

The goal of the project is to examine the drivers, instruments as well as the results of participation of children and youth in local governance in two European countries – Poland and Finland. The countries exemplify different social, cultural, legal and institutional traditions, as well as have diverse local government models, which impacts the understanding of civic participation as well as the way citizens are involved in public affairs.

The interest of the Polish-Finnish research team in the given issue is motivated by several reasons:

1. Children's and youth' participation in local governance, at least according to international institutions and organizations, constitutes presently a standard. However, the practical implementation of this principle raises many doubts, *inter alia*, in regard to the extent the recommendations of international bodies are actually translated to the practice of public life.
2. The research results suggest that early civic involvement stimulates future political activity (see Lichterman 2005). At the same time, children and young people constitute a group at the high risk of marginalisation. This is due both to the way they are perceived, e.g. as laypersons, and to the problems posed by the practical side of their involvement in decision-making processes. Therefore, building citizenship and creating exemplary forms of youth involvement contribute to the development of upcoming civil society. This issue seems to be even of greater importance during the pandemic time and in a post-pandemic reality where children and young people struggle with social isolation and are at high risk of exclusion.
3. Children and young people are the group that will be responsible in the future for making decisions about public matters, both at European, national, and local levels. Therefore, it is important to identify and diagnose the functioning of mechanisms of their involvement. Their efficient operation is not only a 'laboratory of local democracy', but it also determines future citizenship.
4. Ignoring the potential of children and young people as stakeholders of the public sphere and questioning their 'expert' role in public affairs may translate into the quality of public services and their unsuitability to the young peoples' expectations. Additionally, questioning young people social rights can translate into permanent discouragement of this group from public affairs which can negatively impact authorities' perceptions. Such an approach results in an irreversible loss of social capital, which, if not used, may accumulate in other areas of social life.
5. Moreover, the research team wants to verify to what extent both statutory forms of involvement (e.g., youth councils) as well as democratic innovations (e.g., children participatory budgeting) addressed to children and youth actually translate into the changes in public sphere and what the genuine reasons for their use by local authorities are. In this context, it is also important to examine whether 'youth innovations' have a universal character and if they can be scaled.

The planned research schema includes: **1)** examining – on the basis of international, national and local legal acts as well as relevant literature – the context of children's and youth participation in both countries; **2)** analyzing of existing data on children's and youth involvement at the local level; **3)** conducting qualitative empirical research that includes: a) expert panels in which various specialists, representatives of a diversity of fields from Poland and Finland will take part.; b) semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders who are responsible for including children and youth into local decision-making; c) semi-structured interviews with youth; d) observations during events addressed to children and youth. The empirical part of the research will be carried out in selected municipalities in Poland and Finland (case studies). The distinctive feature of the proposed research is its comparative nature. The comparison will be done on cross-country and cross-national basis. The effects of the project will be visible in the theoretical, methodological, and practical areas. The results of the research will allow to verify the assumptions concerning the participation of children and youth in local governance. Additionally, a catalog of roles and functions performed by children and youth in local governance will be developed, as well as a theoretical model of the scope and level of their participation. Due to the international nature of the research, the results of the project will also allow for identification and comparison of the changes European local administrations undergo. Due to the analysis of selected case studies, which reflect different contexts and environments, the research team also wants to compare the mechanisms that determine children's and young people participation in local governance as well as to develop recommendations for local politicians, officers, members of non-governmental organizations, social life animators and teachers, who usually serve as promoters and architects of children's and youth participation.