requests that would necessarily be taken seriously, as part of their commitment to the project, motivated them and made them feel empowered. Even the possibility of saying no and not agreeing to participate in all or part of the project was seen as an opportunity and a sign of respect and trust. A prime example of this was when the GOTALK privacy waiver was signed. The GOTALK team devoted a significant amount of time to this bureaucratic step, reading the waiver point by point and discussing both its content and the possibility of using the children's images and voices with them. The signing was an opportunity to present Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the groups, and everyone was assured that

if they chose not to give their consent, their decision would be respected even if their parents gave their consent. Both groups took this opportunity to express their views on the possibility of participating in the dissemination of the project documentation, explaining why they were in favour, against or undecided about the use of their image. The act of signing was also considered a valuable opportunity: for many of them, it was the first time they had signed a document concerning them, and, as a result, they were participating directly in a decision that Italian law attributes to parents.

The second issue highlighted was the importance of observing and getting to know the children before offering them tools and methods. While it is true, as has been amply demonstrated, that words and abstract reasoning alone are insufficient to increase participation and include everyone, it is also true that choosing the right language is crucial. It is therefore important to pay attention to what happens when trying it out and, if necessary, to make adjustments. In working with images, an exemplary situation arose in this regard when the children were asked to take some photographs using the school's tablets and, as there were not enough of these, some mobile phones (with specific authorisation from the headteacher). A similar proposal had been successfully implemented in the previous year of GOTALK with young people. The younger children in this pilot project, however, revealed many critical issues: accustomed to using smartphone cameras very instinctively, many of them were unable to carry out the task as they moved around the school in search of meaningful images and produced a large number of images unrelated to the task assigned, even attempting to use them for social media communication. This critical issue provided an opportunity for reflection, and it was decided to modify the tool, providing the children with a limited number of cameras and assigning them the responsibility of caring for a delicate and precious object. The change of tool led the children to take photographs in a careful and focused manner, providing an opportunity for adults and children to reflect on the risks of overuse and misuse of smartphones.

Another crucial point was the issue of adult power. The young people made it clear, through both their words and their choices and emotions, that the stimuli they receive from teachers and educators, and more generally from the adult world, have a profound influence on their processes and ideas. It is essential that adults carefully consider their words, clearly articulate their views and expectations, and be consistent in the level of freedom and room for experimentation they can or will offer the young people they work with. Disappointing a teacher, breaking school rules, or suggesting something that takes an educator by surprise is a risk that children are often afraid to take, for fear of sanctions, judgments, punishments, or because of their desire for gratification, recognition, and good grades. Adults need to be aware of this and pay close attention to the fact that, in a participatory process, power relations, the vertical transmission of knowledge and the development of reasoning follow different rules and balances, which must be recognised and, if necessary, questioned together, otherwise the potential of the process will be reduced or it may even fail.

The concept of process has also been the subject of reflection. When children participate in a participatory project, its progress is in itself a result because, if supported with the right tools, it generates a sense of belonging, teaches them to take on tasks, express their needs and listen to others, and produces change. It is therefore not essential for the project to end with a concrete product, because there also intangible results. However, if there is a concrete product, the process is more effective. This is particularly useful for younger children: by being able to see, touch and show the results of their participation, children increase their sense of effectiveness and intrinsic motivation and become more aware of the meaning of participation which, as Aristotle said, is a typical trait of human beings as social animals.

3.2.3.2 Inclusiveness, sustainability and policy impact

The premise underlying the analysis of the content that emerged and the evaluation of the process and outcomes of the project, which was also shared based on the results of the first year, is that the tools and

content that were proposed and used are not innovative in themselves, but can produce innovation in consideration of the needs of the context and the people.

The programme was structured based on well-known and tested theoretical frameworks and tools:

- pedagogical activism, with the specific application of the hundred languages, which is also characteristic of the area in which GOTALK was proposed in Italy (Malaguzzi);
- maieutic dialogue and, in particular, philosophical practice with children and adolescents;
- pedagogical documentation;
- qualitative research and action research.

Innovative responses were provided to the specific situations and needs that characterised the contexts selected for the experiment by applying tools that were already known and tested in other contexts but not yet, or at least not fully, applied and mastered at the Dalla Chiesa school, or which were subject to further study and the opening up of new perspectives at Spazio 11.

The challenge of innovation, therefore, consisted in identifying the contexts and observing their characteristics, and then choosing, from among the tools already available and tested elsewhere and in the first year of the project, those that could be most useful in responding innovatively to emerging needs, in order to bring about change, possibly by remodelling and/or renewing the tools themselves.

3.2.3.2.1 Inclusiveness

The initial focus, made clear to teachers and educators from the outset, was to provide space for those who remain silent, for vulnerable individuals, and for those who do not have a good command of the Italian language. The question of how to include them was answered by choosing to:

- propose activities that would enhance the hundred languages (to increase the possibilities of communication);
- provide opportunities for dialogue in which the value of listening was emphasised (talking to everyone, monitoring listening and feedback from others, observing the group before speaking);
- using AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) in the living wall;
- give vulnerable individuals the opportunity to enter and leave the experience and to ask the group to welcome everyone, paying attention to each person's needs (children with SEN carried out meaningful and sustainable tasks, e.g. in the welcome rituals and in activities that did not involve speaking).

Given that the groups were remarkably heterogeneous, it was possible to highlight how the tools chosen to include vulnerable individuals are actually devices capable of promoting inclusiveness in themselves, for everyone and beyond the characteristics of individuals.

The criteria for selecting participants express and support inclusiveness. At Spazio 11, participation was extended from the self-selected subgroup to everyone: few joined immediately, but participation gradually expanded and they decided to implement the "Tea-talk space" as spin-off of the GOTALK project, as well as to participate as a whole group to the guided visit to the neighbourhood thanks to the map designed. At school, working with the entire class (choosing to carry out activities during the hours when children with special needs were also present) made it possible to value differences, assigning different roles, and achieving results that will benefit everyone. All first-year classes were involved in the same way, and through voting on proposals for improving the school, all pupils took part in the process. The need to be effective and the

motivation to take part in a process with a clear purpose that was considered meaningful by everyone made it necessary to define roles and groups. The non-directive approach of the adults led the three classes to understand independently which of their actions and choices created exclusion or were imposing, and to find ways recognised by the boys and girls to include and value differences and share decisions.

The centrality of listening and the importance of giving children and young people a voice. This was the premise in all the groups. For many, this came as a surprise. They did not expect to hear this. They did not expect their proposals to be taken seriously and that the adults would commit to taking them forward as far as possible and together with them. The pilots confirmed the importance of taking children seriously, especially through concrete gestures, to ensure that they feel motivated to participate and are recognised for their attempts to do so.

There is a need for spaces and moments where listening is possible, legitimised and supported. The structure of the process, with clear and defined spaces and rituals (e.g. welcome with clothes pegs and keywords, living wall, chairs in a circle with all participants at the same level, rules of dialogue, closing of the meeting with three questions) made the time for listening and dialogue clear. Even with the effort of following the rules, the children looked forward to this moment, were motivated to take part, and sought interaction with adults in the same way as with their peers.

They experienced the commitment and effort of listening, defending their point of view, and changing their opinion in the face of others' motivations. They sought the support of adults and sometimes delegated to them in situations of deadlock: brought back to the group but not left to their own devices, they experienced the possibility of succeeding on their own in mastering the tools for participation.

Time is a key factor in promoting inclusiveness. Participation and inclusiveness require time and the overcoming of the urgency to reach a conclusion. Accompanied by adults (who provided the tools and highlighted the critical issues), and having the right amount of time to reflect on the experience, the groups found their own ways to include everyone, or at least to demonstrate their awareness of the difficulties in welcoming and valuing each and every individual.

The use of multiple languages is crucial. Alternating dialogue, listening, movement, workshop activities and moments in which to express one's feelings allowed participants to experience participation in different ways. Moving from the abstract (questions posed to the groups, concepts that emerged) to the concrete (activities that made them tangible and placed them within the group experience) and then back to the abstract (answers and concepts developed by the groups) allowed for fuller and more comprehensive participation. The underlying logic was: observe, ask, experiment, understand, respond, ask again.

3.2.3.2.2 Sustainability

Both during the pilot and at the end, we found ourselves wondering what would have happened if the same experience had been proposed outside GOTALK, without a specifically dedicated space and time and without the presence of an external figure who brought a specific research question and a range of tools, methodologies and topics to draw on. This question directly raises the issue of the role of adults as promoters and facilitators of participation, while also highlighting the importance of structures and environments that can either encourage or limit protagonism and participation.

At the same time, great attention was paid to the continuity of the project, which in this second year, especially for schools, was conceived as an opportunity to start a journey, to provide input that would then

be taken up by adults and children, in a process of skills development that could give perspective and autonomy to the participatory process, beyond GOTALK.

Participation is not a school subject, nor is it an activity; it can certainly take this form, but it is essential to recognise that, even when it becomes structural within an educational context, it is more of an attitude than an activity, one that is impossible to confine within rigid rules and structures. Paradoxically, institutionalisation provides a context in which to experiment with it. Still, it can make it less sustainable because, if it imposes it, it brings into play an extrinsic motivation that is not enough on its own.

The perspective of teachers and adults is therefore invaluable in making participation sustainable: they can guide children in asking the right questions and finding answers that stem from intrinsic motivation and are listened to. Children must understand that participation is a process that creates a habitus; it is not something you do because adults ask you to.

To achieve this, teachers and educators also need support. Especially in discussions with coordinators, it was emphasised that adult training and reflection on the topic are essential for independent work, and it cannot be taken for granted that an educator, and even more so a teacher, has the skills to promote and support participation in a concrete way. The possibility that GOTALK might leave behind some tools and food for thought was seen as a good opportunity.

Another point of attention, in terms of the sustainability of an intervention on participation, is the possible disconnect between the project and other practices in the contexts in which it was proposed. When there is no consensus or at least a general sharing of the objectives and meanings underlying participatory activities, their impact and effectiveness are reduced, both in terms of the depth of the intervention and in terms of continuity. This problem is even more pronounced in the school context, where there are more adult figures, constraints are more binding, and there is a more transmissive attitude (and institutional mandate).

Time and structures also play an important role. On several occasions, it has become apparent that more time would have been necessary to allow for in-depth analysis and assimilation of all the insights gained from GOTALK's work. The time variable is crucial because participation cannot be built quickly. Girls and boys, but also adults and contexts, need to take ownership of and re-read what emerges from their reasoning and actions. It is essential to follow the pace of the questions and emerging content, to let things settle, and to allow different points of view to diverge and converge. More structured pupil participation bodies, as well as circle time during educational and teaching activities (a term widely used by teachers, sometimes without understanding its true purpose), should be offered in schools and structured environments, thereby avoiding an overly academic approach. Participation cannot be linked to assessment, the communication of rules, the explanation and transmission of content: listening, freedom of expression and trust in the abilities of children and young people must be at the centre of the circle.

3.2.3.2.3 Policy impact

In order for children and young people's actions to be effective and leave a lasting mark, it is first and foremost important to create contexts that allow their needs and authentic questions to emerge. If children do not feel motivated to participate, they are unlikely to take meaningful action, but will probably limit themselves to carrying out a task. When, on the other hand, the voluntary drive of individuals and the group is encouraged, valuing autonomy and skills, a sense of self-efficacy and connection with others, the intensity of participation increases and, as a result, the effectiveness and impact of the actions that ensue.

At this point, adults face the challenge of continuity and credibility, which raises two questions:

- Is there a network of adults who are mobilising to support the impact and outcome of the children's actions?
- How successful are participation projects and the involvement of children in this sense in disrupting and changing the context? What capacity for agency do children have in their contexts and in society?

It seems essential that adults (teachers, educators, facilitators, researchers, administrators) consider children and young people not only as growing individuals and pupils to whom knowledge must be transmitted, but also as active subjects in the present who are capable of agency. Only in this way is it possible to activate motivation to participate and facilitate the process.

For this to happen, we need:

- view children and young people as individuals who can succeed;
- keeping an open and observant eye on pupils and the group;
- moving away from a transmissive logic;
- not limit the process of ideation, requests and spaces for action a priori, but show the constraints when they actually arise and accompany pupils towards acceptance, but also towards overcoming obstacles;
- know how to question oneself and share a vision of participation, even among adults, from the very beginning of the work. Be ready to participate firsthand, even if with an adult habitus.

Both in discussions with adults and in working with groups of children, a crucial tool for policy impact emerged: the pact. Whether in highly structured and defined contexts or in less formal settings, shared responsibility can become a tool for clarifying, promoting and enhancing participation. The slogan 'respect+respect' coined by class 1B at Dalla Chiesa school effectively expresses the value of the pact and its power to bring about change: the children observed, identified critical issues, and proposed solutions; the adults listened, suggested responses, and identified limitations and resources. If, at this point, the paths do not diverge again, but there is a joint agreement to respect the commitments made towards a common goal, it is more likely that this goal will be achieved and change will be implemented.

3.2.3.2 Reggio Emilia local stakeholder lab

3.2.3.2.1 Lab set-up, participants and agenda

On 14 April 2025, the third local stakeholder lab was held at the Department of Education of the University of Reggio Emilia, attended by education professionals, teachers and local administrators who engaged in dialogue with the protagonists of the two years of the project: educators, teachers, school leaders, parents and boys and girls selected from the various groups. The entire GOTALK programme was presented to those present, after which everyone was invited to discuss the central themes of the project: participation and inclusiveness. The topics were explored in two subgroups: adults on one side and children on the other. At the end, the young people presented the content that emerged from their meeting to the adult group and gathered feedback from their interlocutors.

The adults were asked the following questions, accompanied by images that linked back to the question and the episodes and activities that prompted it.

- Participation:

GOTALK worked simultaneously in school and non-school settings. It was decided to work with everyone. GOTALK experimented with 'widespread' participation, without representative bodies. What possible link is there between representative bodies and forms of participation by everyone?

- Inclusiveness:

GOTALK's work frequently brought back to the centre of the discussion what the role and approach that adults should take to facilitate the participation of young people is and should be.

What has 'stirred' adults and young people? How can we ensure that this does not concern just one or two teachers but that there is a collective effort, a commitment from the whole school? Different attitudes, multiple perspectives: what role should adults play in participatory processes involving children and young people?

The children were also shown stimulating images that contextualised the questions and allowed everyone to imagine what had happened in the other groups. The following questions were linked to the images:

- Participation:

GOTALK is over: did you participate? What now?

How and why do girls and boys participate?

- Inclusiveness:

GOTALK is over: how can we include everyone? How can we include everyone now?

Words, gestures, bodies and objects: 100 languages for being together. And who is left out?

In addition to meeting the protagonists, the local info day planned as part of the project provided further elements for evaluating the programme. The meeting took place on 15 May 2025 at the University and was attended by pupils from the master's degree course in Pedagogical Sciences and professionals working in the field of education in Reggio Emilia. They were presented with the contents of the project and then given the opportunity to experience first-hand some of the activities in which the young people had been involved. Starting from this, a discussion was initiated to try to intertwine GOTALK's contents and methodologies with the way in which those present interpreted and experienced participation in their experience as pupils and/or professionals.

3.2.3.2.2 Insights from the local lab

The discussion with adults (professionals, local administrators and parents) brought the following considerations to light. GOTALK provided an opportunity to exchange experiences and points of view between different professionals and to learn about what others are doing in the area, especially in the neighbourhood. The adults involved appreciated the opportunity to experiment and practise dialogue more. They were particularly pleased to see that the process ended with the young people meeting with adults from the school and local council decision-making bodies to listen to the proposals made by the pupils. This was seen as an interesting reversal of perspective: those who usually suffer the consequences of adult decisions became privileged interlocutors in the consultation and had a real chance to bring about change.

The involvement of adults was also highlighted as necessary, and the teachers and educators who accompanied GOTALK felt fully involved. The two parents who attended gave positive feedback, particularly appreciating the opportunity to participate in the workshop to understand better the objectives and the type of experience their children had in GOTALK.

The focus on listening was seen as an important response to the children's need to feel heard, as was the decision to try to reach all pupils, giving everyone the opportunity to make an informed choice. Inclusiveness was also seen as a central aspect of the project, for example, in observing how the pupils chose their spokespersons and the impact this had on the group dynamics. The fact that the focus was broadened from

class participation to the whole school (e.g. with votes on the proposals put forward by the first-year classes) was also seen as a step towards inclusiveness.

Positive feedback was given on the use of a variety of languages to allow everyone to find an appropriate means of expression: although this led to moments of confusion and 'loss of control' on the part of the teacher, it actually allowed for greater awareness of the issues addressed and for them to be experienced in a more personalised way, creating less neutral contexts.

The discussion led to an interesting debate on the role of adults in participatory processes, which led teachers and educators to reflect on the necessary balance between education and participation and on the adult/child boundary: according to some, educational action is not necessarily participatory but can be directive at certain times, while others believe it is inherently participatory; some believe that it is necessary to make it clear to young people what is negotiable and what is not, while others believe that everything young people ask for should be taken on board and used as a starting point. The discussion generated considerable interest but did not yield any conclusive answers. However, the group of adults agreed on the importance of adults taking responsibility for supporting the participatory process and sharing the responsibility for remaining consistent with the initial promises. This is the same responsibility that the young people have shown in carrying forward the project proposals made by their peers. A related reflection concerned the sustainability and impact of some of the tools used by the project, which, to have a lasting impact, require collaboration with teachers, principals, and educators so that everyone recognises the spaces/themes gained through the project and therefore continues even after GOTALK has ended.

The meeting with pupils and educators during the info day was a further opportunity to analyse the process and results of the GOTALK project. First of all, as they confirmed, adults find it challenging to engage with multiple intelligences, even though, as educators, they know how to propose and use them with their young users. Asking participants to experience first-hand the activities offered to children and young people allowed us to appreciate different languages, moving from theory to practice and exploring concepts more effectively and comprehensively. This opportunity also let people who work with children to 'put themselves in the shoes of the little ones', without infantilism, but understanding the commitment, effort and power of taking action themselves on questions and answers through multiple intelligences. The local lab also highlighted how GOTALK's work is linked to the challenges and objectives of the key competences for citizenship, which is another interesting challenge that the EU is calling on educators, teachers and young people to take up. By participating first-hand and interacting with their peers, children and young people can learn to learn, acquire or expand skills related to communication, design and entrepreneurship, learn or improve how to relate to others, experience citizenship, and reproduce and produce culture.

As regards the content of the lab with children, compared to their participation during the pilot, they drew attention to two dimensions: peer relationships on the one hand, and relationships with adults on the other. On the first aspect, the value of the project and the tools it proposed to support discussion, the exchange of ideas and group- unity emerged: girls and boys said they participated because each had their own role and because they had a goal they felt was theirs (e.g. discovering their neighbourhood, improving the school). With regard to their relationship with adults, the focus group revealed that the children participated because they wanted to be listened to (e.g. by teachers and administrators) and felt taken seriously (by those who ran the project).

Participating in this way allowed them to become aware of their skills, and the girls and boys stated that, in their life contexts, participating means knowing who to follow in the group, both among peers and adults, as well as knowing the right tools and attitudes to do so. For example, they say they follow leaders and people who are proactive, whether adults or peers, when they show they have the right ideas, when they are

reliable, when they are the right people for a particular group or a certain goal, when they know how to involve everyone, and when they are trusted. Regarding adults, it also becomes apparent that children participate by following them when they are knowledgeable, respected, and needed. Furthermore, children feel that participation is an advantage when they are active in an experience mediated by adults. In fact, when faced with such behaviour, adults tend to take young people more seriously and give them credit.

In terms of concrete tools and practices, the focus emerged that children learned from the pilot to listen, to consider different ideas, to get to know other people, to ask questions and to have the right to speak, to form a circle to discuss issues as equals, even with adults.

Particular attention was paid to being taken seriously. Participating is not about giving orders, nor is it about passively following them. While it is true that adults tend to give children more credit when they see them participating, it is also true that children feel that this credit should be recognised as their right and as a starting point. GOTALK has raised awareness of the importance of being taken seriously, both at home and at school, where this is difficult to achieve: classmates and teachers often do not listen, especially when you are the youngest.

Regarding the GOTALK programme, the focus group participants stated that the experience was inclusive. When someone did not express their opinion or remained on the sidelines, the variety of activities on offer and the dialogue allowed them to find spaces and opportunities to join the group. However, the young people noted that some of their classmates found it more difficult to participate, and that if they were left out, the group would lose an opportunity, such as good ideas. To include those who are more shy, those with difficulty in the Italian language, individuals with disabilities, and those who are marginalised, it is necessary to stay close to them. If a classmate is struggling, including them means putting them in a position where they feel comfortable: reaching out to them, not doing things they cannot do, and keeping quiet for them. Being equal and inclusive with everyone is not always the right solution for inclusiveness: some people need a different approach from others. The young people also emphasise that reciprocity and consistency are necessary: asking for respect means knowing how to respect others.

The focus was on the concept of obligation in relation to inclusiveness. Not all contexts are free, and especially at school, the sense of obligation is strong. This condition has two sides: compulsory attendance becomes both an opportunity and a stimulus to participate, but on the other hand, it cannot become a threat. Saying, 'Either you speak up and participate, or I'll give you a D,' does not work.

In this sense, rather than obligation, the key to participation may be the goal. Even in this case, however, there is a double aspect: it is easier to identify a common goal on which a group is formed than to define a common goal within an already formed group. The challenge, therefore, lies in working on goals within structured groups, such as those worked with for GOTALK.

Finally, they returned to the theme of inclusiveness, the importance of adults taking girls and boys seriously, making things fun for them (and therefore within their reach), including goals that interest everyone, making children feel comfortable and combining the passions of the young people with the project being carried out.

At the end of the focus group, participants were asked to work one last time with their bodies, rather than with words, in line with the GOTALK workshops. The group was asked to create a tableau vivant that summarised the content that emerged during the focus. Without speaking, but moving around the space, the girls and boys constructed a first tableau: observing themselves, they noticed that the representation staged forced, imposed participation aimed at causing harm (echoing the theme of the vandalised bathrooms in the school in the second year of the pilot). The group then decided to create a second tableau, again

without speaking: in this new staging, the focus shifted to the chorus and the group. The tableaux were then given the following titles: first tableau: 'Passive participation'; second tableau: 'Inclusive participation'.

The decision to hold the meeting at the university presented an opportunity to empower the children, who expressed happiness and excitement about being welcomed there and sitting at a desk in front of adults in a setting they perceived as important and to which they had never imagined they would have access. Being able to visit the university that had invited them to participate in GOTALK was seen as recognition of their contribution and as consistent confirmation of what they had been told many times about their right to speak and be heard.

4. Final analysis: Bringing contexts and different piloting years together

The overview of pilots on participation in schools and out-of-school settings in this deliverable, as well as the parallel deliverable from the GOTALK project regarding young people between 13 and 18 years of age (D4.3), reveals a wide variety of participation practices that differed significantly in their histories and throughout the course of the GOTALK pilots. It became very clear to the GOTALK facilitators that no one-size-fits-all recipe for pupil participation exists. However, some topics returned, time and again, throughout the analyses of the piloting experiences. In what follows, this chapter discusses recurring topics from the piloting experiences, linking them back to the three initial challenges the GOTALK project started from: sustainability, inclusiveness and policy impact.

GOTALK based the right to participation on a pedagogy of participation. In elaborating the GOTALK methods, we have been inspired by some core elements of the Reggio Emilia pedagogy, explicitly suitable for our aim, since it assumes and fosters participation (Fleet & Machado, 2022b). We drew also on Gardner's idea of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011), which was particularly useful in reinforcing the aim of inclusion.   In GOTALK, we used these pedagogical insights to build a community of participation, to promote inclusiveness and to enhance policy impact through a solid understanding of - often - difficult policy topics. This approach is not particularly innovative in itself, as we stand on the broad shoulders of a research and practice community. It is, however, radical in its consequences, because it disrupts habits and ingrained practices of boundaried participation (Waters-Davies et al., 2024).

4.1 Boundaried participation

Throughout the project, the GOTALK team encountered several boundaried participation practices that have already been widely documented and reported on by other colleagues in the field of participation. (Dedding & Aussems, 2024; Lundy, 2007; Percy-Smith et al., 2003; Waters-Davies et al., 2024; Woodhouse, 2003) Adults should be aware of their impact in participatory processes, since they can take a facilitating stance but can also be an obstacle for genuine participation. Consistency, flexibility, and the ability to trust and grant space to the requests and ideas of young people is pivotal. When facilitating participation, teachers and educators need to step out of the pedagogy of teaching and into a pedagogy of participation.

Here are some of the more common boundaries, encountered in schools and out-of-school setting during the GOTALK pilots:

- 'The children are too young' or 'the little ones have more difficulties with participation'. It is, of course, true that children are in different stages of development and therefore have different capacities. However, the funny thing in this statement is that the 'older children' in one context are considered 'the little children' in another. In other words, the children who are in the final grade of primary school are considered as 'most fit' for participation but may very well be considered as 'not yet fit for participation' in the first grade of secondary school. This makes no sense. The question, then, is not if children are 'fit' for participation, but how a context can elicit and support participation with a diverse group of children.
- Teachers and educators only want to invest in participation in the ideal way. And because those ideal ways are often unrealistic (e.g., difficult to schedule meetings, unstable pupil attendance,…), the tendency to expect perfection undermines the possibility for genuine participation: meetings are cancelled, methodology is adapted to a less effective form, the few pupils that show up to participate are sent away, … Instead, there needs to be consistency between what teachers say and what they actually do with regard to participation. Children and young people notice inconsistencies and may feel annoyed or disappointed.
- Throughout the pilot experiences, different levels of institutionalization were represented. Although institutionalization can provide participation processes with strong procedures, it can also be a risk as institutionalization has the tendency to make the participation process more controlled, rigid and therefore boundaried. For instance, if pupils are told to only participate through the pupil council, pupils that are not a member of the pupil council can only exercise their right to participate in an indirect way, through their representatives. Or, if pupils are only allowed to talk about topics that are on the agenda, they lose the chance to speak about other topics that are also on their minds.
- Agenda setting is another important area of adult gatekeeping. Adults may impose their own ideas or plans on young people. Participation activities might be used by adults to achieve results that are useful to the school and the children, but which should be obtained by other means. In the GOTALK pilot experiences for instance, in one of the schools, teachers suggested ideas that emerged elsewhere to pupils. In this way, teachers hoped the GOTALK funds would cover the expenses of pupil tablets or school uniforms. On the other hand, adults often feel themselves not to have full freedom about agenda setting for pupil participation because of an assumed idea of what pupil participation should entail. This causes agendas that are too full and a pace that is too fast for genuine participation. Additionally, it is not always evident to include sensitive topics on the agenda. Also, facilitating teachers feel uncomfortable addressing those topics in a participatory body.
- Adults in the piloting trajectories have voiced that they feel the need to guide or steer pupils towards specific ideas or perspectives. The rationale for this is that pupils need to be guided because otherwise they might not or only after a vast amount of time come up with 'useful' or 'good' ideas for the school. Even when teachers guide or steer pupils, they sometimes feel the participatory process takes up too much time and is not efficient enough.
- Some of the teachers in the GOTALK pilots believed not all pupils are fit for participation. Many teachers can easily pinpoint which pupils are 'very well suited' for a pupil council, focusing their attention and encouragement less on pupils that 'do not think about the topics that are discussed in a pupil council', have difficulties expressing themselves, pupils who do not always follow the school rules or pupils who are shy or silent.

4.2 Preparing the setting for participation

In the school communities the GOTALK team worked with, elements of boundaried and genuine participation for children co-exist. It can be seen as a continuum, rather than a black or white trait of schools. Participatory activities can be nice and beautiful. However, they need to be supported by a system that encourages participation. Stated otherwise, if a school wants children to participate, then it should be prepared for them to do so.

Building a school community where participation can exist fully and is not boundaried, is a step-by-step, conscious and reflective process. Laura Lundy (2007, p. 939) said this asks for 'a culture shift in school life'. In participation processes, power mechanisms should be more outspoken and visible. In that way, adults can be more vigilant and reflective about their own practices not to obstruct or put too many boundaries on participation. They need to be ready to see in what ways pupils are not allowed to participate and openly reflect on that. The reflection should be deep and honest, as children are quite astute in remarking on how a school or context looks at them (Peleman et. al., 2014).

For genuine participation to grow, young people and adults must make an effort to understand each other's perspectives. This also applies to the perspective on participation itself and how it is organized. A balanced organization of participation must be sought, taking into account the perspectives of young people and adults alike. All of this, with special attention to the perspectives of the child, as those are more at risk being forgotten or overlooked (Koziel, et.al., 2023). Involving young people from the beginning of the participation process is pivotal. It ensures a shared vision between all actors on what is being done and how to reach a decision. Some areas to which this can apply:

− Balance between participation in school decisions and organizing activities
− How to distribute tasks, expectations and roles - between peers but also between adults and young people.
− How should communication flow between policy makers and young people? Who is responsible and what can be expected from each actor?
− Who is in charge of aligning with young people that are not part of the participatory process? How can adults and young people support each other in this endeavour?

Pupil participation depends on adults taking responsibility for it. Both in the Italian and Belgian setting, youngsters have asked for a written agreement signed between young people and adults, as a starting point of a participatory process. Through that agreement, young people can count on the commitment and get the rules of the game clear from the start. Adults also need to take their responsibility during the process. For instance, when preparing youngsters to speak at adult meetings of policy makers or mediating that conversation. Apart from internal school actors, stakeholders and policy makers outside of the participation context should also be involved. They also have a role to play in reaching sustainable results and making sure collaborations are continued over the long term. Additionally, after a participatory process has concluded, adults have a crucial role to play in ensuring that results are visible and sustained. In general, young people should be able to have a genuine conversation with adults about their initiatives and receive maximal support, even when those initiatives go beyond what adults have imagined for a participatory process.

4.3 A journey from boundaried to genuine participation

The GOTALK pilot trajectories identified different possibilities to reduce boundaried participation. In many cases the GOTALK facilitators worked with schools to make them aware and ready for participation, diving into the "Why?" and "How?" of participation with teachers, school policy makers and pupils.

THE NEED TO SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

One of the key conditions to start the journey towards a more genuine participation for children is to slow down and make space for reflection and deep listening. Listening to each other and meeting each other is important and not easy for young people, and adults alike (see also Chicken et.al. 2024). GOTALK invested in discovering the 100 languages to express perspectives in participatory processes (Malaguzzi, 1996; Rinaldi, 2021; Gardner, 2011). The 100 languages were not only used to better understand and express about policy topics, but also about concepts of participation itself. They are not only valuable to young people but also proved to be worthwhile when working on vision building with adults. All actors benefit from practising asking questions and active listening exercises, for all of the 100 languages. Slowing down allowed teachers to more easily step into a pedagogy of participation, as they could take the time to be curious, listen actively, pay attention to the different languages pupils use to express themselves, and honestly integrate all the messages they capture while facilitating the participatory process. Pedagogical documentation – pictures, pupils' quotes, drawings, living wall extracts - can open doors to discuss sensitive topics, as also indicated by Cahill and Dadvand (2018) who refer to different methods to be used in the process of participation. Listening always pays off, even listening to those messages that are not expressed desirably or appropriately. Sometimes these messages are even more valuable than direct messages because they highlight points of view, emotions, and struggles that would otherwise not be expressed. On various occasions, the GOTALK team advocated for more time and space for teachers facilitating pupil participation, as teachers investing in participate deserve more support than having to sacrifice their breaks to do so. The endeavour of investing in genuine participation should be invested in and valorised properly, not only in terms of time and budget, but also in opportunities for professionalisation. This finding aligns with the need for adult knowledge building on children's rights, also indicated by Barbara Woodhouse (2003) and Laura Lundy (2007).

An attitude of listening can also help to take a more inclusive perspective: putting oneself in someone else's perspective. This inclusive perspective was important for children and youngsters, in order to integrate the voices of their peers who could not attend participation sessions. This finding is parallel to the P7 model of Cahill and Dadvand (2018), who also include perspectives as one of the domains in their model of youth participation. Also, for adults, it was important to open ears and eyes to all pupils' messages. Children, youngsters and teachers all expressed that using different languages to express themselves enabled participation to grasp more perspectives of a wider range of pupils. Teachers consistently told the GOTALK facilitators that the pupils they had worked with, and that they saw expressing themselves in various languages were very ready for participation. This could be seen as an expression of a change of "positioning" of the children (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018) as teachers had changed their expectations and image of those children. Teachers can also exercise real and deep listening when they have a look at their own voices at school, in order to critically analyse the messages they convey towards their pupils.

ALLOWING THE WALLS TO LIVE

The living wall was used in the GOTALK project as a tool for collecting and reviewing perspectives where different languages can be used to express points of view (Clark & Moss, 2011; Fleet & Machado, 2022; Malaguzzi, 1996; Rinaldi, 2021). During the different pilots, the living wall was used for many different purposes, showing the multidimensionality of it. It can be used for searching different views, assembling different perspectives, keeping peers and school staff involved with the participation process. The living wall makes it explicit that participation is a collective process where everyone can add, contribute, inform and be informed.

The usage of the living wall is perceived as a reflective practice in itself. By deciding what to add to the living wall, actors are triggered to take the perspective of the other, to reflect on the participation process and its

outcomes and purposes. However, using the living wall requires space in a considerately chosen location that is accessible and usable for all school actors. It also requires time and a sustained willingness and dedication to do something with it.

FACILITATING DIFFERENT FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

Pupil participation need the support of the entire organization. Getting the full team committed is important and can take different forms: the core team around the children's council is strongly committed and actively involved, while the rest of the team is at least informed and supportive of pupil participation.

The participatory body of pupils should be given a full place within the organization and needs to be linked to other bodies in the organization. The children's council needs planning, meeting facilities, agenda, etc.

Motivating pupils from higher secondary education have greater agency than their younger peers and might therefore be reluctant towards participating. Presenting them with different options and intensities for their contributions can enable them to participate in a way that suits them. Or, when pupils confirm that they are not interested in participating, this is another message of pupils to reflect on by the teacher team. It might give them information about how to improve participation at their school. Anyhow, the doors to future participation should remain open to all pupils, also those who opt out initially.

NEED FOR AN EXTERNAL POINT OF VIEW

During the GOTALK pilots, facilitators and teams of educators and teachers have noticed the value of an external point of view. This external view can be a driving force forward for experimenting and reflecting on participation. The involvement of an external point of view thus seems to be a point to be considered when working with teams if no external facilitator is available. Teams could explicitly seek critical friends and go into dialogue to find their blind spots throughout the participatory processes.

Gathering pedagogical documentation and discussing it together can be a strong starting point for vision building exercises that touch upon sensitive or taboo topics. Feeling uncomfortable with specific situations should not be avoided but should be embraced as a possibility to move forward as an organization.

4.4. Integrating the lessons learned into the final model

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ITALY AND BELGIUM

The Italian and Belgian piloting contexts showed very different realities, which enabled the facilitator-researchers to inclusive and transferable conclusions on participation practices. The Italian context did not work with formal children's councils, but rather had to put new participatory bodies in place in both schools and out-of-school contexts. The choice to include schools and out-of-school contexts showed the facilitator-researchers differences in institutionalization and their impact on participation processes. In the Belgian contexts, each of the primary and secondary schools involved already had a pupil council in place. However, the facilitator-researchers chose to invite schools with different practices of pupil participation granting them a broad spectrum of piloting experiences. Since in Belgium, pupil council were already in place, questioning those practices resulted being more sensitive and rigid then in Italy, while not being less interesting.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AGE GROUPS

Although we can distil some differences between the age groups in children and youngsters we worked with, we want to stress that none of these differences is absolute, and many more differences exist inside of cohorts of children and youngsters.

- For pupils in higher secondary education, motivation seemed to fluctuate more as their agency is mostly broader than that of younger pupils. This situation can be addressed explicitly by adults with curiosity and wonder. A space to talk about motivation for participation can be created so that obstacles for motivation can be understood and relieved. Although, like Laura Lundy (2007) noted, the right to participate is not a duty, but a right: the decision of young people to opt out should be respected.
- For younger children, it is more important to quickly get started with concrete policy themes and put them into practice immediately, rather than diving into conceptual discussions about participation without applications. This balance also exists for older pupils but might be less outspoken then for their younger counterparts.
- Different ways of organizing primary and secondary schools also showed in the pilots: connections between educators and pupils and within teams of adults function differently, resulting in different practices of participation.

ADAPTING THE MODEL

The final model was developed starting from the initial prototype model that guided the first period of piloting and the adapted model that was developed for the second period of piloting. Different adaptations aligned the model with the insights the GOTALK team got throughout the different piloting experiences:

- The steps were initially seen as consequential, but later interpreted as overlapping and intertwined cores that can be used flexibly to deepen participation.
- More focus was put on the process of participation than on the outcome.
- The extra dimension of the Goldens Circle (Sinek, 2011) of Why? How? and What? are added to the model

The graphics underneath show the final model and the explanation of each of the elements in the model. This final model is also part of the conclusive part of the mainstreaming guidelines, deliverable D2.3 of the GOTALK project.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS & NETWORKING

MAPPING THE IDEAS OF PARTICIPATION

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS & POLICY IMPACT

Reflection and review

PARTICIPATION

Why   How   What

SEARCHING FOR OTHER VIEWS

DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

ASSEMBLING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES
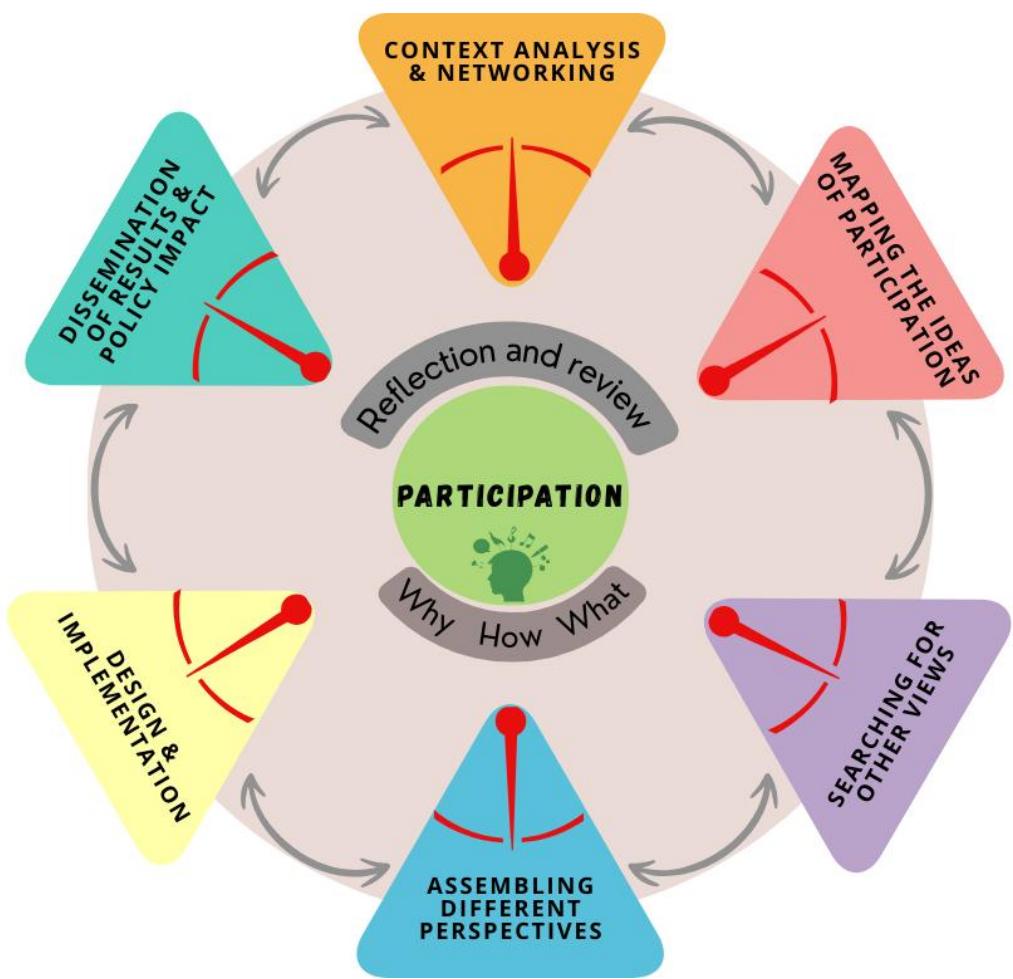
PARTICIPATION

PARTICIPATION IS THE FOCUS, THE CENTRAL CORE OF YOUR ACTION:
- It is your objective
- It is both the premise and the tool from which to begin
- It is the process itself, which becomes concrete and active through its development

SIX TASKS ARE POSITIONED AROUND THE CORE:
THEY GENERATE, SUSTAIN, AND GIVE CONCRETE FORM TO PARTICIPATION
THEY ARE ALSO OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION AND DRAW MEANING FROM IT

- Observe the context and be fully aware of your objectives: Now you can decide whether to start from the core or from one of the other tasks

- Each task has its own autonomy: You may develop it to a greater or lesser extent depending on the characteristics of the environment and the main actors involved in your participatory process

- The tasks are all interconnected and may intersect through the central common point

- Some tasks may emerge as more prominent than others, but all will play a role in supporting and shaping participation

- The six tasks are not sequential but rather interconnected: You will likely find yourself returning to the same point multiple times

CONTEXT ANALYSIS & NETWORKING

PARTICIPATION DOES NOT HAPPEN IN THE ABSTRACT

- Observe and monitor the characteristics and needs of the group (both children and adults)
- Examine the context and identify strengths and needs
- Broaden your view: What kind of environment surrounds your working context? Which other actors could engage with you?

FROM OBSERVATION, OBJECTIVES AND PERSPECTIVES EMERGE

MAPPING THE IDEAS OF PARTICIPATION

THE TERM PARTICIPATION IS BROAD AND POLYSEMIC

- What does participation mean for the children and youth in the group?
- What does participation mean for the adults who accompany them?
- What does participation mean for other stakeholders (institutions, funders, families...)?

BUILD A COMMON LANGUAGE AND MAKE DIFFERENT MEANINGS EXPLICIT

SEARCHING FOR OTHER VIEWS

IDEAS FOR PARTICIPATION DO NOT COME OUT OF NOWHERE:
SHARE AND ASK QUESTIONS

- to other peer groups
- to other adults
- to experts on the topic you want to address
- to those who might support or oppose your ideas

EXPAND YOUR PERSPECTIVES AND BE OPEN TO THE UNEXPECTED

ASSEMBLING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES
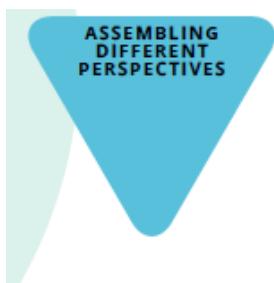
PARTICIPATION IS BORN FROM DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

- Support your arguments
- Listen to others' arguments (both within and outside the group)
- Can a synthesis be reached?
- Are some perspectives prevailing?
- How can minority perspectives be valued?
- Is it possible to change or give up your point of view?
- What must be defended and is non-negotiable?

THIS IS WHERE DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES COME INTO PLAY
(Delegation, Abstention, Majority and Minority, Representation)

DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION
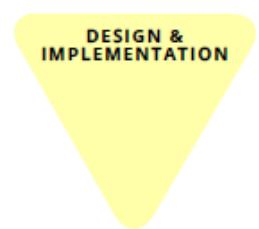
MAKE IT CONCRETE: IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEE AND TOUCH YOUR PARTICIPATION AND ITS RESULTS

- Questions arise from observation
- Questions lead to ideas
- Ideas are discussed and used to plan
- Projects are implemented and monitored
- In the end, results are reviewed, celebrated, and new observations begin

THINKING ABOUT PARTICIPATION ONLY IN ABSTRACT TERMS WOULD BE INCOHERENT

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS & POLICY IMPACT

PARTICIPATION MUST BE WELCOMED, LISTENED TO, AND RECOGNIZED BY PEERS, STAKEHOLDERS, AND INSTITUTIONS

- Give space to documentation
- Share the outcomes of your participatory process
- What left a mark? What has changed? What is transferable?
- Pay attention to coherence and listening: Are adults taking children and youth seriously?
- Can the process continue? Who and how will carry it forward?

GO BEYOND YOUR OWN GROUP:
HOW DO OTHERS POSITION THEMSELVES AROUND YOU?
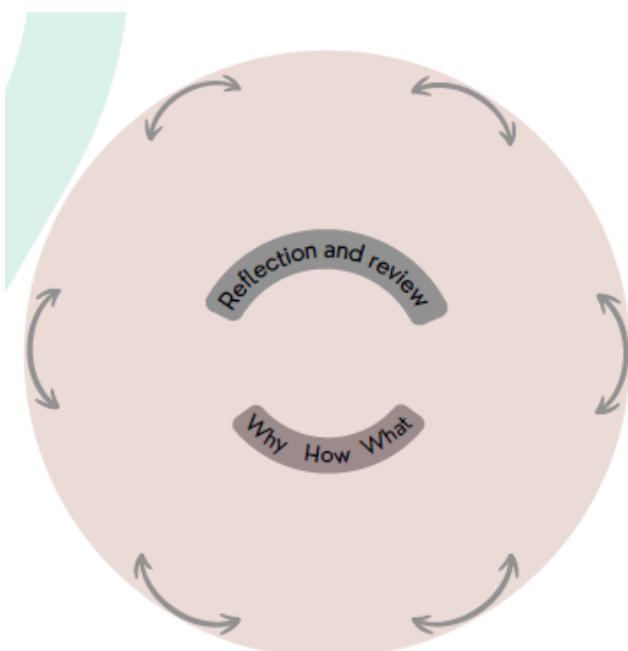
PARTICIPATION IS A CONTINUOUSLY MOVING PROCESS

The grey zone connects all the elements at play.
It is your area of reflective intervention: The progression of the participatory process allows you, from time to time, to understand where to pause, when to move forward or return, and with which tools to do so.

THREE QUESTIONS CAN GUIDE YOU IN REFLECTION AND REVIEW:

- **Why?** Why does the school choose to foster participation?
- **How?** Which procedures are in place to support formal participation?
- **What?** Which participation practices and tools are used by the children's council?

PAY ATTENTION TO THE 100 LANGUAGES:
THEY ARE THE BEST ALLIES IN PARTICIPATION

- Reasoning and maieutic dialogue are always connected to direct experience
- To explore a concept and answer a question, words alone are not enough — and sometimes are not even necessary
- Artistic, visual, and bodily languages offer alternative ways to express oneself
- Remember that intelligence is plural and thinking is embodied

IN EVERY STEP OF YOUR PARTICIPATORY PROCESS — EVEN WITH ADULTS!

THE PARTICIPATION OF MINORS IS POSSIBLE BY PROMOTING A PLURALISTIC APPROACH, WHERE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE MAIN ACTORS, SUPPORTED BY ADULTS.

Keep a close eye on the balance between the contributions of young people and adults. This balance may vary depending on the context and needs, but children must be protagonists, not puppets.

HOW MUCH WEIGHT DOES THE ADULT INTERVENTION CARRY, AND HOW MUCH DO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CONTRIBUTE?

HOW DOES THE BALANCE SHIFT WITHIN EACH PART OF THE PROCESS?
AND ACROSS THE WHOLE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS?
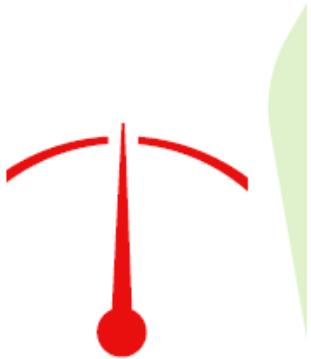
5.   Conclusion

Both schools and out-of-school settings are constantly teaching young people about participation. The message pupils get can go from 'Your opinion contributes to our organization as a whole and is strongly valued' to 'Your perspective is disturbing to us and you will be punished for expressing it'.

Adults working in educational settings are therefore pivotal, because they have the power to enable and enforce the voices of children, together with their self-esteem and ability to express themselves. Taking young children seriously is vital for their development. Taking responsibility as an adult for this task includes reflecting on the work with young people. Although this task can be challenging and confronting, the GOTALK project celebrates and encourages all adults that continue to listen deeply to and advocate in alignment with young people's perspectives. The GOTALK project has shown that children's contributions are vital and that, if given the right opportunities, they can express their full potential.

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