# Reweaving the Tapestry of the Generations

A Guide to Community-based
Intergenerational Initiatives in Europe

# Acknowledgements



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# Glossary of Terms

**Care setting for older people**
A care setting for older people can be a residential facility or a day centre. Residential care facilities (also known as Homes for Older People) are long-term care facilities which provide supervision and assistance in activities of daily living with medical and nursing services when required. Senior citizens centres (also known as Adult day centres) are settings offering social, cultural and learning activities on a day basis.

**Childcare setting**
A childcare setting is an organised service which offers a variety of types of group care, development and learning opportunities to young children in the years before they attend primary school. Across Europe there are a range of terms used to describe such settings e.g. crèche, kindergarten, nursery, preschool, playgroup or children's centre. Sometimes the umbrella term early childhood education and care (ECEC) is used to describe such settings.

**Formal learning** (settings)
Formal learning is learning that takes place within the institutionalised and chronically graded education system and includes settings such as preprimary and primary schools, secondary schools and third level educational institutions.

**Informal learning** (settings)
The lifelong process by which everyone acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experience and encounters in social and physical environments at home, at work, at play and in the community.

**Non-formal learning** (settings)
Non-formal learning is any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the formal education system. Examples of non-formal learning settings include parent and toddler groups; libraries; older people's clubs and youth clubs.

**Intergenerational** (IG) **learning**
Intergenerational learning involves different age groups learning together, learning from each other and learning about each other in a range of settings.

**Lifelong learning**
Lifelong learning refers to learning and training which can occur across the lifespan. The term is also used to reflect the view that everyone should have the opportunity to engage in learning at any time during their life.

**Lifewide learning**
Lifewide learning highlights that learning can take place across the full range of life experiences at any stage in life. It covers a multitude of levels, means and activities. It includes formal, non-formal and informal learning.

# Glossary of Terms

**Mediators** (of IG practice)
In the context of the TOY project mediators of IG practice are typically ECEC practitioners, social care practitioners, teachers, community workers, senior volunteers and parents. Their role includes supporting interaction and being a bridge and interpreter between generations.

**Senior volunteer**
In the context of the TOY project, a senior volunteer is an older person (55 years +) who has a specific role and responsibility within an initiative or an activity.  The role is undertaken out of interest and there is no remuneration involved.

**Senior beneficiary**
In the context of the TOY project, a senior beneficiary is defined as an older person (55 years +) who is a participant in an activity as a beneficiary along with children.

# 1   Introduction

Intergenerational (IG) practice brings people from different generations together. They share activities, learn together, come to understand each other better and have fun together. Most IG learning initiatives have focussed on bringing together older people with children and young people aged 9 to 25 years. Up to now, the potential of IG learning involving younger children 0 to 8 year-olds has been underdeveloped. This is a real missed opportunity.

The Together Old and Young Project (TOY) (2012 – 2014) has been explicitly designed to shed greater light on this area. It brings together the worlds of older care, active ageing, lifelong learning, senior volunteering, early childhood education and care (ECEC), primary education, research, community development and local government. The TOY Project is being implemented by a consortium of nine partner organisations in seven countries:

Ireland ——— Dublin Institute of Technology
Italy    ——— Lunaria
                   Retesalute
Netherlands — International Child Development Initiatives
Poland ——— Comenius Foundation
Portugal ——— University of Aveiro
Slovenia ——— Educational Research Institute
Spain ——— University of Lleida
                   Municipality of Lleida

TOY is being funded under the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme - Grundtvig.

IG learning initiatives involving young children are uncommon and the benefits to all generations are unclear. One of the aims of the TOY Project was to uncover IG learning organisations, initiatives or individuals promoting IG learning amongst young and old, identify the benefits, and investigate and articulate strategies and behaviours used. This report represents findings of the action research which sheds light on these issues. A summary report illustrated with photographs and quotations of participants in the IG initiatives researched, and translated in 8 languages, is also available (www.toyproject.net).

The five phases of the TOY Project are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
Together Old and Young Project Phases

| **1 Literature Review** | The first phase of TOY, the **Literature Review**, provided a comprehensive analysis of (the lack of) IG learning involving older people and young children in Europe including constraints, opportunities and issues needing further analysis (summarised in Section 2 below). A further outcome of this stage was the development of a **Framework** for TOY which includes **five goals** of IG learning: |
|---|---|
| | 1. Building and sustaining relationships |
| | 2. Enhancing social cohesion in the community |
| | 3. Facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge, |
| | 4. Recognising the roles of grandparents in young children's lives |
| | 5. Enriching the learning processes of both children and older adults. |
| | Within the framework, special attention is paid to two **thematic areas of activity**, Nature and Outdoor Learning; Arts, Culture and Creativity. |
| | The background research conducted by all TOY partners for the Literature Review also involved **identifying individuals, groups and initiatives in seven European countries**, which have succeeded in bringing together the two generations in learning contexts. |
| | The TOY Literature Review, titled: Together Old & Young:  A Review of the Literature on Intergenerational Learning Involving Young Children and Older People was published in June 2013. http://www.toyproject.net/#!literature-review/c1sbe |
| **2 Action Research** | The **Action Research**, the results of which are presented in this report, involved a **more in-depth investigation** of a subset of the individuals, groups or initiatives identified in Phase 1 in order to uncover successful behaviours, strategies and necessary conditions for IG learning involving old and young in non-formal community settings. |

**3 Capacity Building Modules**

During subsequent phases of TOY in 2013 and 2014 **Capacity Building modules** for practitioners and senior volunteers will be developed and 'piloted' in five countries. This process will be informed by the results of the literature review and the action research. A Toolkit for Intergenerational Learning will then be published on the TOY website.

**4 Pilot Actions**

Between March and August 2014, one or two IG **Pilot Actions** involving young children and older people will be supported by the TOY Project in five countries. The Pilot Actions will **put into practice lessons learned** in the previous phases of the project. A multi-media report documenting the Pilot Actions will be published on the TOY website in Autumn 2014.

**5 Monitoring & Evaluation**

The results of all phases of TOY are being **monitored, evaluated and documented**. Stakeholder seminars, involving interested parties, are being held by all partners to disseminate results. These provide an opportunity to discuss the results with local communities and reflect on what works best.

All publications and events associated with TOY can be followed on the TOY website: www.toyproject.net

# 2 Objectives of the Action Research

**The Action Research serves the following three objectives:**

1. To identify organisers' and participants' (old and young) views regarding the aims and benefits of IG initiatives, paying particular attention to regional variation.
2. To review and check the validity of the five TOY Goals of IG practice (The TOY Project Consortium, 2013).
3. To identify successful behaviours, strategies and conditions for IG learning involving old (55 years +) and young (8 years and under) in non-formal community settings as evident in two thematic areas: Nature and Outdoor Learning; Arts, Culture and Creativity.

**Attention in the research is also being paid to the following questions which were identified in the TOY Literature Review as needing further investigation:**

- How does regional variation across Europe in patterns and expectations of IG living, such as three generations living together, translate into IG learning practice?
- What is the contribution of and limitations of young children's and older adults' involvement in IG learning?
- What is the role of the middle generation (parents, ECEC practitioners, social care practitioners, IG facilitators and mediators) in IG activities involving young children and older adults?
- Given that IG projects and initiatives appear to be highly dependent on the commitment and innovativeness of key individuals – what are the strategies and behaviours for IG learning that are accessible to other members in the community?
- What is the gender dimension of IG learning and contribution of both (girls and boys) and men and women in IG learning?

# 3  Implementation in Seven Countries

**Research design**

In order to ensure consistency and coherence across all participating partners a common research framework was developed, which set out selection criteria for IG initiatives, ethical guidelines for research and the timeframe for data collection.

Each partner was asked to study two to three initiatives, which met the following criteria:
·Involve children eight years and younger and older people (55 years +)
·Stimulate learning either in Arts, Culture or Creativity or Nature and Outdoor Learning
·Take place in non-formal community settings, (if no IG initiative in non-formal settings were found, could include initiatives which are part of formal settings such as pre-school or primary school)

In-depth information on the initiatives, both quantitative and qualitative, was collected by means of observation, photographing, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A Research Toolkit was developed based on the input received from partners. It contained: sample information sheet for interviewees; initiative summary form; observational visit guidelines; interview schedule for coordinator/facilitator of the initiative; interview schedule with senior volunteers; focus group schedule with senior beneficiaries; interview schedule with sample of children; interview schedule with sample of parents and sample consent letters. All parts were translated into the local language as necessary.

The intention was to collect as many perspectives from different generations on each initiative as possible: i.e. a rich case study. The minimum requirement in terms of data collected for each initiative was a completed initiative summary form; a completed semi-structured interview with coordinator/facilitator and a semi-structured interview with senior volunteers (or senior beneficiaries if no senior volunteers involved).

**Analysis and documentation**

Each partner analysed and synthesised all data for each case study in their country. Quantitative data such as numbers, ages and sex of participants and identification of TOY goals were collated on a summary form. Views and experiences, illustrated with direct quotations and photographs were compiled in a narrative case study, written in English. This was organised under four headings:

Introduction and story behind the initiative
How do the different generations benefit?
What are the necessary skills and conditions?
Constraints and challenges

All data was analysed centrally in International Child Development Initiatives - ICDI, the overall project coordinator. Draft analyses were shared with all partners (and a selection of interviewees) for comments.

# 4   The Case Studies at a Glance

In total we visited and studied 21 IG projects involving participation of young children and older people. The majority (14 out of 21) fall under the broad thematic area of 'Arts, Culture and Creativity' (ACC); three could be considered Nature and Outdoor Learning (NOL) initiatives and four others have elements of both thematic areas.

Table 2
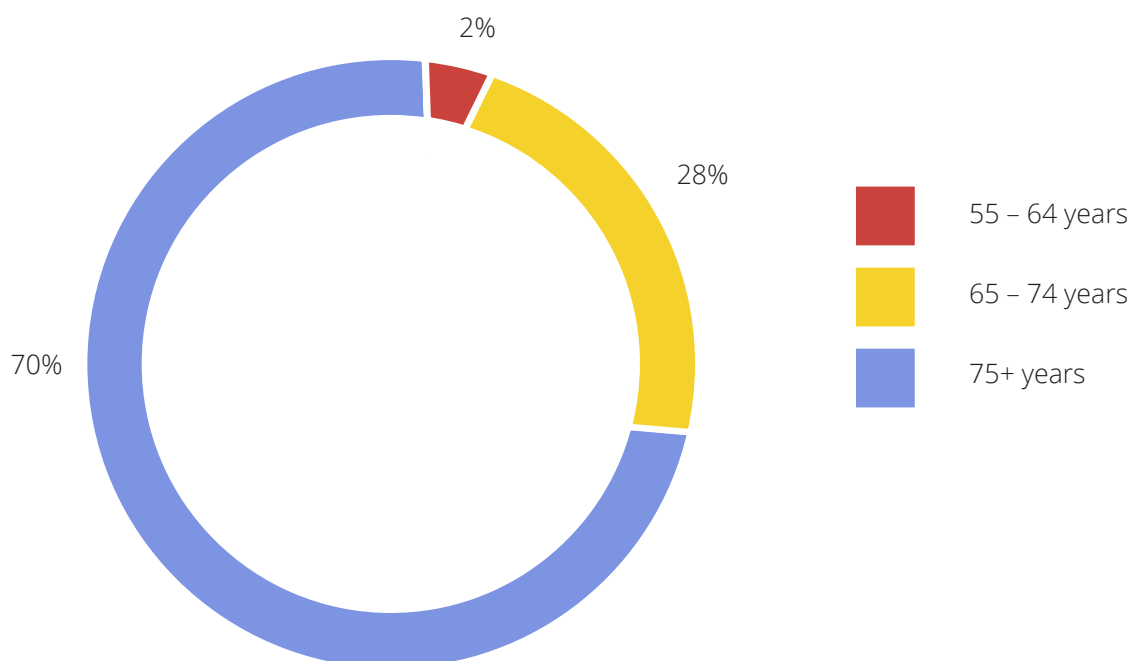 TOY Project Case Studies: Summary Information

| Country and Town | Name and Description | ACC or NOL |
|---|---|---|
| Ireland, Summerhill, Co. Meath | The Way We Were project (Senior volunteers exhibit artefacts from earlier times and explain to primary school children how they were used) | ACC |
| Ireland, Naas, Co. Kildare | If You Were in my Shoes project (A community participatory arts project involving 5 to 86 year olds) | ACC |
| Ireland, Summerhill, Co. Meath | The Trauma Teddies project (Senior volunteers and primary school children knit teddies which are carried in ambulances to comfort children going to hospital) | ACC |
| The Netherlands, Leiden | The Dice: Young Meet Old/*Jong Ontmoet Oud* (Five and six year-olds from a primary school regularly visit older people in a residential care home for older people to do activities together) | ACC |
| The Netherlands, Leiden | Very young children and older people with dementia sing songs together in residential care home for the older people which also houses a childcare centre | ACC |
| The Netherlands, Leiden | Senior volunteers reading aloud to children: Senior volunteers read storybooks 1. in the library (*Voorleesmiddag*) 2. in children's homes (*VoorleesExpress*) | ACC |
| The Netherlands, Leiden | North Leiden School Garden/*Schooltuin Leiden Noord* (Senior volunteers and young children garden together) | NOL |

| Country and Town | Name and Description | ACC or NOL |
|---|---|---|
| Poland, Lublin | The Academy of Supergrandmothers and Supergrandfathers/*Akademia Superbabci i Superdziadka* (a school for grandparents to learn more about grandparenting role and to engage in volunteer work with children) | ACC |
| Poland, Lódz | Flying Grannies/*Latajace Babcie* (A group of female senior volunteers write and perform their own stories and poems in a range of children's settings) | ACC |
| Slovenia, Ljubljana | From 0 to 100 – together/*Od 0 do 100 – skupaj* (7 and 8 year-old primary school children do creative activities together with seniors in a care home for older people) | ACC |
| Slovenia, Ljubljana | Learning scouting skills and playing games from the past /*Učenje taborniških veščin in igranje starih iger* | ACC/NOL |
| Slovenia, Ljubljana | Tree of Generations/*Drevo generacij* (preschool children, their parents and grandparents participate in an intergenerational project for creative joint leisure time) | ACC/NOL |
| Italy, Piacenza | Older People and Children Together (*Anziani e Bambini Insieme*) a city intergenerational centre combining an Adult day centre and residential care home for older people and a childcare centre for 0-3 year-olds | ACC/NOL |
| Italy, Rome | Urban Garden/*Hortus Urbis* (Intergenerational garden for citzens of Rome developed to renovate an historical site and stimulate environmental awareness) | NOL |

TOY's primary focus is on non-formal community-based IG practice i.e. organised educational activity carried on outside the formal school system. The majority of initiatives (14) took place in settings such as libraries, care settings for older people, community centres or city gardens. One of the unique aspects of TOY, distinguishing it from other IG research projects, is the inclusion of young children (0-8 year-olds). Within this age range it was difficult for researchers to find IG initiatives involving children under 3 years although we have been able to include a few. Some of the case studies also involved children up to 12 years.

We grouped the senior participants into two categories: those who were involved primarily in their capacity as a **senior volunteer** with a specific role and responsibility and those who we described as **senior beneficiaries**, participants in an activity as a beneficiary alongside children. In total, **111 senior volunteers** were involved aged between 55 years to approximately 80 years. More than **303 seniors benefited** from the initiatives. Of these senior beneficiaries, 214 (70%) were 75 years and over; 84 (28%) were 65 to 74 year and 5 ( 2%) were 55 to 64 years. In both categories women outnumbered men. Approximately 80 per cent of both volunteers and beneficiaries were women.

*Figure 1*
*Age of senior beneficiaries*

# 5 An Intergenerational Tour of Europe

Ireland

Netherlands

Poland

Spain

Italy

Slovenia

Portugal

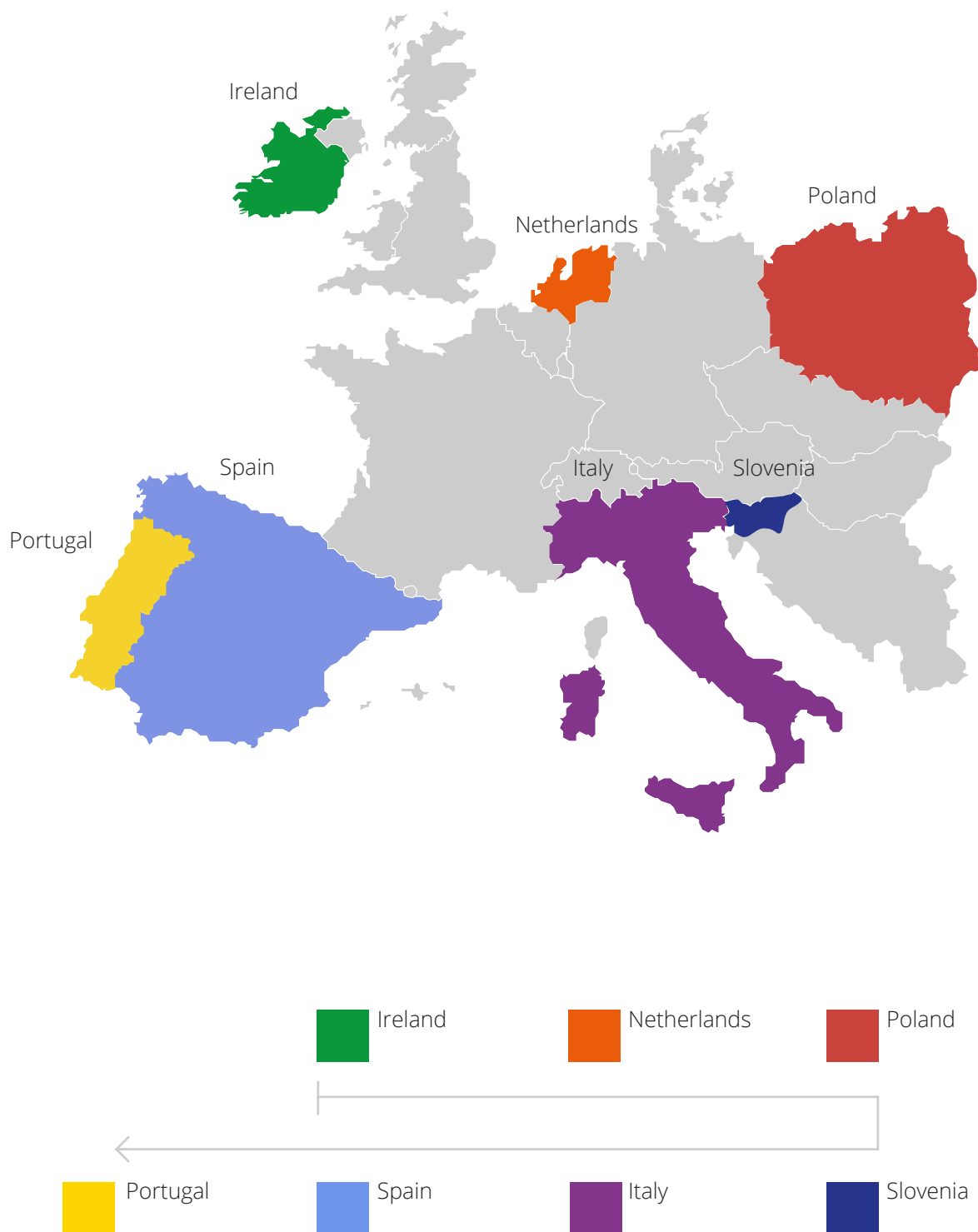| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Ireland | ■ Netherlands | ■ Poland |
| ■ Portugal | ■ Spain | ■ Italy | ■ Slovenia |

*Figure 2*
*Participating countries in the action research*

We began our search for examples of innovative IG learning activities in **Ireland** where a well established national voluntary organisation, Third Age has been providing creative opportunities for older people to contribute to society. Two of the three initiatives we studied in Ireland are 'Third Age' promoted initiatives. One involved jointly exploring local history and heritage. In the second, children knitted so called 'trauma teddies' under the mentoring of senior volunteers, used to comfort children going to hospital in ambulances. In the **Netherlands**, a country with a strong tradition of volunteering, we found examples of active participation of senior volunteers in municipal library supported initiatives to stimulate young children's love of reading. Senior volunteers were also found in school gardens and in homes for older people, helping out in song-singing sessions, which involved 'resident' seniors and preschool and primary school children.

It was extremely difficult to uncover organised activities between young and old in **Poland**. The two initiatives we did find were described as quite unique. These were a school for grandparents to learn more about their grandparenting role and engage in volunteer work with children and 'Flying Grannies' where senior volunteers write and perform their stories and poems in children's settings. Moving south to **Slovenia**, we discovered IG activities with young and old involving a scouting group in a care home for older people. We also observed an IG workshop facilitated by NOVITA, whose mission is to promote IG cooperation in Slovenia and a project titled "Tree of Generations", which stimulated creative joint leisure time between children, parents and grandparents in preschool settings in Ljubljana.

It was not difficult to find IG learning activity in **Italy**. The selected TOY case studies included an IG centre combining a childcare service for 0 to 3 year-olds and a care home for older people and an IG educational urban garden. In Italy, we also found a mayor-led multi-generational creative response to the natural disaster, the recent earthquake which destroyed L'Aquila and its surroundings. Involving older people in story telling with children was also evident in the initiatives in **Spain** in the region of Lleida. In another Lleida municipality-supported project, children from a community play centre and senior volunteers from a care home for older persons learned about ecology together using ICT as a learning tool.

Our IG learning inquiry ends in the southwest corner of Europe in **Portugal** in the city of Aveiro and its surroundings. The 2012 - European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations was vibrant in Portugal, with many new projects initiated. Projects included "Recognising You", where young primary school children exchanged letters with older people in a care setting for older people and "From 8 to 80 years old" whereby social gatherings were organised between children in a kindergarten and a neighbouring care setting for older people.

All 21 case studies including selected quotations from participants are available on the TOY website. **www.toyproject.net**

As stated in the Introduction one of the outcomes of the first phase of the TOY Project was the identification of five goals of IG practice involving young children and older people. An important first exercise in revisiting the goals in the Action Research was to check their validity against the primary goals of the 21 case studies. In other words, which of the TOY goals are most and least prominent and are there key goals in the case study initiatives that haven't been captured in the TOY goals?

Goal 4, Recognising the roles of grandparents in young children's lives was most frequently identified (17 mentions), followed in almost equal frequency by Goal 1, Building and sustaining relationships (11) and Goal 2, Enhancing social cohesion in the community (10). Goal 3, Facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge and Goal 5, Enriching the learning processes of both children and older adults, were both identified as a major goal in 6 case studies. A cross-cutting IG issue, which has not been sufficiently captured in the TOY Goals is: enhancement of seniors' health and wellbeing (see revised TOY framework).
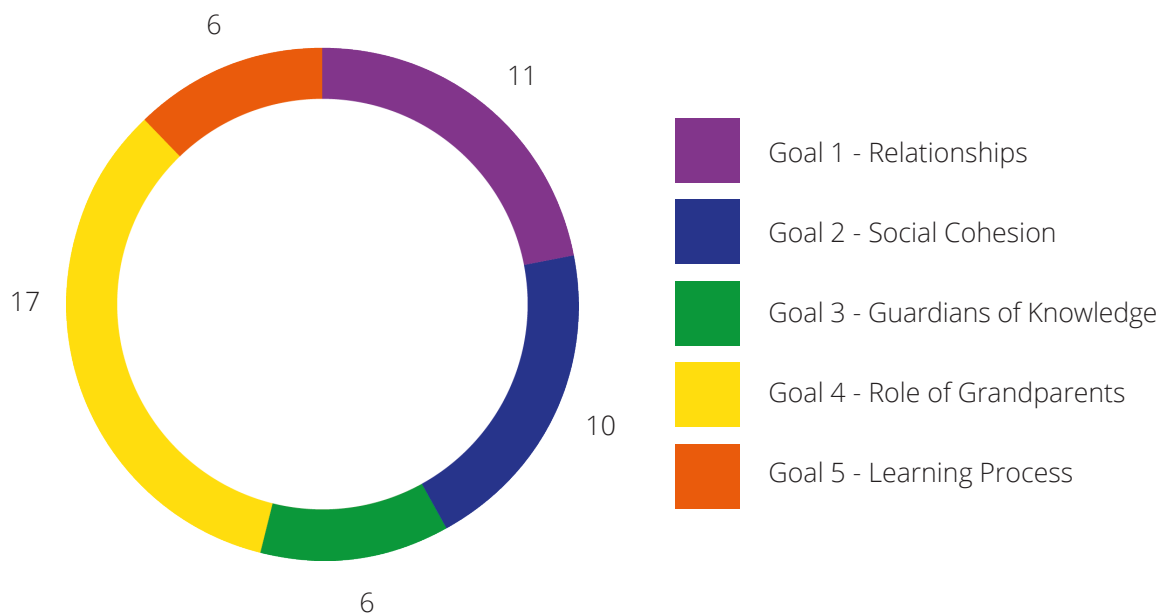


*Figure 3*
*Frequency of Goals' Attribution in Case Studies*

*In the following sections we revisit each of the TOY goals with reference to key findings from the case studies.*

### Goal 1: Building and sustaining relationships

In Phase 1 we proposed that IG practice can enrich relationships generally and counteract negative stereotypes and isolation of older people. What we learned in the case studies is that in contact with each other, both old and young can challenge their stereotypes about the other. The opportunity to overcome negative views about older people was mentioned frequently as a goal of IG activities for children. Seniors too mentioned that the stereotypical views they had about children were challenged.

Older people valued getting insight into children's life-worlds and felt more 'up-to date'. Both groups had to adapt to and learn how to interact with the 'other' and adapt to different personalities outside the family. An interesting variation regionally, was how relationships and connectedness were expressed. In the countries of southern Europe and Poland, affect and physical affection was prioritised – whereas in Ireland, the Netherlands and Slovenia, sharing of humour was viewed as important. In these countries physical affection was not highlighted as important.

By far the most frequently mentioned benefit of contact with children for seniors, whether as a senior volunteer or as a senior beneficiary, was feeling useful and valued and having a contribution to make to society. A related benefit and outcome of this was new energy and enhanced general health and wellbeing through contact with children. For their part, children were viewed as benefiting from a relationship with a grandparent figure (see also Goal 4, below). Having fun and enjoyment was mentioned frequently both as a goal and benefit of IG activities for all generations in all countries.

### Goal 2: Enhancing social cohesion in the community

In Poland, Italy, Slovenia and Portugal the development of solidarity between generations was identified as a specific goal and benefit of IG practice. It was also apparent in a number of the initiatives involving institutions that a desire to open up physically and relationally to the community was a key motivation in bringing the generations together such as when children visited homes for older people (IE, NL, PT, SL). A more elaborated construction in realising this aim was integrated services for young and old together in the same physical space (IT, PT). IG activities were also viewed as an opportunity to address the impact of migration on social cohesion in a number of initiatives: e.g senior volunteers better understanding the lives of migrant families and children through home visits to read stories (NL), as a volunteer in a library (IT) or working with children from play-centres with predominantly migrant children (ES). In Portugal the isolation and loneliness of older people 'left behind' due to emigration of family members was mentioned as one rationale for children to visit and exchange letters with seniors in a care home for older people.

### Goal 3: Facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge

An important way of valuing old people's contribution to society concerns recognising their roles as guardians of knowledge, traditions and skills. We witnessed many examples of seniors teaching skills and sharing their hobbies in the initiatives studied: seniors introducing children to local history through examining artefacts or seniors teaching children gardening, food production and cooking skills. The destruction of the piazza, the traditional meeting and play space for all generations in Poggio Picenze, Italy and the heart of the town prompted the instigation of a programme whereby old people passed on the collective cultural memory of the town by demonstrating traditional crafts and telling stories from the past. Highlighted in all countries was the importance of children learning norms and values of behaviour and how to interact with their elders. This was understood as: having respect, being polite, being helpful. In some initiatives seniors were also keen that children learned to value nature and the outdoors.

Through participating in an IG project, which in some cases benefited from additional 'expert' input, seniors also learned new skills such as how to read books and stories with children in an interactive way (NL, ES) or learned about non-violent communication and anti-discriminatory behaviour (PL). They also extended their own knowledge of local history (IE, IT), gardening (NL, IT), writing and reading (PT).

### Goal 4: Recognising the roles of grandparents in young children's lives

The literature review phase of TOY highlighted the important role that grandparents play in the nurture and socialisation of their grandchildren. Also referred to was the phenomenon of social grandparents, whereby older people who are not biological grandparents, but who may fulfill aspects of a grandparental role when biological grandparents are living at a great distance, or who may be absent altogether. The value for children of having a grandparent figure in their lives repeatedly came up in the case studies we studied. This was expressed in terms of affective relationship with a (social) grandparent (PL, SL, IT, ES, PT). In the Netherlands, this relationship was also viewed as bringing structure, ritual and calmness, to children whose lives may otherwise be quite chaotic.

In some cases it was suggested that in 'time poor' families where parents were very busy with work responsibilities, young children benefited from the time and the relaxed attention a social grandparent could provide. From their side social grandparents valued and enjoyed being able to fulfill a grandparent role, especially if their own grandchildren were not living close to them (IE) or if they had no grandchildren of their own (NL).

### Goal 5: Enriching the learning processes of both children and older adults

One of the key principles underpinning TOY is the notion of lifelong learning i.e. learning should be an enterprise for life. It was therefore interesting, if not puzzling, that sometimes our questions about learning with IG practice, was met with confusion by interviewees. This in large part might be explained by the separation in public consciousness of formal school learning (reading, writing, subject knowledge) and non-formal learning through social interaction about for example, appropriate social behaviour, stories from the past, cooking

or recognising plants. The concept of learning was also viewed as problematic in relation to one initiative in the Netherlands which included older people with dementia interacting with children aged between 4 months and 3 years. Here, the benefits from the seniors' perspectives were viewed purely in terms of a sense of wellbeing in the here and now, and a feeling of security created by seeing children and singing songs from their own childhood. Learning in the 'traditional' sense, was not viewed by the carers as relevant.

For residents in care homes for older people, the activities with children were viewed as beneficial in terms of enriching the daily routine (NL, SL, ES). Children too welcomed the break from the classroom routine and getting out of the classroom to visit an old people's home where there was outdoor play equipment they could use. They also reported learning new games and skills from seniors. Professionals also noted that children were confronted in a very natural and real way by the realities of the life-cycle, including death, when seniors with whom they had contact passed away (IT, PT).

Another contradiction arose in relation to the notion of IG practice as learning and consequently beneficial in education. Whilst on the one hand the learning processes experienced in IG practice, hands-on active learning or learning through real-life experience, were viewed as valuable for pre-school and primary school aged children, on the other hand, IG initiatives were seen to take time away from the 'regular' school curriculum. This was mentioned as a challenge in sustaining IG projects (IT, PT). Interviewees in Italy, Ireland and Portugal believed that non-formal IG activities would be more valued and sustainable if recognised as having a role in formal early childhood or primary school curriculum.

**Revised TOY Framework**

The revised framework includes an all encompassing goal: improved health and wellbeing, highlighting the importance of lifelong learning and lifewide learning to health and wellbeing for both age groups.

It also recognises the role of senior volunteers as mediators of intergenerational learning between older people and young children. In the TOY Project it is important to note that we do not favour a sharp distinction between the role of senior volunteer and senior beneficiary; indeed in some case studies older people played both roles.
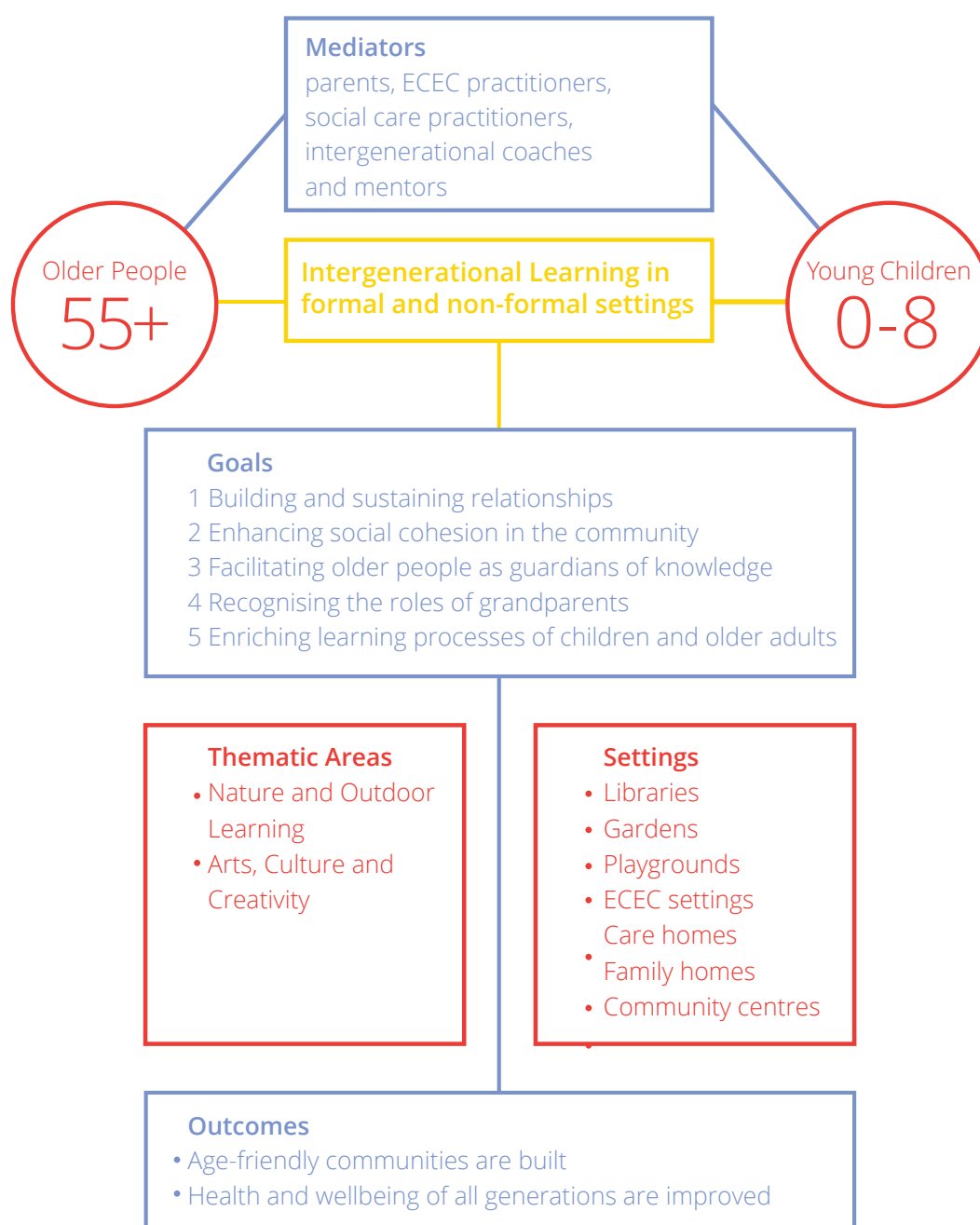
**Mediators**
parents, ECEC practitioners,
social care practitioners,
intergenerational coaches
and mentors

Older People
55+

**Intergenerational Learning in formal and non-formal settings**

Young Children
0-8

**Goals**
1 Building and sustaining relationships
2 Enhancing social cohesion in the community
3 Facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge
4 Recognising the roles of grandparents
5 Enriching learning processes of children and older adults

**Thematic Areas**
• Nature and Outdoor Learning
• Arts, Culture and Creativity

**Settings**
• Libraries
• Gardens
• Playgrounds
• ECEC settings
  Care homes
• Family homes
• Community centres

**Outcomes**
• Age-friendly communities are built
• Health and wellbeing of all generations are improved

*Figure 4*
*Revised TOY Framework*

# 7  Skills and Conditions for Intergenerational Practice

A key question for the whole TOY Project is to better understand the conditions that need to be in place for IG practice 'to work'. We were interested in finding out more about the skills, attitudes and strategies of those involved, these could be organisers or initiators of IG activities; senior volunteers or so called 'mediators' between old and young – which could be senior volunteers themselves or professionals (early childhood practitioners or social care practitioners working with older people).

**Personal attributes**
Firstly, there is remarkable agreement across most of the initiatives studied regarding the necessary personal attributes of those individuals leading and coordinating activities. The same consistency is found with respect to valued personal skills of senior volunteers.
For leaders and initiators of projects or activities the following are highlighted: commitment, enthusiasm and motivation, expressed sometimes as being 'passionate' about IG practice. Additionally, openness to innovation in learning and teaching and having very good communication skills including being a good listener are important. Having an original idea is also viewed as contributing to success in IG work.

**Planning and organisational skills**
Good planning and organisation was also mentioned by almost everyone interviewed on this topic. This means different things in different IG activities. Mentioned was: being able to bring together a variety of actors in designing and thinking through activities and cooperating in their implementation or arranging the physical space to allow for informal interaction between children and old people. Good planning and organisation could also entail ensuring child protection guidelines and protocols were being followed and taking care of day to day logistics such as making sure there were enough materials, drinks and snacks for children and seniors. Less frequently mentioned was the need to prepare both children and seniors regarding what to 'expect' from the other group and to reflect afterwards on the contacts in terms of, what it felt like, what was special, or not so nice.

**Knowledge of both generations**
It was viewed as very important for initiators, coordinators and facilitators of IG activities to have knowledge of both generations. Some interviewees specified that insight into development of both groups was necessary (i.e. developmental psychology, psychology of ageing). Others emphasised the importance of being aware of what is interesting and appealing to both children and seniors in terms of activities, for example: what kind of art and craft activity they like, songs they know. Coordinators and mediators need to combine expectations of the seniors on the one hand, and the needs and interests of children on the other hand and vice versa. Interestingly, with some notable exceptions, many of the organisers did not seem to consult directly with participants themselves, whether seniors or children, regarding their priorities, likes or dislikes, nor were they included in planning or evaluation processes.

**Role of a senior volunteer**

Eleven of the IG initiatives involved the participation of groups of senior volunteers. It was noted that coordinators had an important role in motivating volunteers. Part of this was helping them build on and further develop their hobbies, skills and interests in their work with children. A positive example of a senior volunteer in an IG activity, which included interaction with young children (and sometimes their parents and other family members), is also someone who is highly motivated and committed. Core skills include: communication with children, patience, adaptability and having a playful attitude. Other skills and attitudes mentioned included being respectful and non-judgmental particularly in the context of working with children and families from different cultural backgrounds. Being curious and open to learning is also valued. This could mean being open to learning more about interacting with groups of children, being interested in further developing your own skills and hobbies (local history, crafts, books, gardening) and/or being willing to share your passions with others. It was also suggested by a few interviewees that younger volunteers in their 20's and 30's could be more attractive to children.

A key role for mediators was to act as bridge or interpreter between generations in order that interaction runs smoothly. Interestingly, views differed amongst professional mediators regarding the extent to which professional knowledge was required about older persons (if you are trained to work with young children) or about young children (if your professional training focused on older people) in order to fulfill this mediating role. In this regard, it can be argued that knowledge about 'the other' can be obtained by collaborative work. In a few cases it was mentioned that if a person was either a parent or grandparent and therefore had experience with children, the notion of needing additional training in how to interact with children was perceived as strange or even insulting.

On the other hand peer-to-peer support within the group of senior volunteers, facilitated by a mentor (in one case an experienced volunteer) was an important support structure and means of capacity building of senior volunteers in initiatives in Ireland, Netherlands and Poland. Senior volunteers valued the opportunity to share their experiences as volunteers and learn from each other.

**Broader conditions**

Other broader conditions, in addition to the personal and pedagogical skills already referred to, and which are viewed as having an impact on the success and sustainability of IG practice in particular contexts were: having an original idea (PL); content support from expert institutions (IT); financial support and prioritisation of mayor and municipality; support and recognition from school, and embedding IG learning within school curriculum (IT, IE, SL, PT); recognising the importance of IG practice in offering a social outlet for older people (IE) and support and involvement of parents and other family members (PT and IT).

With respect to the final point it is important to note that a number of the initiatives, especially those in Southern Europe, are more accurately described as multi-generational activities where parents' involvement is actively encouraged, sometimes with the explicit aim of stimulating more contact between three or even four generations in the family context.

# 8  Conclusions and Recommendations

The overall conclusions of the Action Research in seven countries concern the following three issues:
- The need to recognise intergenerational (IG) interactions and relations as learning.
- The importance of committing to innovation in learning practice in Intergenerational (IG) learning.
- Recognising that intergenerational learning involves more than just two generations.

## 1 Intergenerational relations as learning

An important conclusion from this phase of the TOY project is that understandings of learning should be broadened to include contributions of both young children and older people. Through their interactions and relations with each other, young children and older people can be co-creators of knowledge and capable of leading and sustaining social relationships of learning.

Although 'relational' learning has a place in ECEC policy and practice, the focus is on interactions and relations between practitioners and children or between peers in the context of play. To date, learning between young children and older people in ECEC settings, in community settings or in primary schools, is not recognised as learning in education and welfare policies. This needs to be challenged.

The findings of the 21 case studies researched illustrate:
- The **positive role played by grandparents or grandparent figures (social grandparents) in young children's lives** in terms of learning and development. This was expressed in terms of **affective relationships**, bringing **structure**, and offering **time** and **calm attention** to young children.
- Both generations also gained from the possibilities of **having fun together** in shared activities and through this interaction learning about the **others' life worlds** and challenging **stereotypes** about **age, gender and culture.**
- Furthermore, **the major benefit to older people** in their involvement with young children in IG practice, whether as senior volunteer or senior beneficiary, was **feeling valued and useful** and having a **contribution to make to society**, with consequent **renewed energy and vitality.**

All these findings point to the important contribution **lifelong learning** and **lifewide learning** makes to the **health and wellbeing of both age groups.**

## 2 Commitment to innovation in learning practice

If IG learning is to find a place in local and national education and welfare policies, it is necessary to define the necessary skills and conditions for this to happen. The findings of this phase of the Action Research suggest the following:

- Firstly, leaders, coordinators, practitioners and senior volunteers need to be **committed to IG practice** and **be open to innovation in learning**. A flexible, playful and non-judgmental attitude is also helpful

- Secondly, as with any educational experience whether non-formal or formal, good **planning and preparation** is also important. The findings of the TOY action research indicated that much **more attention was given to planning logistical issues such as materials and schedules rather than to planning and reflecting on relational aspects of IG practice, which were 'taken for granted'.** We observed missed opportunities to talk with both age groups about what to expect from the other age-group or to reflect on the experience and learning. How this can be facilitated in a way which is meaningful and helpful for all age groups will be researched and piloted in the next phase of the TOY Project, development and piloting Capacity Building Modules and Pilot Actions.
- Thirdly, **mediators** (ECEC or social care practitioners, teachers, senior volunteers, parents) also need to be a **bridge and interpreters between generations**. Views differed regarding the need for prior context knowledge and professional practice knowledge about 'the other' age group in IG practice. An alternative approach being proposed as a result of this research, is that this **knowledge** can also be **gained by collaborative work between organisations and individuals**. This proposal will be tested in the piloting of the Capacity Building Modules, during the next phase of TOY.
- Fourthly, a clear gap and omission in most of the IG case studies was that **insufficient attention was paid to both evaluating IG initiatives against clear goals and consulting both young children and older people in the design and evaluation of IG practice**. This needs further attention and will also be included in the TOY Capacity Building Modules and Pilot Actions.
- Fifthly, with the exception of Poland, both older men and women participated in the IG initiatives we studied. In the remaining six countries approximately 80 per cent of the beneficiaries and senior volunteers were women. **Barriers for men's participation as senior volunteers** included the **perception of caring and educating of young children as the role of women** (PL) and reluctance of men to engage with young children for fear that their motivation might be misinterpreted (IE). Clearly young children benefit from the involvement of both men and women in their lives and this includes grandfathers and social 'grandfathers'.

## 3 Intergenerational learning involves more than just two generations

Finally, throughout this report and indeed in all TOY Project documentation we have used the term intergenerational (IG) to focus attention on interaction **between two generations or groups**: young children (0- 8 year-olds) and older people (55 to 74 year-olds; and 75 years and older). Given that many age groups, including parents and professionals in their 20s, 30s or 40s were actively involved in the learning practices we have been exploring in seven European countries, it is important to underline that many generations can be involved and benefit in learning together.

**4 Next steps**

The TOY Project is committed to further research and development work in relation to IG learning. During 2013 and 2014 six of the TOY Project partners will develop and pilot a capacity building module on IG learning involving young children and older people, in consultation with local stakeholders. In 2014 one or two IG pilot actions will be supported, documented and evaluated in each of these countries. Findings and experiences from all phases of the TOY Project will be presented at an international conference in Leiden, the Netherlands in October 2014. More information on all of these initiatives is available on the project website.

# References

The TOY Project Consortium (2013) *Together Old & Young: A Review of the Literature on Intergenerational Learning Involving Young Children and Older People*, Leiden: The TOY Project.

All 21 case studies including selected quotations from participants are available on the TOY website, www.toyproject.net