

## **CHILD'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE**

- A comparative study based on the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2003.

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## SUMMARY

The object of this study is to compare children's right and possibilities to participate in decision making in matters that affect them in Finland and Norway. I have also compared the official attitudes regarding children's capability or incapability to take part and be included in decision making in Finland and Norway. The study focuses on institutional level and as data I have used the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway, which were submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2003. The data are official, political documents that have been prepared by the countries' governments and according to strict guidelines provided by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. As a method of analysis I have used content analysis.

The results of my study suggest that according to the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway, the most visible difference in children's right and possibilities to participate in these two countries has to do with differences in attitudes. Norway's report claims that children's right to participate is already a reality in Norway and possibilities to participate exist in Norwegian society. In the Finnish report children's participation rights stay, for the most parts, at the level of discussion concerning its importance. In Norway, according to the periodic report, children are seen valuable to society already as children, therefore their participation in decision making is also seen as valuable. In Finland, according to the periodic report, the value in children's participation seems to be in developing better adults-to-be and preventing social exclusion in later life.

Within the concept of welfare state children's right to participate in different welfare institutions and systems raises an interesting question of the quality of services provided. Giving children a right to state their views in matters that affect them demands certain professionalism from welfare workers and authorities. A right to participate inevitably develops customers, who are more competent, whether they are children or adults. The more competent the customers are the more aware of their rights and the more capable to make demands they are. And this can cause a need to develop better services that take the views of the customer more into account. Therefore research on children's participation rights can in its part help develop new ways to make sure that children's views are better taken into account than they are nowadays.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background to the study

Some years ago I got a job as a research assistant in an international research-project called 'Inequal childhood in the Nordic Countries'. The empirical results from this project showed that there are clear-cut differences in the levels of children's well being in Finland, Norway and Sweden. In fact, Finnish children seem to be doing the worst, Norwegian children better, but still worse than Swedish children. From the system point of view, what these countries have in common, is that they all belong to the same welfare regime, the Nordic Welfare model. This is essentially the starting point of my interest towards the final subject of my research. I wanted to know what caused such a difference in the well being of children. So, I started from the biggest common nominator: the welfare model all three countries belong to. The Nordic Welfare model is obviously a huge concept and from the very beginning I realised that it was way too wide and it had to be narrowed down a little. While studying the welfare state I started to pay more attention to family policy and how it had changed, and decided to concentrate on that. But I still felt like I should narrow the field a little bit. So the next subject came in the form of child policy. It was interesting because I didn't really know what it meant, as opposed to family policy. Also the size of the concept seemed appropriate and possible for me to grasp. Then, very soon after I'd come to this conclusion I came across the Convention on the Rights of the Child and realised the meaning of it to national child policy and child legislation and really got into it. I became quite fascinated with the 3 P's -approach and as I got to know the periodic reports, which I ended up using as data in my research, I really felt like there was something interesting in combining them with the 3 P's -approach. The 3 P's approach means dividing the rights stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into three categories: a right to protection, to provision and to participation.

Through out the process I juggled with the number of countries I wanted to include in my research. At the beginning I thought I would concentrate only in Finland, but working in an international research-project just offered too good an opportunity to pass on including the other countries as well. I started with all 3 - Finland, Norway and Sweden. But soon noticed that comparing just Finland and Norway seemed most interesting. One of the reasons is that I was more connected with the Norwegian research-partners and felt closer to researching Norway than Sweden. Also, the fact that Norway is not an EU-country and in some ways just feels more different when compared with Finland than Sweden helped make my mind up. So in the end the final subject, children's right and

possibilities to participate in decision making in matters that affect them in Finland and Norway according to the third periodic reports submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2003, crystallised through every step described above.

## **1.2. Structure of the study**

The above-mentioned steps can be seen in the basic structure of my research. Essentially it evolves through four simple questions: 1.What? 2.How? 3.Through what? 4.What was found out? The first question refers to finding out what it is that I am interested in. What is my research question? This first chapter answers the question partially and the second chapter offers a simplified summary of my research question. The second question, how, refers to how, exactly, I aim to answer my research question. What is the data and how have I chosen to analyse it. After explaining what I am researching and how I aim to achieve it, my third question refers to my theoretical background. What is the context within which my object of interest exists in? What is the theory through which I examine the data? The idea of my theoretical background is to move from larger concepts towards a more condensed idea of what I am interested in. In practice this means, that the overarching concept is the welfare state and more specifically family policy and child policy. After defining these issues, I will then move on to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and keep on narrowing down the field until we end up with the concept of participation. I think it is important to start from such a general concept as the welfare state, because in order to understand children's participation rights, as I see them, one must understand the context within which they exist. The fourth question quite simply refers to the actual analysis and its results.

## **1.3. Aim of the study**

My focus of interest is in how children are seen in Finland and Norway, participation wise, and what kinds of possibilities they are given to participate. According to the third periodic reports. Let me now clarify this. First of all, why the periodic reports? Because the decision to use the reports as data was made such a long time ago, I have treated it as a given that it should be so. But I realise that in order to use them convincingly I should explain why I chose them. It all boils down to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. I have a rather black-and-white -point of view concerning the Convention, because I believe that in ratifying the Convention, Finland and Norway are committed to it. In fact to the extent that some of the Convention's articles may supersede the countries' own national legislation. So, according to the Convention, Finnish and Norwegian

children have a right to be protected, they have a right to a share of society's resources (a right to provision) and a right to participate in decision making in matters that affect them, according to their age and maturity. An actual right. And because I treat it as such a binding commitment, the content of the reports can be taken seriously. They are official documents that as such tell tales of official attitudes. They present the official viewpoint on how things were at the time of the reporting. Second of all, what is it that interests me in the reports? I write that it is how children are seen and what kinds of possibilities they are given, but it is more complex than that. What I searched from the reports evolved while reading them over and over, and in the end it was an intuition-type of selection. I became aware that the third periodic reports not only talk about the actual possibilities that children are given to participate in decision making, but also about the attitudes towards children's capability to take part and be included in decision making. This is what I mean by how they are seen. How children are perceived as, participation-wise. Capable or not capable - this really is an essential question and it will be asked many times through out this research. My aim is not to answer that question, just map out the discussion around the question. And see how it reflects on the question about children's participation rights.

Using the concept of welfare state, family policy and child policy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as my theoretical background and such political, official documents as the third periodic reports as my data, rules out the individual's point of view. This was a conscious decision, because I am not interested in the individual. My interest is in the system point of view. But not in the system itself. What I mean is that I do not intend to find out what differences there are in the welfare systems in Finland and Norway. What I am interested in are the differences that can be found in certain areas within similar welfare systems. In my case areas concerning participation rights. I also decided that the targets of comparison are the most recent periodic reports of Finland and Norway, the third ones from the year 2003. I did not consider it meaningful for me to compare the third periodic reports with the second periodic reports from the year 1998. I am not interested in the changes in children's participation rights in Finland or Norway, but rather the differences that can be found in participation rights *between* Finland and Norway according to the most recent reports. I am not focusing on the developments, but on the state of the art the reports describe in both countries at the time of the reporting.

The reports offer a wide range of information on how Finland and Norway have implemented the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, what has been successful, what less successful. So naturally I had to leave a lot outside my scope of research. For instance, the remaining 2Ps of the



3P's approach, the right to provision and to protection had to be left out. Also, I decided to focus on the majority of Finnish and Norwegian children, this meant leaving out issues concerning immigrant children, handicapped children and children from minority backgrounds (for example children with sami or romani backgrounds).

## **2. RESEARCH QUESTION**

The object of this study is to compare children's right and possibilities to participate in decision making in matters that affect them in Finland and Norway according to the third periodic reports submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child by Finland and Norway in 2003. I am also interested in comparing the official attitudes, according to the reports, regarding children's capability (or incapability) to take part and be included in decision making in Finland and Norway. The data, i.e. the periodic reports, are official, political documents that were prepared according to guidelines presented in Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The reports are made for the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the reports' contents are defined by the guidelines. As a method of analysis I used content analysis, in other words I looked for meanings in the reports' text. Or more specifically, what is the meaning of certain issues being present or absent in the text.

## **3. DATA**

As data I chose to use the national reports that countries, which have ratified the Convention, submit to the UN Committee on the Rights of the child periodically, more specifically the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway that were submitted in 2003. The Committee consists of ten experts of recognised competence in the field covered by this Convention. This committee oversees how the States Parties achieve in the realisation of the obligations in practice. (Articles 43.1 and 43.2) According to the Guidelines Regarding the Form and Content of Periodic Reports to be submitted by States Parties under Article 44, paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the focus of periodic reports must be on changes or new developments that have taken place since the previous report was submitted. The first report must be filed within two years of the ratification of the Convention by the State Party concerned and thereafter every five years. (Articles 44.1 (a) and (b)) I did consider including the previous periodic reports of 1998 in my research, but decided against it. My meaning is not to compare changes in participation rights *within* Finland or Norway, but rather the differences that can be found in participation rights *between* Finland and

Norway according to the most recent reports. I am not focusing on the developments, but on the situations the reports describe in both countries during the reporting period of 1998-2003.

### **3.1. Third periodic reports**

When discussing the data, it is important to also say a few words about what the data is like. As mentioned above, the periodic reports are written according to guidelines as presented in Article 44. The Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted the current general guidelines in 1996 and they consist of 166 paragraphs. The mere number of paragraphs explains in its part how very defined the contents of the periodic reports must be. In the matter of respecting the views of the child, i.e. participation rights as presented in Article 12, the general guidelines require that the reports should indicate how the right of the child to express views freely on all matters affecting him or her, and provision for those views to be given due weight have been incorporated in legislation. It also requires information to be provided on legislative and other measures taken to ensure the right of the child to express views in a manner consistent with his or her evolving capacities in family and school life, administration of juvenile justice, placement and life in institutional and other forms of care and asylum-seeking procedures. Opportunities provided for the child to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings affecting him or her, as well as the situations in which the child can intervene directly or through a representative or an appropriate body should be indicated. As well as information on any bodies or instances where the child has a right to participate in decision-making, such as schools or local councils. The periodic report should also indicate what measures have been taken to raise awareness of families and the public in general of the need to encourage children to exercise their right to express their views, and to train professionals working with children to encourage children to do so, and to give their views due weight. The number of child development courses provided for professionals working with children and also the number of courses about the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the curriculum of various schools and institutions, as defined by the Committee, must be indicated. And finally, the report should indicate how the views of the child obtained through public opinion, consultations and assessment of complaints are taken into consideration in the legal provisions, and in policy or judicial decisions. (General guidelines for periodic reports 1996, paragraphs 42-47.)

In light of what is said above, it is easier to understand what type of documents the periodic reports are. They are written according to rather specific guidelines, regardless of actual situation of children's rights in each country. The guidelines provide the topics and each State party must

indicate what has been done, what has not been done and what should be done, and how, regarding the topics. Naturally the situation concerning children's rights is different in every country, as is the case between Finland and Norway as well, and, taking paragraph 8 of the General guidelines for the periodic reports into account, all relevant information concerning children's participation rights is not included in the third periodic reports on account of it been reported already in earlier reports:

" In the light of Article 44, paragraph 3, of the Convention, when a State party has submitted a comprehensive initial report to the Committee or has previously provided detailed information to the Committee, it need not repeat such basic information in its subsequent reports. It should, however, clearly reference the information previously transmitted, and indicate the changes that have occurred during the reporting period." (1996)

Therefore, even though both countries have the same goal: full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they might be in different stages of that implementation. What I mean by this is, that the goal can be the same, but the starting point can be different. Also the ways through which the goal is to be achieved in Finland and in Norway can be different. Nevertheless, I feel it is justifiable to compare the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway in search of differences in participation rights. And this is due to the very fact that they only include changes and developments that have occurred during the reporting period, because they therefore underline the current situation in both countries and show what is seen as important, implementation-wise, at the moment of reporting in comparison to each other.

The Finnish periodic report of the year 2003 consists of 96 pages and it was prepared at the Legal Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in co-operation with the ministries and authorities that take responsibility for the various themes involved. A focal point in the reporting was that the civil society was included in many phases of the reporting process. The report has been distributed widely to numerous authorities and civil organisations in Finland. So, in essence, it is a document that was made for officials by other officials. But anyone interested in the Finnish third periodic report can find it, for example, from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' home page at <http://formin.finland.fi>.

According to Finland's third periodic report, making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child widely known in Finland has not been very successful. For instance, in 2002 a number of Finnish children gathered to a special session to discuss children's rights and their clear message was that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is very important, but unknown to them. Also, Finnish non-governmental organisations that work with children's rights have criticised the

inadequate publicity the Convention has received. Most of the work to make the Convention more widely known has been left on the shoulders of different organisations. In response to this, the National Committee on the rights of the Child, operating under the administration of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was founded in 2003 and it will for its part respond to this challenge. (Finland's third periodic report 2003, 13-14.)

The Norwegian periodic report consists of 126 pages and the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared it. Also a number of other ministries participated in the process. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs co-operated with the Onbudsperson for Children and non-governmental organisations and, in contrast to the Finnish report, efforts were made to also include children in the reporting process. (Norway's third periodic report 2003, 20-21.) The efforts were made in response to the Committee's recommendation to focus more strongly on providing education on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and children's rights for children. What the efforts in reality have been, become more clear in the analysis.

Including children to the reporting process has in general made Norway's third periodic report more diverse, compared to its Finnish counter part. Diverse, because it presents children's point of view on various matters as well as the official point of view. And these two points of views do not always see eye to eye. And, when it comes to participation rights for children, inclusion of children in the reporting process explains on a rather elementary level why children should be included in matters that affect them. Officials do not always know how the best interest of children can be best secured.

Making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child more widely known has been challenging also in Norway. Children in Norway associate children's rights with children in situations of war, distress, famine, etc. They do not associate children's rights with situations that Norwegian children are more likely to experience, such as poor learning environment, bullying and various types of pressure. As a solution, the report suggests that schools should be the main arena for long-term education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A project, called Life Before 18, began in 2002 and one of its goals is to develop educational programmes on the Convention for primary and lower secondary schools and colleges. I will get into the Life Before 18 -project in more detail in my analysis.

According to Flekkøy the periodic reports are the responsibility of the government of country, so they present the views of the government at the time of reporting and are therefore always based on party political values and views (2001, 416). Besides being official documents on how Finland and Norway take children into account when making political decisions, the contents of the periodic reports are very similar, due to the general guidelines, and they therefore offer useful information for comparative research. To begin with it was not easy to decide on what to emphasise, as the reports discuss a wide range of issues concerning children's life situations and rights. For a long while I was just reading them through, underlining everything that seemed important. But after a while it became clear to me that the most interesting comparison between Finland and Norway in my opinion was to consider the level of participation that is available to children in these countries that in many ways seem very similar. Children's basic rights are in general realised rather sufficiently in the Nordic countries. It is indeed, in my opinion, safe to say that children's rights and welfare are at a high level in both Finland and Norway compared to most other countries in the world, so it made the most sense to me to concentrate on participation rights. Also, according to Cantwell, of the three essential concepts of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - provision, protection and participation - in practice is the participatory one (1993, 123). So, when I was reading the third periodic reports I focused my attention on the ways in which the reports give children opportunities to be a part of decision making in matters that affect their lives in Finland and Norway.

Participation rights can on one hand be seen in the global scale as 'fine tuning' of children's rights. In light of some problems that children, for example, in the third world suffer from, paying attention to insufficiencies in participation rights might seem futile. But on the other hand full realisation of participation rights can be seen as the next step in understanding childhood as an independent stage in an individual's life that is just as important and worth while as being an adult, not just a stepping stone into adulthood. Also it is good to keep in mind that as children's welfare is being promoted, for instance, in the field of child protection, listening to the child and taking into account what the child wishes and feels is an important part. In making it possible for children to participate, it is easier to ensure that children stay at the centre of the process. (Lansdown 1997, 37-38.) And thus working in the actual best interest of the child is better secured.

As I was reading the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway, I focused my interest in how the reports considered children in terms of participation rights. This means leaving out a lot of information the reports offer such as rights concerning provision or protection. But it was necessary

to narrow the field, as it would have been too much if I had attempted to cover all that the reports include. Also I decided to focus on the situation of the general population of children in Finland and Norway. In practice this means that I left out topics concerning immigrant children, handicapped children and children from minority backgrounds (for example children with sami or romani backgrounds).

### **3.2. Analysing the data**

As a method of analysing I used content analysis. According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi, content analysis is a basic method of analysing, which can be used in all traditions of qualitative research (2002, 93). Content analysis is a method to get a condensed and generalised description of the phenomenon that I am researching. But, as Grönfors has added, content analysis can only be used to organise the data for conclusions (1982, ref. Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003, 105). This means there is a risk that the result of the research is a well described analysis that lacks proper conclusions and only presents a well-organised data as a result (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003, 105). Content analysis is about looking for meanings in the text. It differs from another type of text analysis, e.g., discourse analysis in that in discourse analysis one analyses how meanings are produced in the text. (Ibid. 106.) When Tuomi & Sarajärvi write about content analysis they mean efforts to describe the content of documents in words (2003, 107).

According to Krippendorff, the purpose of content analysis is to: "provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of "facts", and a practical guide to action" (1985, 21). He goes on to say that intuitively, content analysis could be characterised as a method of inquiry into symbolic meaning of messages. But he finds two misleading connotations in this characterisation: firstly, it should be kept in mind that messages do not have a single meaning that needs to be unwrapped. There are always numerous perspectives, from which data can be looked at. Even a single receiver can find a multitude of contents from one message and thus claiming to have analysed *the* content of a message or data is not possible. Secondly, Krippendorff does not think that meanings need to be shared. It is a fact that messages can convey different things to different people and therefore meanings are always relative to a communicator. (Ibid. 22.)

When I think of my own position as a researcher here I find that my aim is to provide a representation of "facts". Krippendorff's use of quotation marks with the word "facts" suites the data well, in regards to how I read it. I am well aware, as I wrote earlier, that the reports are based on

party political values and views, as reporting is the responsibility of the government of the country at the time of the reporting. Therefore I do not see it as absolute truth or as a direct report on how things really are in practice, but rather as "facts". And because I chose to use the periodic reports as my source of information I need to trust them. What I mean by that is, that I am going to be loyal to the data and analyse it as it is. I am going to take it as a given, that the reports tell me how things are and restrict my analysis to only what I can read from the reports. Speculations about the accuracy of the reports' contents are not a part of my research.

In accordance to Krippendorff's writing, the most distinctive feature of messages is that they inform someone vicariously, providing the receiver with knowledge, for example, about ideas in other people's minds. In my case ideas in the minds of people who wrote the periodic reports. Krippendorff also notes that it is always a specific someone who makes conclusions from data to their context. Context meaning the empirical environment of that specific someone. (1985, 22-23.) My understanding of empirical environment is that in this case it means my theoretical background for this particular study as presented in the next chapters, as well as all the experience and information I have gathered during my years studying social policy. This forms the context within which I analyse the data.

### **3.3. Research method in practice**

In documentary analysis there must be some criteria for inclusion and exclusion of documentary data, even if these are broadly defined and refer mainly to the boundaries rather than the substance of the subject being researched. These criteria should reflect to the issues on which the researcher is seeking evidence. (Dey 1993, 99.) And based on these criteria, categories are build up. Prior reading can inspire the criteria and it is possible to use an already existing framework to guide data analysis (Tesch 1990, Miles & Huberman 1994, Sandelowski 1995; ref. Kyngäs & Vanhanen 1999, 7). This means that the outline of the analysis is based on earlier information, in other words the content analysis is deductive. The outline can be structured, in which case only such issues or themes that fit the outline will be picked out from the data. In my case, the general guidelines provide such a structure for the data, so using that same structure for my analysis made sense. (Ibid. 7-9.) Dey writes of a 'holistic approach', which attempts to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as whole. The first step, in my case, is a general comprehension and categorisation of the data according to a wider concept, the concept of participation. The next step is to make a

more detailed categorisation, which in my case means categorising according to the framework provided by the general guidelines. (1993, 104.)

But what does this all mean in practice? What did I do with the data, the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway? Well, as I mentioned earlier, I started reading the reports and underlining just about everything. My initial idea was to choose certain articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that, in my opinion, represented the different Ps (provision, protection and participation) the best. After choosing the articles I searched for them in the periodic reports and wanted to find out how well the 3 Ps are put into practice in both Finland and Norway, according to the reports. But as I did this, I soon realised that, once again, the subject of my research was getting too extensive. One might even say it got out of hands. I became rather discouraged and understood I needed to narrow the field, again. As this was going on, I did notice that I was most interested in just one of the Ps, participation. And when I finally decided to concentrate on participation, this new focus made it easier to decide what needed to be included in my theoretical background and what had become completely irrelevant.

Now that I knew what I was looking for in the reports, I went through them once more. This time I underlined based on two questions relating to participation:

1. How is a child defined in Finland and Norway, based on the periodic reports, and
2. How is a child's participatory position defined and actualised, and what kinds of possibilities are children given to participate in decision making that concerns them in Finland and Norway, based on the periodic reports?

Question number one included issues such as, who is a child and how does the society see children, for instance, how capable children are perceived as, in terms of are they capable to participate in decision making or not. It does not have so much to do with matters such as age and other traditional definers of childhood, but rather the idea of a child. This will become clearer as I start explaining my findings. Question number two included issues such as, what kinds of possibilities children have to participate in decision-making in matters that affect them and how important is it to Finland or Norway that children are given opportunities to participate.

After underlining everything that seemed relevant in regards to these questions, I had lists that were made of both countries' periodic reports and that consisted only of matters that were relevant to my research. At his point I had to trust that I had included every single issue that was significant to my analysis on these lists and that I could safely disregard the rest of the reports' contents.



The aim of my study is not only to find out the answers to the two questions I described above. In fact the final aim is to compare Finland and Norway in regards to them: How the way children are defined is different in Norway compared to Finland? How the way children's participatory position is defined and actualised is different in Norway compared to Finland? To answer these questions I needed to organise my lists to facilitate this. So, on the left side of the paper I wrote down everything that concerns children's definition in Finland's report. And on the right side I wrote the corresponding points from the Norwegian report. Then I repeated this with the question about children's participatory definition. At this point I had categorised the data according to the concept of participation, as I understand it in this study. The next step was to categorise according to more detailed criteria and the General guidelines provided these categories. And the categories are:

1. reporting process
2. differences in the levels of the position of children's participation rights
3. reasoning behind giving children a right to participate
4. children's participation on an institutional level
  - 4.1.municipal level
  - 4.2.educational level
  - 4.3.central government level
5. amendments to legislation
  - 5.1.local planning
  - 5.2.social welfare
6. children as actors

The meaning of this chapter was to provide an answer to the question "How?" More precisely, how I am going to answer my research question. The next chapters, chapters 4, 5 and 6 explain my empirical environment, the context through which I examine the periodic reports.

#### **4. CHILDREN IN WELFARE STATE – THE SYSTEM POINT OF VIEW**

From a social political point of view, how children's welfare in a country is organised and secured is defined within family policy and child policy. Family and child policies, in turn, are defined by how the country's social welfare is organised in general. By this I mean that what is the welfare state model the country belongs to. Finland and Norway are both Nordic Welfare states and therefore have similarities in terms of what the countries' social policies are like. One of the reasons why I

think it is important to go over issues regarding welfare state here is that children's right to participate has become more important in the welfare state's different institutions (for example in schools and social welfare system). This will become more apparent later in my research. Also, many of the situations where children should be included in decision-making happen within the concept of welfare state. So, in the following I will present some points that have to do with family policy, child policy and the Nordic Welfare state in general, and also what the aforementioned policies mean in Finland and Norway.

#### **4.1 Family policy**

Family policy is a much more vaguely defined area, for example, compared to health care or social services. This arises partly from the fact that in many countries the family is seen as a private institution that the society shouldn't intervene in unless in a case of a crisis. For this reason, most countries have no specific family policy laws or administration. (Forssén 1997, 59.) Kamerman et. al. have specified that family policy is defined as being everything that the government does to or for families (ref. Forssén 1998, 97). According to current research family policy is understood as the entirety of benefit packages for families. This means that it includes the general social security benefits i.e. health insurance and unemployment compensation. In addition to the benefits targeted specifically at families with children i.e. child allowances and tax deductions and services such as day care. (Forssén 1998, 97.)

The core question in establishing family policy in industrialised western countries used to be who should bear the economic responsibility for children. Establishing policies for families has been carried out in stages. Up until half way through last century, the need to raise birth rate justified the first stage of family policy. As the welfare state developed, the goal moved slowly from raising birth rate to economic assistance for families, and finally to supporting the general welfare of children and families. (Forssén 1997, 59.) Many industrialised countries started to develop family policies after World War II and by now nearly all industrialised countries have some kind of financial support system for families. Tax deductions and direct income transfers are the two main systems. (Forssén 1997, 60.) According to Ringen (1988), it was long thought that as a result of economic growth and income redistribution schemes poverty would vanish from society altogether, but poverty is still one of the biggest problems in modern day welfare states (ref. Forssén 1998, 95). Different welfare models have approached the issue of poverty in different ways, and in the Nordic countries people are being protected from poverty with institutional social policy (Forssén 1997,

58). Differences in the level of child poverty in different countries are growing, but the Nordic countries have been able to prevent child poverty almost entirely in all types of families. Due to the redistribution system and comprehensive day care system that enables women to work, the risk of child poverty is minimal. (Forssén 1997, 83.)

The goal and function of the Nordic welfare model is social integration. Maintaining high-quality public services that are reasonably prized and available to all that need them does this. Basic security is at a reasonable level, the state has a central role as a provider and benefits are universal. Services are for all citizens, regardless of income. (Forssén 1998, 102.) The principle of the Nordic, i.e. the social democratic model is to pre-emptively divide costs that are consequent to having a family before the family's capacity to help has exhausted. The ideal is not to maximise people's dependency on their family but to maximise individuals' independence. A welfare state that allocates income redistribution directly to children and also takes responsibility for the children and the elderly is the result of this model. The model serves the needs of families and makes it possible for parents to choose between work and home. (Esping-Andersen 1990, 27.) The Nordic model emphasises the individual's role in society over the role of the family and the public sector's job is to guarantee an individual's well being (Tyrkkö 1997, 33).

Today, especially in the Nordic countries, it can be said that the aim of the welfare state is to divide costs of children equally amongst the members of society and enhance equality between genders. Family policy has indeed been an essential tool in amending the possibilities for women to participate in work life in the Nordic countries. (Forssén 1998, 97-98.) And as far as economic welfare is concerned, the Nordic model is friendly to both women and children (Forssén 1997, 83). Esping-Andersen (1996a; ref. Kautto 1999, 58) has argued that because the Nordic welfare regime allows for combining employment and family life as opposed to other countries' regimes, the Nordic countries have the highest birth rates in Europe. There has indeed been much debate if high fertility rates are linked with women's participation in the labour market and family policies, but the impact of social policies on fertility remain to be proven by research. The Nordic welfare states have been praised for their efforts in guaranteeing equal opportunities not only in working life but also in the family and society in general. On the other hand they have been criticised for being family hostile societies by debilitating traditional family values with their liberal family and reproduction policies and their emphasis on gender equality. (Kautto 1999, 58.)

## 4.2. Child policy

During a hundred years of development, family and childhood as well as raising of children has become institutionalised and more of a matter for society. In other words, the environment of modern children has broadened significantly outside of the family. Nearly all children spend a great deal of their day in either day care or at school. (The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities 2000, 26.) In studying modern day childhood one must take into account, in addition to the primary environment of children's own families', the other scopes of children's social realities (Rousu & Strandström 1998, 12). The basis of child policy and also of child protection is a concept of children as independent subjects (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1995, 4). As a matter of fact, in child policy the question is very much about society's estimation of children, society's values and attitudes. Because it is about examining societal, cross administrative actions from the child's point of view (The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities 2000, 7.)

Child policy is more than just the sum of its parts: family policy, educational policy, youth policy and child welfare policy. Among other things, the general development of the labour market, community planning and housing policies affect the lives of children, the young and families. The subject matter of child policy is very broad. It consists of all decisions and definitions of policies as well as practical actions that influence the social circumstance, rights and welfare of the children and the adolescents of both today and of the future. (The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities 2000, 9; Långvik 1998, 7.) According to the strategy on child policy by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the first priority should be that children have a safe environment and guaranteed equal possibilities to care and education. Regardless of their domestic or social circumstances. Protecting children's lives, and people's lives in general, from abuse or neglect demands joint responsibility and durable basic values in policies. It goes without saying that a healthy and happy childhood is critical to society's future as it produces healthy and happy adults. (2000; 5, 7.) As Suominen puts it in his text: "Taking care of children's well being shows the level of society's humanity." (1998, 59).

Irmeli Järventie writes in her research 'Syrjäytyvätkö lapset?' that children aren't just a group that receives benefits from society. The meaning of children in the employment market must be recognised as something else than just future consumers and citizens. She reminds us that many of our society's institutions and organisations that are linked to them exist because children exist. In the industry and service sector and the public and private sector, the existence of children employs

many workers. And as consumers, children are a considerable crowd. Children are the future insurance of all nations and therefore their wellbeing doesn't only concern them but every one. (1999, 6.) The most important investment society can do is to create for children a balanced environment to grow up in and develop (The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities 2000, 5). All societal events and phenomena have historical, economical and cultural reasons and effects reaching far into the future, so helping children is therefore an essential priority for the well being of society both in the long term and in the short-term (Suominen 1998, 59).

**Child policy in Finland and Norway.** In Finland the supervision or organising of social policy concerning children has not been appointed to any one ministry in particular. But the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is in key position. (Ruxton 1996, 43.) Norway, on the other hand, has a specific ministry that holds the main responsibility for the wellbeing of children, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. The work of the Ministry includes, for example, efforts to ensure a secure environment for children and young people to grow up in and the opportunity to take part in decision-making in society. (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 2004.) On one hand it could be argued that not having a specific ministry to deal with issues concerning children might show a lack of interest in the government to make sure that the best interest of the children always comes first in official decisions, laws or socio-political solutions when they affect them. On the other hand, concentrating all issues concerning children within one ministry is not an entirely good idea, as it might lessen the need to take children into account when making decisions within other parts of the government.

Flekkøy has described the Norwegian welfare system for children and parents as a safety net with holes. The principles of the welfare system are simply that necessary services should be available universally, the greatest help should be provided to those who need it most and the state should act with preventative measures to resolve problems created by the social changes. (2001, 405.) The Nordic welfare model has been described as a "cradle to grave" system, and, according to Flekkøy, in Norway there were significant gaps at the "cradle" end of this system. For example the lack of a maternal and child health division and other standard offices focused on children's interests and a lack of a comprehensive family social support system, with poor standing of Norwegian children on many variables relative to other Scandinavian countries. He goes on to suggest that one reason for the establishment of an Ombudsman for children in Norway rather than one of the other Nordic countries, may be that the social welfare system in Norway did not have the emphasis on children seen in other Scandinavian countries. (Ibid. 406.)

Child policy of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities is based, among other things, on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The association feels that the basis of good childhood and child policy is a fair welfare state where social and educational equality for children from all parts of Finland is realised. (The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities 2000, 8.) But carrying out regional equality has not been fully implemented according to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, because the committee has recommended that:

“Finland undertake an evaluation of the implementation of all aspects of the Convention by the municipal authorities and that every effort be made to ensure an effective implementation of the Convention by the local authorities. The Committee has also reiterated its recommendation to establish an integrated monitoring system or mechanism to ensure that children in all municipalities benefit to the same extent from basic social services.” (Recommendation no. 14; ref. Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2003, 7.)

The Committee has also urged Finland to consider ways through which all children can be guaranteed equal access to the same standard of services irrespective of where they live. Finnish municipalities have a high degree of autonomy to decide about the administration of their services and the ways in which the functions are organised. It hasn't been considered necessary to establish a specific integrated monitoring system or mechanism to ensure that municipalities take care of their basic functions. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003, 7-8.)

In Norway the tradition of individualism and local control negates the strong state social welfare tradition to some extent. Norway is a sparsely populated country and has a high number of small semi-independent municipalities and this combination causes or is reflected in the tradition of local control. (Flekkøy 2001, 406.) The Committee on the Rights of the Child made the following observation:

“The Committee notes that the significant decentralisation of services and administration from state to municipal authorities, partly as a result of variations in municipal finances, may lead to differences in priorities and different services for children according to the area of the country in which they reside.” (Observation 14/15 and 16/17; ref. Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003, 9.)

Approximately 70 per cent of the revenue received by the municipalities come through the Income System. It is intended to enable municipalities to provide their inhabitants with equal services. Municipalities must, through local self-government, prioritise services themselves to ensure that the

distribution of services is adapted to local needs. (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003, 9.)

### **4.3. Nordic welfare model**

In the core of welfare state are basic services. And the way basic services are organised in any given country are partially defined within the structure of the country's welfare model. The concept of basic services is hard to define, as it has different meanings. Usually, according to the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, basic services mean the kind of services that should primarily and always be available to citizens. (1994; ref. Niemelä 1994, 13.) Behind the concept of basic services are, first of all, human needs, more specifically basic needs. These needs can be defined in different ways, but what the different definitions have in common is the point of view that a need motivates people to pursue matters central to living. Second of all, cultural values, more specifically human value. Humanism is one of the central basic philosophies in the western countries and it emphasises people's inherent, equal value. And from this value, the values of freedom and equality, central values of western societies, are derived. The basic needs and the basic cultural values actualise in society as certain basic rights. And what is essential to these basic rights is, that all citizens have certain subjective rights and all citizens have a basic right to certain benefits. Because the cultural values change as society evolves, the understanding and defining of basic rights change all the time. Therefore the understanding and defining of basic services change. (Niemelä 1994, 16-18.) And then the understanding and defining of welfare models, or more specifically welfare services or systems within a specific model change as well. Children's welfare is a recognised principle and value in today's western societies, but children's participation in decision making in matters that affect children is a fairly new addition to it. So, according to the "formula" presented above, if children's right to participate evolves into a basic cultural value, it will, in turn, develop basic services to become more child-inclusive, participation wise.

So what is the Nordic welfare model like, within which children's right to participate should evolve? Throughout the past few chapters the concept 'Nordic Welfare model' has come up quite a few times and Finland and Norway are indeed both categorised as Nordic Welfare countries. So the aim of the following chapter is to go through some basic elements of the model. Keeping in mind that the following is a theoretical description of a model, which in its purest form does not exist anywhere. But in order to categorise welfare states it is essential to generalise individual policies to make sense of the whole. It is also good to keep in mind that my interest is in children's

participation rights in Finland and Norway, two countries that are categorised as Nordic Welfare countries. And while children's welfare, of which participation rights are a part of, exists within the concept of welfare state, I do not consider it meaningful for me to go very deep into the issue of welfare state. Therefore the following presentation of the Nordic Welfare model is only superficial.

Esping-Andersen, for instance, divides welfare states into three categories: liberal, conservative and social democratic welfare state (1990). In liberal welfare states means tested assistance, modest universal transfers, or modest social-insurance plans predominate. In conservative welfare states preservation of status differentials predominates: rights are attached to class and status. The church has shaped the corporatist regimes and therefore they are strongly committed to preserving the traditional family. (Ibid. 26-27.) The social democratic welfare state pursues a welfare state that promotes an equality of the highest standards; not an equality of minimal needs as pursued elsewhere. According to Esping-Andersen, the most salient characteristic of the social democratic regime is its fusion of welfare and work: "It is at once genuinely committed to a full-employment guarantee, and entirely dependent on its attainment." (Ibid. 27-28.)

Based on Petersson's opinion, the Nordic welfare model has two trademarks. Firstly it represents a unique approach to political and social problems. Secondly it endorses a unique way of doing social policy. He says that the Nordic social policy is based on comprehensiveness, which partly separates it from other countries. In Nordic countries politics have a broad effect and they cover most of public life by their involvement in many areas. The aim of welfare policy is integrating the whole population into society and balance economic inequalities. (Ref. Nordlund 2002, 6-7.) For historical reasons, the state's strong role as a provider for welfare is more legitimate than in other European countries (ibid. 7).

Factors that have to do with both society's structure as well as political strategies can be found behind the expansion of service systems. Changes in society's structure have caused a need to create health care and places for care of children and the elderly, outside home and family. These societal structural changes are partly due to women's increasing involvement in the labour market and to the demographic shift, especially the ageing of the population. (Kosonen 1998, 143.) The integration of women in to the labour market has been the basis of the Nordic ideal of social equality. This integration has been achieved by turning unpaid work into paid work and private care into public one. And indeed, women have benefited from the development of the 'woman-friendly welfare state' as employees, as beneficiaries and as clients. (Ibid. 170.) Institutional social policy,



which aims to prevent poverty by means of extensive and universal benefits, is carried out in Nordic countries. For example, a universal redistribution of income, social and health services and free of charge education system guarantees an equal possibility to welfare to all population groups. (Forssén 1997, 58.)

As a simplified summary, one can talk about the Nordic welfare states as collective societal institutions. Social benefits, social services, redistribution of income, high employment rate and economic development were connected tightly together in the Nordic model during the last few decades, and different areas required each other in many ways. And up until half way through 1980's, the welfare state's institutions in each country functioned well and made results for the most parts. (Kosonen 1998, 175.) But the tight connection between different parts has also caused problems: the welfare state is blamed for mass unemployment of the recession years and slow economic growth in Nordic countries. Social costs, taxation, equality, the extent of social security and rigidity are seen as problems. (Ibid. 266.)

Ever since the 1960's Nordic countries have had a reputation as exemplary welfare states. Nordic welfare states were able to remain stable even during the difficult years of 1970's and 1980's. But in the 1990's, the stability was considerably affected by economic recession. The future of welfare state became uncertain. (Kosonen 1993, 5.) Nevertheless, taking the economic hardship into account, the welfare state has operated fairly well in the 1990's. Even if social security and social spending has been generally cut down, it can be said that even after the downsizing, welfare states have been able to continue the earlier traditions and functions of the Nordic model. Welfare policy was able to soften the income problems caused by recession considerably. (Kosonen 1998, 379-380.)

When welfare state models are discussed, the Nordic countries are usually bunched together. They can be called the social democratic model (Esping-Andersen 1990) or the Nordic model (Kosonen 1998). However, there are important distinctions in, for instance, how services are organised within the Nordic countries. These distinctions are caused by demographic, economic and cultural differences. (Cohen & Hagen (eds.) 1997, ix.) As an example of demographic differences between Finland and Norway it is notable that the demographic situation is expected to change more dramatically in Finland due to the post-war baby boom, which is visible in the present age structure as a peak in the number of people aged around 50. In Norway the ageing population is less

pronounced than in Finland. (Kautto 1999, 56.) And as an example of economic differences, it is to be noted that Norway did not suffer from an economic recession in the 1990's like Finland did.

## **5. THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

This following chapter serves, on the one hand, as the background information for my data. On the other hand, it continues to narrow down the field of interest towards the actual research question concerning children's participation rights. In other words it presents a more condensed explanation of my context. While the Nordic Welfare Model does not mean exactly the same thing in Finland and Norway, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child does. Ratifying the Convention means exactly the same thing in both countries and therefore says something about how things *should* be in terms of children's rights. As stated in the introduction of Finland's third periodic report, the Convention on the Rights of the Child constitutes an international standard applicable to the rights of the child, and its provisions are legally binding on the States Parties. The report goes on to say that Finland's national legislation concerning children is consistent with the principles set out in the Convention. (2003, 4.) In Norway's third periodic report it is stated that Norwegian legislation for the most parts meets the requirements of the Convention and in some cases actually gives children stronger rights (2003, 8.)

This part consists of 4 chapters and it begins with a brief presentation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in general. In the following 3 chapters I will then explain more thoroughly the three essential concepts of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 3 P's. Even though this research will ultimately concentrate only in participation rights, I still feel it is important to go over all 3 P's, provision, protection and participation, in some detail, to make the distinction between them clear.

### **5.1. What is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?**

According to the principles of the UN's Declaration on Human Rights the acknowledgement of the inherent value of all members of humankind and their equal and inalienable rights is the basis of freedom, justice and peace in the world (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, introduction). The first international instrument devoted primarily to children's rights was the Declaration of Geneva, adopted by the League of Nations in 1924. In 1952 the United Nations adopted the

Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which was more comprehensive and directed than its predecessor was. This Declaration is conceptually the parent document for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989. (Bennet 1987, 16-17.) In the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child it was understood that a child isn't only an object that needs protection but also a subject of certain rights (Agathonos-Georgopoulou 1993, 69). In only a few years the Convention was ratified by almost 190 countries and in the history of the UN no other Convention has been adopted this widely (Sgritta 1997, 376). The work to accomplish the Convention was started in 1979. It took 10 years to finish. The Convention consists of 54 articles that have been divided in three parts; the first part concerns the rights of children (articles 1-41). The second the assembly and working methods of the committee on the rights of the child (articles 42-45) and the third concerns the ways that countries can join the convention (articles 46-54). (Bartley 1998, 17-18.)

An important aspect of the Convention's philosophy is that all children are equal with not only each other but also with adults; children have the same inherent value as adults (Hammarberg 1994, ix). In light of this it is justifiable to ask why children needed their own Convention in the first place? If the first declaration on human rights in 1948 applied to all humans, didn't it also apply to children? (Lee 2001, 5.) According to Lansdown, the need for a separate language (human rights - children's rights) comes from past failure to include children explicitly within the scope of human rights (1997, 25). The Convention nevertheless includes many articles that are uniquely involved with children's lives. For example, the right to play in article 31.1 which emphasises the perspective that childhood in itself is a valuable time – not only a training period for adulthood. (Hammarberg 1994, ix.) A central issue in the Convention is that the best interest of the children must always come first in official decisions, laws or socio-political solutions when they affect them (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1995, 25). According to Järventie the aim in pursuing out children's rights is to create for the next generation conditions in which the children can mature into socially competent citizens (1999, 57). In fact States Parties must undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention (article 4). Finland ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, Norway a year earlier in 1990.

In addition to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter also ensures the rights of European children. It took the European Council a long time to prepare a separate European strategy for children that were more applicable to the regional circumstances. European countries could sing up to this from 1996.

(Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1995, 26.) In a report on a European strategy, published by the European council in 1995, it is mentioned that the rights of children have been recognised nearly everywhere in the world, at least in theory. But, even though Europe is a rich and developed continent, the situation here leaves much to be desired. The rights of children are far from being a reality. Children are often the first victims of war, recession, poverty and especially financial cuts. (Council of Europe 1995, 2.) The report emphasises that realising the rights of children according to the UN Convention, taking children's position into account and defending them, as today's and tomorrow's citizens must become priorities in European politics. The council is convinced that respecting children's rights and better equality between children and adults will help preserve the pact between generations and contribute towards democracy. (Council of Europe 1995, 1-2.)

In the Finnish Council of state's report to the parliament (1995) the goals of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are condensed into the following three essential concepts (the 3 P's): it obligates the States Parties to secure children

1. A right to a share of the society's resources (provision)
2. A right to be protected and cared for by the society (protection)
3. A right to participate in all decision making that affects them (participation)

(Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1995, 4.)

Giovanni B. Sgritta sums up in 'Provision: Limits and Possibilities' that these rights can belong to the concept of 'citizenship'. Citizenship as a concept includes certain rights and responsibilities that entail to a full membership in society. (1993, 36.) According to T.H. Marshall citizenship is based on three kinds of rights: civil rights, political rights and social rights. Civil rights consist of rights that are involved with individual freedom, while political rights mainly consist of the right to participate in decision-making as opposed to social rights that consist of the right to a share of society's resources and social heritage. (Marshall 1950, 10-11; ref. Walby 1994, 380.)

## **5.2. Provision**

A share of society's resources must be guaranteed for children in a way that in the distribution of resources, the rights of children are secured as fully as possible (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1995, 26). "States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (Article 27.1). States Parties must to the maximum extent of their available resources, undertake all appropriate measures to ensure the realisation of children's economic, social and cultural rights (article 4).

To carry out children's cultural rights, i.e. a right to education is brought up in article 28, where it is mentioned that primary education must be compulsory and available free for all. It is although not defined what should be the age to start school or how long the education should last. (Bartley 1998, 157.) Possibilities to develop must be guaranteed, in addition to, the right to the best possible medical health and care (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1995). According to the Convention, the parents or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure the conditions of living necessary for the child's good enough development. But the States Parties must in accordance with national conditions and within their means take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement the aforementioned right. (Articles 27.2 and 27.3.)

Nowadays when the right to a share of society's resources is discussed, one should take into account society's demographic changes (Sgritta 1993, 41). Leena Kartovaara predicts that the number and percentage of children in society will decrease in the future. Although the number of children today is almost as high as it was in the beginning of the 1940's the expected lifespan is so much higher that there just are more of the elderly in relation to children and the proportion of children will stay at 22 percent. (Statistics Finland 2000, 12.) When the relative proportion of children decreases, the age structure of the population gets older. This has serious implications in regards to labour policy and society's 'care-relationship'. The ageing demographics have also been evaluated to deteriorate the political importance of children and families with children. Bardy wrote in her article that the founding principle of the welfare society has been a "pact between generations" that meant a "co-operational relationship" between generations. This division of resources has meant, among other things, that childhood or old age isn't left entirely on the shoulders of families. The society will not continue without reproduction and an essential part of reproduction is how children, and those who take care of them, are given enough mental and material support. (2001, 21-22.) Although, according to Thomson (1991), the focus point of the pact between generations has moved from the young to the elderly. He feels that the ageing population has moulded it to fit their own interests since the 1970's; the coming generations will never be able to enjoy the same benefits as the older ones still do. At the moment pension spending represents the largest social expenditure in all the industrialised countries. (Ref. Sgritta 1993, 44-45.) Still, keeping society's functionality and also the distorted 'care-relationship' in mind, especially good care should be taken of the decreasing child generations (Bardy 2001, 21).

It has been said that childhood means a passive period when children themselves have no other rights than the ones that come with being in a family. That childhood only has long-term meaning, i.e., when a child grows up to be an adult he or she is finally entitled to benefits and rights that have thus far been denied to him or her. Only when these deeply rooted conceptions are overcome, can children's share of society's resources truly be realised. (Sgritta 1993, 46.)

### **5.3. Protection**

Children's right to protection functions on three levels. Primary responsibility for the child's welfare lies with the parent. Secondly, there's the state's indirect responsibility. Indirect responsibility means here that the state must respect parents' primary responsibility and assist them in their duties. The third and final responsibility is the state's direct responsibility for protecting and caring for the child if parents fail in their duties. (Agathonos-Georgopoulou 1993, 71.) These three levels are also taken into account in the Convention:

“States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.” (Articles 3.2 and 20.1.)

Regardless of the categorisation the final goal must be the well being of children (Agathonos-Georgopoulou 1993, 72).

In signing the Convention the States Parties commit to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation while in the care of parents, legal guardians or any other person who has the care of the child. If the child has been neglected or abused the States Parties must take all appropriate measures to promote recovery. (Articles 19.1 and 39.) In other words, children have a right to protection and care in a way that society takes responsibility for their welfare if their parents don't have the necessary resources to secure it (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1995, 26).

In interpreting article 19 the very delicate issue of separating the best interest of the child and the family arises. The question must be asked: which is more important, a child's right to protection or

a family's right to privacy. Legally it is not a hard question to answer; when a child has been harmed the child's right to protection exceeds the family's rights. Although, the society is still disinclined to interfere in situations when parents' behaviour violates children's rights. (Agathonos-Georgopoulou 1993, 73).

#### **5.4. Participation**

The International Save the Children Alliance has pointed out, that children's right to express their views on matters that affect them is one of the more radical thrusts of the Convention (1999, 28). If children are given rights to participate in decision-making, perspectives to do with both rights and responsibilities must be taken into account. The right to participate is most often determined on the basis of age; children are defined to be old enough to make decisions about certain issues or take responsibility of their actions at a different age in different countries. For example, in Norway and Finland a child can agree to an adoption at the age of 12, but for instance in Germany he or she has to be 14 years old. Article 40.3(a) requires the States Parties to establish a minimum age below which children shall be presumed not to have the capacity to infringe the penal law but it doesn't mention any specific age. In the aforementioned Nordic countries the minimum age for criminal responsibility is 15, in Germany 14 and in France 13. (Bartley 1998, 155-156.)

Behind refusing children their autonomy has traditionally been a conception that children are immature not only physically but also emotionally and intellectually. It has been said that because children do not have enough experience of life they cannot decide for them selves what is good for them. (Verhellen 1993, 59.) Children have limited access to society's economic resources and they have been excluded from political decision-making (Franklin 1995, 9). Clearly, of the Conventions three essential concepts, the 3 P's, the major missing element in practice is the participatory one. For what kinds of channels do children have -or even know about- that would help them to make their voices heard in situations that demand it? (Cantwell 1993, 123.)

Article 12 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child inters the most unequivocally the right to participate:

“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial

and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.“

The article in effect admits that a child might have something important to tell that adults don't know about. It also opposes the common perspective that it would always be possible or even desirable for adults to talk on the behalf of children. (Lee 2001, 93.) In most cases, the power to decide about issues, that are important to children, is left in the hands of adults (Raitoaho 1998, 25). To find out what is in the best interest of the child it is rational and well founded, even necessary to listen to the child; he or she must have a right to be heard and his or her thoughts must be taken seriously (Hammarberg 1994, x).

According to Verhellen (1993, 64) children's participation is good, not only for children but also, for society. For children it is good because through participation they learn responsibility and gain a stronger sense of self. And for the society because the more people that participate in making decisions the higher the level of democracy functions at. If the issue is meaningful to the child, he or she does not need to be encouraged to participate. Bardy says that being active and curious are natural parts of children's being. She feels that the basic issue in children's participation is to involve children with communities, in a way that there is a learning process that makes it possible for them to understand who we are, where we belong to and how do we live. (2001, 125.)

The '3 P's' –approach relies fundamentally on a developmental view i.e. it perceives a child as someone who lives in a waiting period and who is granted certain, but not all, rights. Even though the Convention's philosophy is that all the children in the world are equal with not only each other but also with adults, the '3 P's' –approach assumes that a comprehensive subjectivity, citizenship, is acquired with attainment of maturity. Dividing rights into specific components, for example into the 3 P's, means there are differences between individuals and groups and that these differences must be taken into account. (Sgritta 1993, 38.)

States have, in signing the Convention, promised to take into consideration that children are capable to talk for them selves and that their opinion should be taken into account when handling issues that affect them. How ever, article 12 that clearly defines the right to participate leaves a lot to adults' discretion. The right to participate only applies to children that are “capable of forming their own views (...) the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” In other words, the child's age and level of maturity will affect to how much weight his



or her opinion or point of view is given. The Convention doesn't define how it is decided or who can decide what the required age or level of maturity should be. It also doesn't define how much weight should be given to children's opinions when decisions are made or what such matters there are that affect children in the first place. (Lee 2001, 93-94.) It should still be kept in mind that there is a delicate balance that exists between the child's right to make an informed decision and the need to protect the child in cases where the decision could result in potentially damaging consequences. As Bennett quotes a commentator in his critique of the emerging Convention on the Rights of the Child: "a child has a right not to be abandoned to his or her own rights" (Hafen 1976; ref. Bennett 1987, 33).

## **6. TOWARDS CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE**

The last chapter brought us closer to my actual interest: participation. The aim of the following chapter is to open up the concept of 'participation' more. More specifically, when it comes to children's right to participate. As will become apparent during chapter 6.1., children's position has slowly shifted towards needing to have a right to participate and a say in matters that affect them, but only through first considering children's right to, or even need for, protection or provision. This shift has taken place within the change in how adults see children. The more children are seen as citizens, as opposed to mere welfare dependants, the more participation rights appear in discussions about children's rights.

### **6.1. Children's position**

Child protection laws and educational laws were implemented at the turn of last century in all industrialised countries. Verhellen thinks that these laws meant the beginning of social control and socialisation of children. (1993, 51.) According to Therborn, law and administrative forms of state intervention have played a crucial part in the constitution of modern childhood. In his opinion the two most important definers of childhood have been legislation concerning both compulsory education and labour. As a result, a child became someone who was too young to work and someone who had not finished his elementary education. (1993, 247-248.)

With these new laws and institutions children were separated from the adult world and at the same time cocooned in a world of their own, where they were supposed to wait, learn and prepare themselves for the 'real' world. Also children became more the property of the state and less the private

property of their parents. (Therborn 1993, 51-52.) Subjecting children to education, which was understood to be a liberating act in the best interest of the child, also had negative effects. At the same time as children stopped taking part in the national economy as well as in the households' economy they seem to have disappeared as subjects and as people who play a role in society. (Wintersberger 1994, 213.) But, as Näsman points out, a development from earlier emphasis on protecting a dependent towards emphasising the civil rights of individuals can be seen (1994, 168).

Historically speaking, a rather recent aspect of current conceptions of children is the notion that they can be abused and maltreated by parents or other guardians, and that public authority should intervene against child abuse. In fact the protection of children against cruelty and neglect was to follow only after, and indeed to be modelled upon, interventions against cruelty to animals. (Therborn 1993, 251.) In the last decades, the conception of childhood has changed considerably. Childhood has gained acceptance as an independent part of a human's life that in it self is valuable, not just about getting ready for adulthood. It is understood that even though children are dependent on the support of the family and adults, they still have their own needs, hopes and above all independent rights. (Larjoomaa 1998, 93.) Children aren't only the citizens of the future but also play a fundamental part in society, as children (Qvortrup et.al. (eds.) 1994, xi).

When considering children's right to participate, it is important to map out how children are seen by adults. According to Bren Neale children can on the one hand be seen as welfare dependants and on the other, as young citizens. The former way of viewing children means that children are dependants, incompetent and vulnerable. That they need care and protection and that adults determine children's childhood. The latter way - seeing children as young citizens - is an idea of children as people who have strengths and competencies and who need recognition, respect and participation. According to this point of view, children influence their own childhood. For adults, citizenship usually means entitlement to autonomy and freedom of choice that goes hand in hand with adult responsibilities. (2004, 7-8.) "The qualification as a citizen is stated in law, and legislation specifies the criteria entitling a person to various rights, entitlements, and social services from the agencies of the state" (Näsman 1994, 167). But if citizenship is defined as entitlement to recognition, respect and participation - as a social form of citizenship, it applies just as much to children as to adults. (Neale 2004, 7-8).

The point is not to see children as either welfare dependants or young citizens, but as *both* welfare dependants *and* young citizens. Children are undoubtedly dependent and in need of care, but

deserve to be respected and recognised as individuals and given a right to participate as well. Therefore, as Neale points out, "a key challenge for the future is to find ways to balance care with respect, and protection with participation" (2004, 11). Keeping the above mentioned in mind, it has to be pointed out that it applies to children of all ages. Not as Näsman (1994, 187) puts it: "children's principal way of gaining autonomy and status is growing up", but rather that citizenship is not a conditional status, as in children do not become more deserving of recognition, respect or participation simply by growing older. Acquiring competencies, responsibilities, understanding or maturity can not be the way to earn citizenship, because these qualities are born of experiences, activities and interactions with others. In other words, they develop through participatory practices. (Neale 2004, 13-14.) And only through participation children can develop a genuine appreciation of democracy and a sense of their own competence and responsibility to participate (Hart 1997, 3). Participation is a right to be involved in making decisions and is fundamental to any basic recognition of children as people. And without the right to participate, children are denied the most basic of principles - to be accepted as people in their own right. (Lansdown 1997, 29-30.)

## **6.2. Right to participate**

Because childhood is thought of by most adults as a time of innocence, a period free from responsibility or conflict, attempts to give children more control over their lives - like a right to participate - is seen as an intrusion to this period, denying children the right to enjoy their childhood. This protective viewpoint, found also in official attitudes and legislation concerning children, is used to justify the resistance to giving children more control over their lives. Children are perceived as vulnerable and therefore in need of protection, but the vulnerability derives partly from their lack of political and economic power, the under-valuing of their potential for participation and consequent denial of civil rights. The predominance of the protective model in the construction of adult-child -relationship has inhibited the development of appropriate recognition of children's real capacity for participation. (Lansdown 1997, 22-24.)

With rights come responsibilities. And children are not competent to accept many responsibilities. Arguably there is a relationship between rights and responsibilities, but when it comes to children's right to participate it is the adult's responsibility to ensure firstly that children have sufficient information with which to make informed choices and secondly that there are available opportunities to take part in decision-making processes. (Lansdown 1997, 25.) Lansdown also raises an interesting point saying that this debate over rights and responsibilities only comes up

when discussing children's rights. An adult's right, for example, to freedom of religion or not be discriminated against on racial grounds apply irrespective of the behaviour of the adult. (1997, 25.)

## 7. ANALYSIS

Before getting into the analysis, it is worth reminding that the periodic reports do not necessarily contain all the relevant information concerning the concept of participation and how it is realised in Finland or Norway. As mentioned earlier, it is clearly stated in the General guidelines for periodic reports that if information has already been presented to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, it need not be repeated (1996, paragraph 8). Essentially this means that it is impossible to say anything conclusive about the full picture of participation in either country just according to the third periodic reports because they do not contain the full picture. What can be said is what the third periodic reports bring up and what is not mentioned, and what is emphasised and what is not. I read both reports according to the same criteria, asked both reports the same questions and then combined the information received according to those questions. This resulted to tables containing all the information *the third periodic reports* could offer regarding each question. And therefore some of the tables are uneven, in a way that they contain much more information about Norway, because for one reason or another the Finnish report had hardly anything to say about these particular subjects. There can be a number of reasons for that, one being that the information has already been presented to the Committee in earlier periodic reports and no changes have occurred in relation to those particular issues. This does not mean automatically that in Finland similar processes, projects or institutions do not exist. It just means that for some reason they were not included in the reporting. At this point I had to make a choice whether to find the relevant information elsewhere or to stick with the third periodic reports and make my interpretations according to them. And I decided to stick with the reports. Therefore what I can offer are my interpretations of the status of children's participation rights according to the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway.

Through out the text I put down the page number, where the relevant passage can be found in the periodic reports. This should make it easier for those who want to see the original context of the paragraphs I have chosen from the reports. In the beginning of each chapter I have included a table including the relevant part of the lists I described earlier. And to make the reading of these lists easier, it should be mentioned that the abbreviation "LB18" stands for Life Before 18 -project. Of the Norwegian third periodic report I used the English version as my abilities in Norwegian

language are quite elementary and of the Finnish counter part I used the original, the Finnish version. But the translations for the lists are from the English version of the Finnish periodic report.

## 7.1. Reporting process in Finland and Norway

**Figure 1. Reporting process in Finland and Norway.**

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The civil society has played a key role in the various phases of the process. Preparation of the report started by a request of statements in writing from all competent authorities and non-governmental organisations that have an interest in the matter. (16)</li> <li>• The Ministry for Foreign Affairs organised a public hearing on 2 July 2003, and invited 34 different local and government authorities and public associations to attend the event. As many as nine different authorities or non governmental organisations were represented, and nine other parties sent their comments in writing. (16)</li> <li>• The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, Plan International Finland and the Finnish Children and Youth Foundation have jointly produced a new card game Ota oikeus ("Take the Right"), which helps make the Convention known among both children and adults. (15)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the work on Norway's third report, efforts have been made to include children and young people in the reporting process. The Ombudsperson for Children initiated the Life Before 18 project in co-operation with the Forum for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Youth Council and the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. (6)</li> <li>• The project has enabled children and young people in Norway in 2002 to express their views about school and leisure time, what is good and what is less good, what they miss and what they would like to have, how it can be even better for children and young people to grow up in Norway. (6)</li> <li>• The project emphasised the importance of involving children and young people with different life experiences and the work processes have been important. Children and young people from schools and organisations, and in the consultation process, have carried out 15 visual and creative assignments. 25 pupils' councils from schools in various parts of Norway were invited to complete these assignments. (6)</li> <li>• Children and young people from organisations and with experience of the child welfare services, asylum reception centres, mental problems and broken families have participated in 10 rounds of consultations arranged by experienced participation workers – a total of 1000 children and young people. 2-3000 pupils in lower and upper secondary schools have contributed through the Pupil Inspectors – a web-based questionnaire where pupils can evaluate their school. (7)</li> <li>• The Internet Parliament is the Ombudsman's tool for collecting the views of children and represents 6400 pupils in Norway. (7)</li> <li>• One of the results of the project is that the experiences and proposed solutions of children and young people have been included in this report and placed under the relevant articles of the Convention. (7)</li> </ul>

The third periodic report of the Government of Finland was prepared at the Legal Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in co-operation with the ministries and authorities that take responsibility for the various themes involved. According to Finland's third periodic report, a focal

point in the reporting was that the civil society was included in many phases of the reporting process. For instance, preparation of the report started by a request of statements from all competent authorities and non-governmental organisations that have an interest in the matter. In fact, a total of 23 written statements from various non-governmental organisations and government authorities were received. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs also organised a public hearing at the time of the publishing of the third periodic report, in July 2003, and invited 34 different local and government authorities and public associations to attend the event. Nine different authorities or non-governmental organisations were represented and nine other parties sent their comments in writing. (15) It can not be found in the report that children or young people would have been included in the reporting process. But the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, Plan International Finland and the Finnish Children and Youth Foundation in co-operation with young people have jointly produced a card game Ota Oikeus (take the right), which helps make the Convention more widely known among children and adults in Finland. (14)

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared Norway's third periodic report. As part of the work on the report, efforts were made to include children in the reporting process. The Ombudsperson for Children initiated the Life Before 18 -project in co-operation with the Forum for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Youth Council and the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. According to Norway's third periodic report, the Life Before 18 -project enabled children to express their views about school and leisure time in 2002 and emphasised the importance of involving children with different life experiences. (6) Children from organisations and with experience of the child welfare services, asylum centres, mental problems and broken families - a total of 1000 children - participated in ten rounds of consultations arranged by experienced participation workers. 2000-3000 pupils in lower and upper secondary schools contributed through the Pupil Inspectors. The Pupil Inspector is a web-based questionnaire where pupils can evaluate their school. Also on the Internet is the Children's Internet Parliament, which is the Ombudsman's tool for collecting the views of children. It represents 6,400 pupils in Norway. (7)

The Children who took part in the Life Before 18 -project are not a representative group in the scientific sense of the term, but they represent different groups. The majority of Norwegian children as well as children with special life experience are represented in the project. It is stated in Norway's third periodic report that organising such a project signals that the views of children are seen as important and as something that should be taken into account. Furthermore, one result of the

project was that the experiences and proposed solutions of children were included in the third periodic report, and placed under the relevant articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (7)

## 7.2. Differences in the levels of the position of children's participation rights in Finland and Norway

**Figure 2. Differences in the levels of the position of children's participation rights in Finland and Norway.**

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In accordance with the Constitution of Finland, children shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to them to a degree corresponding to the level of their development. (23)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring the influence and participation of young people has become a recognized principle in Norwegian society, although we are still striving to implement it in practice in both the private and public spheres. In adults eagerness to do their best for children the children may be pushed into the background. This is why we have made efforts to include the views of children in this report. (6)</li> <li>Improving the possibilities for children and adolescents to take part in society and influence and cope with the conditions in which they grow up is a key objective. (107)</li> </ul>

When comparing the reporting processes of Finland and Norway, as described by the third periodic reports, the most striking difference is obviously the fact that Finland did not include children in the reporting. Where as in Norway an entire project was organised to enable children to participate in the reporting. This in itself suggests that the two countries are at a different level when it comes to actual participation rights for children. These different levels become clearer with the following sentences from both reports. The Finnish report states that: "In accordance with the Constitution of Finland, children shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to them to a degree corresponding to the level of development." (21) The corresponding paragraph in the Norwegian report states that: "Ensuring the influence and participation of children and young people has become a recognised principle in Norwegian society." (6) Even though the Finnish report quotes the Constitution of Finland, which obviously has quite a lot of weight in terms of credibility, I still find the mentioning of 'principle' in the Norwegian report more actual. It brings the participation right closer to reality and makes it, at least, sound more like something that actually exists in Norwegian society. Norway's report, however, goes on to explain how implementing this principle in practice in both the private as well as the public sphere is still challenging. Adults are very eager to do what is best for children and sometimes children get pushed in the background because of the eagerness. This is the very reason that efforts were made to include children in the reporting. (6) The key objective is

to improve the possibilities for children and adolescents to take part in society and influence and cope with the conditions in which they grow up. (107)

So, to begin with, the Finnish and Norwegian third periodic reports offer a different view of the way they see the meaning of children's right to participate. The Finnish report's mentioning of the Constitution of Finland seems to me to emphasise that the question of participation is ultimately a matter of the law. Making participation a question of the law confines it as something official and as something that is not exactly a part of everyday life, but rather something that happens under special circumstances: according to the law children must be given a possibility to participate. Where as the Norwegian report talks about a principle of ensuring influence and participation, which makes participation more a question of values: it is valuable if children are given a possibility to participate. My interpretation of what the reports say is that in Finland participation happens because it has to, because it is the law and in Norway participation happens because it is wanted to happen, because it is seen valuable to society.

### 7.3. Reasoning behind giving children a right to participate in Finland and Norway

Figure 3. Reasoning behind giving children a right to participate in Finland and Norway.

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both research and practical experience have shown that children also have opinions and expertise in issues that relate to themselves and, for example, their living environment, if only there is will and wisdom to hear their views. (34)</li> <li>• The Ministry of Education participates in carrying out an Action Plan to promote the participation of young people in its own branch of administration. The Action Plan comprises fifteen different projects. The idea is, among other things, to increase collaboration to prevent social exclusion in the transition phase from comprehensive school to secondary education, to help teachers more easily detect symptoms of potential social exclusion, to support immigrant youth to adjust by inviting them to take part in courses of Finnish and integration programmes, and to make workshops for young people an established form of activity. (24)</li> <li>• To step up the participation and exercise of social influence by children and young people, the Ministry of Education has, in co-operation with the Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi, an umbrella and service organisation for the young, developed an online instrument of network democracy, used, for example, in the education to democracy in Finnish schools. In addition, support has been directed to children's parliament, an activity in schools, which seeks to improve their own school community and immediate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have important experience and suggestions for solutions that can be used in efforts to develop good measures and activities. (6)</li> <li>• One of the main perspectives is to regard children and young people as a resource. The creativity, critical ability, choice of values, involvement and participation of children and young people are a resource for society. (11)</li> <li>• LB18: Their interests span a broader range of topics than those on which adults solicit their participation. They are interested in visions for their municipality, efforts to combat drug and alcohol abuse, neo-Nazism and bullying, and in working to establish meeting places for everyone in the municipality. Many feel that their experience and inputs have no impact when decisions are made and new measures are formulated. (42)</li> <li>• For several years the authorities have been giving priority to efforts to strengthen children's and adolescent's right to state their views and be heard in the family, at school and in the local community. Several acts containing provisions giving children and young people the right to state their views and be heard in cases that affect them. Experience has shown that the participation of children and young people has a positive effect in local communities and that they make an important contribution to local planning and</li> </ul>



<p>neighbourhood. Some municipalities maintain a Youth Affairs Board, which is an integral part of the municipal administration and which deals with issues concerning youth work and youth-related activities. Some municipalities have also set up Youth Councils to discuss local youth issues. As a rule, young people aged 13 to 18 years in schools and other educational institutions take responsibility for the election of members for the councils. (24)</p>	<p>decision-making processes. Although a great deal of progress has been made in recent years, there is still a long way to go before all municipalities meet the requirements for active participation by children and young people. Children and young people must take part in determining the basis on which decisions are made. (41)</p>
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In the Finnish report it is stated that both research and practical experience show that children have opinions and expertise in issues that relate to themselves, if only there is a will and wisdom to hear their views. (32) Similar view can be found in the Norwegian report, which also states that children have important experience. But it goes on to say that children also have important suggestions for solutions that can be used in efforts to develop good measures and activities. (6) It is in fact mentioned that one of the main perspectives is to regard children as a resource. That the creativity, critical ability, choice of values, involvement and participation of children are a resource for society. (11) In theory, it sounds very good but according to the children, who took part in the Life Before 18-project, children's interests include a broader range of topics than those on which adults solicit their participation do. Many children feel that their experience and inputs have no impact when decisions are made and new measures are formulated. (42) So, after reading both reports, I think there is a lack of "will and wisdom" to hear children's views in both countries. As the result from the Life Before 18 -project shows, it can come as a surprise to adults how vast the field of children's interest can be. This comes down to the questions raised in the earlier chapters about how it is decided what such issues there are that affect children in the first place and how it is decided when children should be given the opportunity to participate. And, at least according to Norway's report, it does not seem to be children themselves. They clearly state that their experience and inputs seem to have no impact in decision-making. The beautiful ideology behind considering children as a resource (as stated in the Norwegian report) should be raised to a more practical level, where it would be defined how this resource could better be put to use.

In Finland, it seems that the overarching goal, as found in the third periodic report, in making it possible for children to participate is to prevent social exclusion in later life. This goal becomes evident in various circumstances throughout the report. For instance, the Ministry of Education participates in the carrying out of an Action Plan to promote the participation of young people in its own branch of administration. And, among other things, the idea is to increase collaboration in order to prevent social exclusion in the transition phase from comprehensive school to secondary education. The Action plan aims to help teachers to detect symptoms of potential social exclusion

more easily. It also aims at making workshops for young people an established form of activity. A project to promote the participation of young people is being carried out as a broad-based joint pilot programme by several municipalities. The aim is to formulate models to prevent social exclusion and enhance participation. (22) Preventing social exclusion is a worthy cause, but really emphasises children's position as 'adults-to-be'. What I mean by this is that it should be valuable in itself that children can *as* children participate in decision-making and make an important contribution to society by participating. The 'adults-to-be' -ideology holds within the effort to teach children how to become good future citizens and adults, how to become part of the work force and not become socially excluded - in the future. Childhood is not seen as an independent and valuable time in a person's life in itself.

To improve the participation and exercise of social influence by children, the Ministry of Education has also, in collaboration with the Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi, an umbrella and service organisation for the young, developed an online instrument of network democracy. It is used, for example, in democracy-education in Finnish schools. Support has also been directed to children's parliament. The basic idea behind children's parliament is to offer schoolchildren an opportunity to exercise influence in order to improve their own school community and immediate neighbourhood. In addition, some municipalities maintain a Youth Affairs Board. It is an integral part of the municipal administration, which deals with matters concerning youth work and youth-related activities. When interpreting the report, I think it is possible to argue that the Youth Affairs Board does not work with, but rather on behalf of young people. Some municipalities have also set up Youth Councils to discuss local youth issues. As a rule, young people aged 13 to 18 years in schools and other educational institutions take responsibility for the election of members for the councils. (22) The democracy-education seems to me like another way of teaching children to become better adult citizens. But children's parliament and Youth Councils aim purely at making it possible for children to influence their immediate surroundings. They promote the idea that childhood in itself is a valuable time in a person's life and being able to participate and influence, not only learn how to do so, can be useful for society. To find out how to make things better for children in schools and local communities, it is necessary to ask children themselves. They need to be able to actually influence in matters, not just be taught how to do so in theory. And besides, without real results it can be impossible to learn participation.

According to Norway's third periodic report, the authorities have for years been giving priority to efforts to strengthen children's right to state their views and be heard in the family, at school and in

the local community. Several Acts contain provisions that give children the right to state their views and be heard in cases that affect them. And experience has indeed shown that the participation of children has a positive effect in local communities and that they make an important contribution to local planning and decision-making processes. The report indicates that a great deal of progress has been made in Norway during recent years, but the report also admits that there is still a long way to go before all municipalities meet the requirements for active participation by children. It is stated quite simply in the report that children must take part in determining the basis on which decisions are made. (41)

#### 7.4. Children's participation on an institutional level

**Figure 4.1. Children's participation on an institutional level: municipal level.**

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some municipalities maintain a Youth Affairs Board, which is an integral part of the municipal administration and which deals with issues concerning youth work and youth-related activities. Some municipalities have also set up Youth Councils to discuss local youth issues. As a rule, young people aged 13 to 18 years in schools and other educational institutions take responsibility for the election of members for the councils. (24)</li> <li>• The Ministry of Interior administered a national participation project in the years 1997-2002, which improved the opportunities for participation and influence of local residents. During the project cycle, many municipalities and cities carried out various programmes and projects to enhance the participation of children and young people. (34)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some municipalities, children and young people may express their views in all cases that interest them. Others think in more traditional terms and only invite children and young people to express their views in limited areas, such as municipal leisure services. (43)</li> <li>• The number of municipalities that children's and youth councils, children's and youth municipal councils or similar bodies for exerting influence increased significantly towards the end of the 1990s. In 2002 approx. 340 of the 434 municipalities in the country had an arrangement of this nature. (42)</li> <li>• LB18: Adults generally want the best for the child, but they also find that adults seldom ask what they think is best for them. Young people have experiences and suggestions for changes that they think could have improved the conditions in which they grow up and ensured that the best interests of children are safeguarded. The young people called for schools, institutions and organisations to ensure that they co-operate with young people. They called for co-operative situations in which they are met with respect, are listened to and can express their thoughts, experiences and suggestions to the adults they depend on in the system. (34)</li> <li>• LB18: The young people largely find that they are allowed to say what they believe and think. Nevertheless, one limitation in freedom of expression brought up by many of them was that adults prefer young people to express themselves in adult language. The young people who took part in the project would like, to a greater extent, to be able to use their own forms of expression to give and receive information. (51)</li> </ul>

It is reported in Norway's third periodic report that in some of Norway's municipalities, children may express their views in all matters that interest them. But others think in more traditional terms,

and therefore let children express their views in very limited areas, such as municipal leisure services. (43) The number of municipalities that have children's and youth councils, children's and youth municipal councils or similar bodies for exerting influence increased significantly towards the end of 1990s. In the year 2002 approximately 340 of the 434 municipalities in the country had an arrangement of this nature. (42) Nevertheless, taking into account all the above mentioned official efforts to include children in decision-making, the children who took part in the Life Before 18 -project feel that even though they know adults generally want what is best for the child, they still find that adults rarely ask children themselves what they think is best for them. Young people have experiences and suggestions for changes that they think could have improved the conditions in which they grow up and ensured that the best interests of children are safeguarded. The young people called for schools, institutions and organisations to ensure that they co-operate with young people and that in those co-operative situations they are met with respect, are listened to and can express their thoughts, experiences and suggestions to the adults they depend on in the system. (34) They also wish, to a greater extent, to be able to use their own forms of expression to give and receive information. This is an important addition when considering issues that relate to children's possibilities to participate. Because young people who took part in the Life Before 18 -project do for the most part find that they are allowed to say what they believe and think but brought up one limitation to freedom of expression that they encounter. Which is that adults prefer young people to express themselves in adult language. (51)

According to Norway's third periodic report, children's and youth councils, children's and youth municipal councils and other similar bodies are a reality in approximately 75% of municipalities in Norway. The report does not discuss whether they are important or should exist, but rather how to make an arrangement of this nature to be a part of every municipality. So, according to the report children's participation is a real and active part of today's society in most parts of Norway. But, as in so many instances throughout the report, the Life Before 18 -project provides a different point of view. It seems that once again it is a question of how it is decided when children are given a possibility to participate. And in this case an interesting addition: how are children allowed to participate? Surely children can not be expected to tell their point of view only in adult terms? The young people, who took part in the Life Before 18 -project, called for respect, to be taken seriously and to be able to express themselves in their own way. And if children are invited to participate, this is the least they should get. In some ways this reminds me of the Finnish 'adults-to-be' -attitude. Children should be respected, as they are - children. And, as the result from the Life Before 18 -project shows, a right to participate should not be limited to issues adults find suitable for children

to participate in. Rather the right should be open to discussion and children should be included in that very discussion.

The Finnish report is a little more vague when reporting on children's participation on municipal level. It mentions that some municipalities have a Youth Affairs Board, and that some municipalities have set up Youth Councils. (34) Also the Ministry of Interior's national participation project is mentioned, during which many municipalities carried out various programmes and projects to enhance the participation of children. (34) It is impossible to evaluate the comprehensiveness of children's possibilities to participate on municipal level based on Finland's third periodic report, but I feel it is possible to make some interpretations. For instance, the Ministry of Interior's project in the years 1997-2002 coincides with the reporting period of the third periodic report (1998-2003). Why is it not reported in more detail? My interpretation is that for some reason the Finnish report does not give much emphasis on the issue of children's participation on municipal level. Whether it is because the project did not have very good results or because it is not seen important enough to report in more detail or some other reason altogether, but nevertheless it does not accord a priority status to the issue in the context of the third periodic report. On the other hand, when compared to Norway's third periodic report's more detailed information on the issue of children's participation on municipal level, it also raises a question whether Norway has had to make more improvements than Finland. It could also be argued that sometimes the lack of information means there is no need for improvement.

**Figure 4.2. Children's participation on an institutional level: educational level.**

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principles that govern early childhood education pivot around children, parents and the educational staff. Early childhood education is emphasised to be a process that promotes the growth, development and learning of the child with the child itself as an active participant. Children learn in a growth and learning environment that has been specifically and intentionally designed for the purpose and in interaction between adults and other children. A high standard early childhood education levels off the differences arising from children's various backgrounds and thus offers all children equal opportunities of development based on individual capacity. The early childhood education policy supports the Committee's recommendation concerning the right of each child to physical, mental, spiritual, moral, psychological and social development. (22)</li> <li>• The Ministry of Interior administered a national participation project in the years 1997-2002, which improved the opportunities for participation and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Education Act contains provisions requiring pupils to be represented on the School Board of every primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school. The school board has the right to state its views on all matters concerning the school. Every primary school, grades 5-7, and lower secondary school, grades 8-10 must have a Pupil's Council comprising one representative for each class. Every upper secondary school must have a Pupil's Council with at least one member for every 20 pupils. Every class in primary school and lower secondary school must have a class council of which all the pupils are members. (46)</li> <li>• In order to develop competent children, children must have a genuine right of codetermination in their everyday lives. The activities of a day care centre should, therefore, not be the sole responsibility of adults. Children's right to codetermination must naturally be adapted to the activities of the day care centre and the age and maturity of the child. (46)</li> <li>• LB18: The majority of them feel that they have most</li> </ul>

<p>influence of local residents. During the project cycle, many municipalities and cities carried out various programmes and projects to enhance the participation of children and young people. (34)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition, many child and youth organisations, such as the Central Union for Child Welfare, are engaged in co-operative projects that enhance children's participation and provide guidelines on how to exercise influence. (34)</li> <li>• The development of the information and communications technologies (ICT) and the reduction of the prices of equipment and programmes have opened up new kinds of learning and communication environments for children and young people all over the world. This has improved the opportunities for participation and also for internationalisation and multiculturalism. (35)</li> <li>• All children and young people do not have access to the advantages that the new technologies offer, which increases children's and young people's inequality. (35)</li> </ul>	<p>influence at home and least influence at school. They feel they have a greater say in the classroom than in matters that concern the school as a whole. They expressed a desire to work on important matters and called for improved co-operation with adults at school. However, they wish to run the meetings themselves and to be taken seriously. (46)</p>
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To increase children's possibilities to participate in matters that concern schools in Norway, the Education Act contains provisions requiring pupils to be represented on the School Board of every primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school. The School Board has a right to state its views on all matters that concern the school. In addition, every primary school, grades 5-7, and lower secondary school, grades 8-10, must have a Pupil's Council, which consists of one representative for each class. Every class in primary school and lower secondary school must have a class council of which the pupils are members. Every upper secondary school must also have a Pupil's Council with at least one member for every 20 pupils. (46) The idea behind this is, that in order to develop competent children, children must have a genuine right to codetermine in their everyday lives. This idea reaches day care centres as well: the report states that the activities of a day care centre should not be the sole responsibility of adults. But at this age children's right to codetermination must naturally be adapted to the activities of the day care centre and the age and maturity of the child. (46) In here, developing *competent children* is specifically brought up. The reason I am paying attention to that is because it does not mention developing competent adults for the future. According to Norway's third periodic report it really is a question of educating children to become competent in their own lives as it happens. Giving them opportunities and skills to participate and this way possibility to influence in matters that affect them. In this case matters that concern the school. A genuine right to codetermine is also brought up and I see the usage of the term 'genuine' here as a proof of understanding that it is not enough for children to have a theoretical right to participate. It also requires certain measures, such as organising class councils and Pupil's Councils, to actualise the right to participate. In light of what the report has to say on

matters that concern children's participation in education, it is interesting that the majority of the children who took part in the Life Before 18 -project feel that they have the most influence at home and least influence at school. And at school, they feel they have a greater say in the classroom than in matters, which concern the school as a whole. The children expressed a desire to work on important matters and called for improved co-operation with adults at school. However, when it comes to co-operative situations at schools, the children wish to run meetings themselves and to be taken seriously. (46)

In Finland, the principles that guide early childhood education pivot around children, parents and the educational staff. In early childhood education it is emphasised that it is a process that promotes the growth, development and learning of the child and in which the child is an active participant. It is suggested that high standard early childhood education levels off the differences arising from children's various backgrounds and thus offers all children equal opportunities of development based on individual capacity. (20) What comes to children's participation in primary and lower secondary schools, the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that enough attention has not been paid to it in Finland. During the recession years in the early 1990's, schools had to save money and as a result schools cut down extracurricular activities and student body activities. The Committee has urged Finland to act efficiently to increase children's possibilities to participate in matters that concern their education. (Recommendation 32, 32) As a response to this recommendation, the report mentions that the Ministry of the Interior administered a national Participation Project in the years 1997-2002, which improved the opportunities for participation and influence of local residents. During the project, many municipalities and cities carried out various programmes and projects to enhance the participation of children. In addition, many child and youth organisations, such as the Central Union for Child Welfare, are engaged in co-operative projects that enhance children's participation and provide guidelines on how to exercise influence. The report also brings up the development of the information and communication technologies and the reduction of the prices of equipment and programmes. According to the report it has opened up new kinds of learning and communication environments for children, which has improved their opportunities for participation. Nevertheless, all children do not have access to the advantages that the new technology offers, which increases inequality among children. (32)

I think the Finnish report dodges the Committee's recommendation slightly. In response to the recommendation, a number of projects are mentioned but they do not include actual improvements to children's possibilities to participate in matters that affect their education as such. Which, in other

words, could mean that no improvements have been made in this particular matter. All in all, the report is quite vague in explaining what in fact these projects and programmes, that were designed to enhance the participation of children, were. This does not make an impression that realising children's participation rights in schools would be a high priority in Finland, at least not according to the report. This, in turn, creates a rather sharp contrast to Norway's third periodic report's position on the matter, according to which the authorities have for years been giving priority to efforts to strengthen children's right to state their views and be heard. And the content of the Norwegian report confirms it, in terms of including what has been done to improve children's possibilities to participate in the third periodic report. Although it is good to keep in mind that without other sources of information, the report is given full authority here in confirming the efforts that have been made to strengthen children's right to participate.

**Figure 4.3. Children's participation on an institutional level: central government level.**

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has set a Committee for child issues in spring 2003. The Committee was assigned, <i>inter alia</i>, to make a proposal concerning a permanent mechanism for child and family issues. The Committee functions as the national body required by the UN Special Session on Children and takes responsibility for information about the rights of the child. (10)</li> <li>• The Ministry of Interior administered a national participation project in the years 1997-2002, which improved the opportunities for participation and influence of local residents. During the project cycle, many municipalities and cities carried out various programmes and projects to enhance the participation of children and young people. (34)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of national and regional conferences have been arranged to exchange ideas and experiences in order to strengthen the participation of children and young people. In 2000, 200 young people from 100 municipalities met to exchange their experiences. In 2001 a national conference was arranged for young people, municipal administrators and politicians. (43)</li> <li>• The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs will continue to encourage municipalities to ensure that the systematic participation of children and young people becomes an important and ordinary part of their work. (43)</li> <li>• The Government will each year elect a Children's and Young People's Municipality of the Year. This will be a municipality in which children and young people have influence and which has excelled in its long-term efforts to improve the environment in which children grow up. (11)</li> <li>• It is important to give children and young people clear guidelines or mandates for their work, contact and back-up from the administration and local politicians, and their own resources. Children and young people must have genuine influence in certain cases, clear routines for feedback, and information about what is going on in the municipality. One of the aims of the Ministry's support for children's and youth organisations is to facilitate the participation of children and young people in organisations and encourage democratic organisations that promote the views of children and young people in society at large. (43)</li> <li>• Children and young people take little part in political processes at central government level but they have an opportunity to present their views through spokespersons and through dialogue with politicians and authorities. Dialogue with representatives of</li> </ul>



	<p>children and young people and their representation on official boards and committees are the most common ways for central politicians and authorities to obtain the views of children and young people. Through the political parties' youth organisations, young people present their views directly to the political community. The views of children and young people are also obtained from youth surveys and research. Moreover, children and young people have the opportunity to provide inputs for policy formulation at central government level through the media, the Internet, letters, campaigns, meetings and other forms of direct contact. (44)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to obtain inputs regarding what the Government can do to strengthen the influence of children and young people in society; the Youth Forum for Democracy was established by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs in December 1998. (- 6.2001). According to its mandate, the Forum was permitted to present proposals and inputs on a continuous basis. The proposals were submitted to the Minister of Children and Family Affairs and passed on to local, regional and central authorities. (44)</li> <li>• The Forum focused on unexpected areas and presented proposals that would probably not have come from other channels. Moreover, the Forum had an important signal effect. (44) More attention is being paid to the views of children and young people at both central and local levels. The establishment of a forum of this nature at central government level has also affected municipalities' involvement in efforts to increase the influence of children and young people, among other things by establishing local forums. (45)</li> <li>• The purpose of the support is to facilitate child and youth participation in the organisations by fostering democratic organisations that promote the views of children and young people in society and that offer children and young people an arena for creative activity and give them a sense of belonging. (107)</li> </ul>
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What obviously has to be addressed here is the fact that hardly any information was offered by the Finnish third periodic report for this part in comparison to Norway's third periodic report. And the information I could include for this part does not as such have to do with children's actual possibilities to participate on central government level. It is more concerned with what the government has done themselves to better children's position. The Committee on the Rights of the Child states that it has been concerned about the lack of such a focal point for children within the Government and co-ordination mechanism in the central administration and the local level as would be responsible for large-scale programmes (recommendation no 12; ref. Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2003, 9.) It is possible to argue that based on what can be found in Finland's third periodic report, children have very few possibilities to participate on central government level. This could be

due to the fact, also pointed out by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, that a focal point within the government does not exist, and therefore making it possible for children to participate on central government level has not been a priority.

In Norway, a number of national and regional conferences have been arranged to exchange ideas and experiences in order to strengthen the participation of children. For instance, in 2000, 200 young people from 100 municipalities met to exchange their experiences and in 2001, a national conference was arranged for young people, municipal administrators and politicians. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs promises to continue to encourage municipalities to ensure that the systematic participation of children becomes an important and ordinary part of their work. (43) As an incentive the Government will, for example, each year elect a Children's and Young People's Municipality of the Year. This will be "a municipality in which children and young people have influence and which has excelled in its long-term efforts to improve the environment in which children grow up." (11) Electing a Children's and Young People's Municipality of the Year is a clear example of taking participation rights of children seriously, mainly because being elected as one requires that children have to actually have influence in the municipality, not just a possibility to it. Participation is not left merely to the level of a keynote address. Also, arranging a possibility for young people to meet with administrators and politicians brings them closer to the heart of decision-making and therefore gives young people a feeling of being listened to and respected as a valuable part of society.

For participation to be efficient and for it to result in actual influence, it is essential that children are given some instructions on how to accomplish it. Norway's third periodic report takes up this issue. It states that it is important to give children clear guidelines or mandates for their participation, contact and back-up from the administration and local politicians, and their own resources. They must also get information about what is going on in the municipality. (43) Unfortunately the report does not go beyond stating the aforementioned fact into, for instance, how it is put to practice. But still, in just stating it, the Norwegian report outshines its Finnish counter part. Because this statement puts participation rights on a more practical level, where it makes sense to discuss how it should happen, or how it could be made easier for children. It reminds us that participation rights are a reality and now what needs to be done is to figure out how to put it to use the best way.

Norway's report finds that in certain cases, children must have genuine influence and clear routines for feedback. (43) The fact that it talks about children having genuine influence in *certain cases* is

in my opinion very vague. And underlines the problem concerning how is it decided what such issues are that children should have influence in. This seems to be a common thread in both reports and poses a dilemma for realisation of children's participation rights. Because can it be an actual right, if it can only be exercised in 'certain cases' and what those cases are, are a matter of opinion? More specifically, a matter of adult opinion? For example, can a right to protection be valid only in 'certain cases'? That in certain cases a child should not have a right to be protected? It is curious that when it comes to a right to participate, the very essence of 'a right' becomes blurred.

Although children take little part in political processes at central governmental level in Norway, they still have an opportunity to present their views through spokespersons and through dialogue with politicians and authorities. The most common ways for central politicians and authorities to find out the views of children are dialogue with representatives of children and their representation on official boards and committees. Young people can present their views directly to the political community through political parties' youth organisations, views of young children people are also obtained from youth surveys and research. In addition, children have the same opportunity as adults to provide inputs for policy formulation at central government level through the media, the Internet, letters, campaigns, meetings and other forms of direct contact. (44)

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs in Norway established the Youth Forum for Democracy in December 1998. The aim of the Forum was to get ideas regarding what the government can do to strengthen the influence of children in society. The Forum's work was completed in June 2001. According to its mandate, the Forum was permitted to present proposals and inputs on a continuous basis. The proposals were submitted to the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and passed on to local, regional and central authorities. (44) The Youth Forum for Democracy focused on unexpected areas and presented proposals that would probably not have come from other channels. In addition to that, the Forum had an important signal effect. Since the Forum finished its work, more attention is now being paid to the views of children at both central and local levels. Establishing a forum of this nature at central government level has also affected municipalities' involvement in efforts to increase the influence of children, among other things by establishing local forums. (44-45) The signal effect, which the report brings up as well, is in my opinion the most important outcome of the Forum. The fact that the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs arranged a Forum to co-operate with young people at central government level is another proof of the Norwegian government's efforts to include children in decision-making as citizens with influence. In my opinion, another important factor was that the Forum ended up

focusing on unexpected areas and also in other ways had surprising results. It emphasises young people's value to society, *because* they are young and therefore find different things to be important than adults do. It places stress on the idea that to build a good society for everyone it is important to consult all parts of the population.

Belonging to a children's or youth organisation is one way for children to participate. The young people, who took part in the Life Before 18 -project (and who had experience from an organisation), said in response to a question about the positive aspects of belonging to a children's or youth organisation that they have learned about teamwork, dialogue, solidarity and self-confidence. In their response they were also critical of the lack of resources, adult management and the lack of communication with other organisations. Voluntary child and youth organisations play a key role in the daily life of Norwegian children, in fact, according to the report, approximately 90% of all children have been a member of an organisation or club. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs provides funding for both the central and local activities of child and youth organisations. The purpose of the support is "to facilitate child and youth participation in the organisations by fostering democratic organisations that promote the views of children and young people in society and that offer children and young people an arena for creative activity and give them a sense of belonging." (107)

### 7.5. Amendments to legislation

In both Finland and Norway there have been amendments to legislation to improve children's opportunities to participate in matters that affect them. These amendments concern mainly social welfare, child protection and local planning. First I will go through issues relating to local planning. And secondly, issues concerning social welfare and child protection.

**Figure 5.1. Amendments to legislation: local planning.**

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research on the relationship between children and young people and their environment has revealed that they are accorded a secondary position when questions that are related to their own growth and development are dealt with. What children need is usually conveyed through an adult person's point of view. (67)</li> <li>• The Land Use and Building Act (132/1999): This provides a framework for the integration of children's views in the assessment of the impacts of plans concerning town planning and building permits on the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For several years the authorities have been giving priority to efforts to strengthen children's and adolescent's right to state their views and be heard in the family, at school and in the local community. Several acts containing provisions giving children and young people the right to state their views and be heard in cases that affect them. Experience has shown that the participation of children and young people has a positive effect in local communities and that they make an important contribution to local planning and decision-making processes. Although a great deal of</li> </ul>

<p>living and housing environment of the child. (67)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are recognised as actors in their own life, who must be heard when decisions are made and whose needs must be taken into consideration when plans and decisions are made that have an impact on their housing and living environment. (67)</li> </ul>	<p>progress has been made in recent years, there is still a long way to go before all municipalities meet the requirements for active participation by children and young people. Children and young people must take part in determining the basis on which decisions are made. (41)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipalities are requested to take greater account of the interests of children and young people in local planning and ensure that children and young people participate more and have greater influence in local planning. (11)</li> <li>• In order to focus on the interests of children and young people in local planning, 2 important reforms have been carried out, based on the Planning and Building Act (1989): National Guidelines and the Children's Representative Scheme. The guidelines require municipalities to organise the planning process in such a way that views concerning children as an interested party are made known and that various groups of children and young people are given the opportunity to participate themselves. In this connection, several practical measures are being considered to strengthen the role of the Children's Representative and that participation of children in all types of planning. (42)</li> <li>• The national policy guidelines for children and young people have been in force for more than 10 years and have led to greater awareness of the interests of children and young people in the planning process. (42)</li> </ul>
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According to the Finnish periodic report, research on the relationship between children and their environment has revealed that they are accorded secondary position when questions that are related to their own growth and development are dealt with. Children's needs are systematically conveyed through an adult person's point of view. According to the Constitution of Finland, everyone has the right to a healthy environment and a right to influence in the decision-making regarding their own living environment. The Ministry of Environment has in the past few years paid much attention to the fact that this right belongs to children as well. The report states that children are recognised as actors in their own life, who must be heard when decisions are made and whose needs must be taken into consideration when plans and decisions are made that have an impact on their housing and living environment. The Land Use and Building Act (132/1999) provides a framework for taking children into account in the assessment of the impacts concerning town planning and building permits on the living and housing environment of the child. It is especially ordained that enough outdoor space must be left in connection with residences for safe playgrounds for children. (62) But does this in practice mean that children or young people will be listened to when decisions are made concerning their living environment? In fact, does it not mean that when it comes to, for

example, town planning the impact of it to children needs to be considered? But the impact is still evaluated by adults. Still, providing a framework for considering children's position in local planning is a good start. It admits that local planning is an area that could benefit from children's participation, if for no other reason, at least for making children's living environments better for them.

In Norway, as mentioned before, experience has shown that the participation of children has a positive effect in local communities and that their contribution to local planning and decision-making processes is very important. (41) Municipalities have been requested to take greater account of the interests of children in local planning and ensure that children participate more and have greater influence in local planning. (11) So, in order to focus more on the interests of children, Norway has carried out two important reforms, based on the Planning and Building Act (1989): National Guidelines and the Children's Representative Scheme. According to the guidelines, municipalities must organise the planning process in such a way that views concerning children as an interested party are made known and that various groups of children are given the opportunity to participate themselves. In this connection, several practical measures are being considered to strengthen the role of the Children's Representative and the participation of children in all types of planning. Now the national policy guidelines for children have been in force for more than 10 years and have led to a greater awareness of the interests of children in the planning process. (42)

So, is it possible to come to the conclusion that what we are becoming more and more aware of in Finland, is already known in Norway? Based on Norway's third periodic report, it is my estimate that in Norway it is no longer a question of whether children should have a say in local planning, but a question of how to make them have a bigger say. In Finland children's position in regards to local planning is stated in the Land Use and Building Act. Unfortunately, as presented in Finland's third periodic report, it provides very little in terms of actually enabling children to participate in decision-making. And even though according to the Constitution of Finland everyone has a right to influence in the decision-making regarding their own living environment, in practice this 'everyone' does not seem to yet include children. So the position the Act in Finland offers children is the position of a passive bystander who's best interest will be considered during the decision-making, but who does not get to tell what he or she thinks is best for him or her. Whereas in Norway the two reforms, the National Guidelines and the Children's Representative Scheme, give children a position as influential participants.

**Figure 5.2. Amendments to legislation: social welfare.**

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the Finnish legislation, a person who has not reached 18 years of age is a minor. In accordance with the Child Welfare Act (683/1983), a child is a person aged under 18 years. (17)</li> <li>• In accordance with the Constitution of Finland, the public authorities must support families and others responsible for providing for children so that they have the ability to ensure the wellbeing and personal development of children. Promotion of wellbeing covers protection against violence, subordination and abuse. (55)</li> <li>• A child has the right to a safe and inspiring living environment and a balanced and many-sided development, and to priority status as regards special protection. (52)</li> <li>• In accordance with the Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients (812/2000), the wishes and views of minor clients shall be found out and taken into account as befits their age and level of development. The Act specifically seeks to improve the position and legal protection of the child as a social welfare client and also underline the participation and right of self-determination of the child in issues that concern him or her. (5)</li> <li>• The Child Welfare Act and the complementary Child Welfare Decree have, as long as they have been valid, included a provision, which complements this general provision. According to it, a plan concerning the maintenance of a child shall be made in co-operation with the child and the parties that participate in his or her care. (27)</li> <li>• There is a specific provision stating that when social welfare services are given, the wishes and views of a minor child shall be investigated and taken into account based on his or her age and level of development. (27)</li> <li>• In accordance with the Act, the wishes and views of a minor client shall be found out and taken into account, taking note of his or her age and level of development. A Government Bill concerning the Act (37/1999) states that it has been noted that a minor does not often have an actual opportunity of taking part in the treatment of matters affecting him or her. When disputes over maintenance or visits or the best interests of the child in child welfare are discussed, small children are very easily left to play only a minor role. (26)</li> <li>• Practical problems arise from the fact that all the persons that hear children are not sufficiently informed, and do not have the required skills and time to hear and interpret correctly the child's feelings. Social welfare workers play a key role when the views and best interest of the child are clarified in connection with official decision-making. Their capacity to hear the child and interpret the best interest of the child can be enhanced through training. Municipalities should take care that the employees,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amendments to the Children Act, the Adoption Act and the Welfare Act, whereby children over the age of 7 and younger children who are capable of forming their own views must be informed and given an opportunity express their views before decisions are made in cases that affect them. → The importance attached to the views must be in accordance with its age and maturity. (22)</li> <li>• For several years the authorities have been giving priority to efforts to strengthen children's and adolescent's right to state their views and be heard in the family, at school and in the local community. Several acts containing provisions giving children and young people the right to state their views and be heard in cases that affect them. Experience has shown that the participation of children and young people has a positive effect in local communities and that they make an important contribution to local planning and decision-making processes. Although a great deal of progress has been made in recent years, there is still a long way to go before all municipalities meet the requirements for active participation by children and young people. Children and young people must take part in determining the basis on which decisions are made. (41)</li> <li>• LB18: The children and young people are not, for the most part, consulted about whom they wish to live with when their parents break up, but tend to be ignored while the adults try to solve their problems. (22)</li> </ul>

<p>who are responsible for social welfare services affecting children, have an appropriate vocational training. The units in charge of training courses related to social welfare should also take care that the training sessions provide an adequate account of and help assess the best interest of the child. (24-25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of the best interest of the child requires that children be heard and that they are allowed to express their views, wishes and hopes in matters that concern them. In accordance with Finnish legislation, a child who has reached 12 years of age shall always be reserved an opportunity to be heard and his or her views shall be taken into account when decisions are made concerning guardianship and visiting rights of the child or taking into custody or placement outside the home. The views of children who are younger than that must also be considered, in so far as it is possible considering the child's age and the level of his or her development. (23)</li> <li>• Even if the principal decision-making authority in issues concerning the child has been entrusted to the parent or the legal guardian, he or she shall discuss with the child before making a decision, if possible, taking into account the age and level of development of the child and the nature of the matter. The parent or legal guardian, therefore, has to take the child's views and wishes into consideration. (45)</li> <li>• <i>Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients:</i> The provision does not mean that the child would be the decision-maker in a matter that concerns him or her. The objective is to find out about the child's own views. The authorities always take the ultimate responsibility for a decision that concerns the child. (27)</li> </ul>	
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Next I will go through some issues concerning social welfare and child protection. According to Finnish legislation, and in accordance with the Child Welfare Act (683/1983), a person under the age of 18 is a child. (16) The Constitution of Finland states that the public authorities must support families and others responsible for providing for children so that they have the ability to ensure the wellbeing and personal development of children. Promotion of wellbeing covers protection against violence, subordination and abuse. (50) A child has the right to a safe and inspiring living environment and a balanced and many-sided development and to a priority status as regards to special protection. (48) In accordance with the Act on Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients (812/2000), the wishes and views of minor clients, i.e. children, must be found out and taken into account as befits their age and level of development. The Act is aimed specifically at improving the position and legal protection of children as social welfare clients as well as underlining the participation and right of self-determination of children in issues that concern them. (5) Further more, the Child Welfare Act and the complementary Child Welfare Decree include a provision,



according to which a plan concerning the maintenance of a child shall be made in co-operation with the child and the parties that participate in his or her care. This provision specifically states that when social services are given, the wishes and views of a child shall be investigated and taken into account based on his or her age and level of development. (24-25)

It is stated in a Government Bill concerning the Act on Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients (37/1999) that it has been noted that children do not often have an actual opportunity to take part in the treatment of matters affecting them. For instance, when disputes over maintenance or visits or the best interest of the child in child welfare is discussed, especially small children are very easily left to play only a minor role. (24) Practical problems concerning children's participation in such situations as presented before arise because all the persons that are supposed to listen to children's point of view are not sufficiently informed, and do not have the required skills and time to hear and interpret correctly the child's feelings. In clarifying the best interests and views of children in connection with official decision-making, social welfare workers play a key role. Their capacity to listen to children and interpret the best interests of children can be enhanced through training. Municipalities should take care that the employees, who are responsible for social welfare services affecting children, have an appropriate vocational training. The units in charge of training courses related to social welfare should also take care that the training sessions provide an adequate account of and help assess the best interest of the child. (22)

In order to take into consideration the best interests of children, children need to be heard and they need to be allowed to express their views, wishes and hopes in matters that concern them. In accordance with Finnish legislation, children over the age of 12 must always be reserved a chance to be heard and their views must be taken into account when decisions are made concerning guardianship and visiting rights of the child or taking into custody or placement outside the home. Further more the views of children who are under the age of 12 must also be considered, in so far as it is possible considering the child's age and maturity. (21) And even though the principal decision-making authority in issues concerning children has been entrusted to the parents or other legal guardians, parents or other legal guardians must discuss with the child before making a decision. In this case also taking into account the child's age and maturity. In effect this means that a parent or other legal guardian must take the child's views and wishes into consideration. (42) But, returning back to the Child Welfare Act and the complementary Child Welfare Decree, and more specifically to the provision that discusses investigating children's wishes and views and then taking them into account. This provision does not mean that the child would be the decision-maker in a matter that

concerns him or her. The objective is really just to find out about the child's own views. The authorities always take the ultimate responsibility for a decision that concerns a child. (25)

As these past paragraphs show, when it comes to social welfare and child protection actual participation possibilities exists in Finland. I find it interesting that of all issues concerning children's participation in the Finnish report, the most widely reported issue was this. In Finland you can find a legislation that clearly defines when and how children can participate. I connect it with the earlier issue of preventing social exclusion, which can be found behind many topics concerning participation in the Finnish report. Social welfare and child protection are indeed at the forefront of preventing social exclusion. They cover a field where parents or others responsible for the child's welfare have failed in one way or another. In the Finnish report matters concerning participation become more protection-oriented. Authorities' and officials' position in making it possible for children to participate is also emphasised. In other words, the report gives the impression of Finland as a rather paternalistic society, when it comes to children's participation. It emphasises such issues as authorities, legislation and protection.

In Norway, amendments have been made to the Children Act, the Adoption Act and the Welfare Act. Children who are over the age of seven and also younger children, who are capable of forming their own views, must be informed and given an opportunity to express their own views before decisions are made in cases that affect them. The importance attached to the views must be in accordance with the child's age and maturity. (22) As I have mentioned several times earlier, according to Norway's third periodic report, Norway aims to give priority to efforts to strengthen children's right to state their opinion and to be heard in the family, at school and in the local communities. And there in fact are several acts that contain provisions giving children just that: a right to state their views and a right to be heard in matters that concern them. (41) But, even though the periodic report tells us of the many ways children are nowadays able to participate in Norwegian society, in some cases a right to participate seems to still be merely theoretical. The children, who took part on the Life Before 18 -project, feel that they are not, for the most part, consulted about whom they wish to live with when their parents break up. In fact they feel that they tend to be ignored while the adults try to solve their problems. (22) It goes without saying that in this particular case theory and practice are in sharp contrast with each other. And it is definitely an issue that would deserve more notice. In fact, in comparison to the Finnish report, the Norwegian report was very meagre with words in terms of children's participation in social welfare and child protection.

## 7.6. Children as actors

Figure 6. Children as actors.

Finland	Norway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the Constitution of Finland: "Everyone is equal before the law. No one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person." A separate subsection provides that "children shall be treated equally and as individuals and they shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to them to a degree corresponding to their level of development." (17)</li> <li>• The provision has been included to emphasise the fact that children must be treated both as equals in relation to adults and, in principle, as individuals having equal rights and as persons who are on equal footing with their peers. In addition, the provision shows that every child is to be treated as an individual, not only as a passive object of measures. On the other hand, as a group that is legally incompetent and weaker as adults, children are in need of special protection and care. The provision therefore offers a basis for positive discrimination of children, required to secure that children are treated in relation to adults. (18)</li> <li>• To succeed, society needs the active participation of all its citizens. Acknowledgement of and respect for the significance of the rights of participation of the child is an investment in the future. Giving children access to greater participation is also an excellent tool in their education to democracy, developing the child's capacity to take on responsibility for issues that concern him- or herself, which has, among other things, a preventive impact on such possible adverse developments as social exclusion. (34)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the Governments overarching goals is to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities, rights and obligations to participate in society and utilise their resources. (26)</li> <li>• Children are subjects, not objects. They are committed and have consideration for others, a sense of fair play, ideas, suggestions and a willingness to take action. (6)</li> </ul>

Children's right to participate in decision-making is in many ways still a new idea. After reading both periodic reports I feel that both Finland and Norway are aiming at realising participation rights, but first there has to be some adjustments to how children are seen. And it seems as these reports are mostly about that: writing down and therefore officially admitting that a different way of seeing children is necessary in order to give them rights to participate as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Based on the information I could find in Norway's third periodic report, it is my opinion that Norway is one step further in realising participation rights. According to the Norwegian report it is given priority status and efforts to make children's participation an acknowledged part of decision-making can be found in it.

The Constitution of Finland states that: " Everyone is equal before the law. No one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person." And a separate subsection provides that "children shall be treated equally and as individuals and they shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to them to a degree corresponding to their level of development." (16) What the subsection emphasises is that children must be treated as equals in relation to adults and, in principle, as individuals who have equal rights and who are on equal footing with their peers, i.e., other children. The subsection also shows that every child is to be treated as an individual, not only as a passive object of measures. Nevertheless children are still a group that is legally incompetent and weaker than adults, and therefore in need of special protection and care. The subsection therefore offers a basis for a positive discrimination of children, which is required to secure that children are treated equally in relation to adults. (16) But this is essentially legislation. As stated in Finland's third periodic report, society needs the active participation of all its citizens to succeed. It is also stated that the acknowledgement of and respect for the significance of the rights of participation of children is an investment in the future. According to the report giving children access to greater participation is an excellent tool in democracy education and it develops children's capacity to take responsibility for issues that concern themselves, which has, among other things, a preventive impact on such possible adverse developments as social exclusion. (34) This statement positions children as citizens and therefore admits their right to participate. But it also holds on to the 'adults-to-be' -ideology, as seen in other parts of the third periodic report as well, in seeing the benefit in children's participation as an investment to the future. And repeats prevention of social exclusion as being a motive behind giving children a right to participate.

Norway's periodic report discusses much the same issue. It is said in the report that one of the Government's overarching goals is to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities, rights and obligations to participate in society and utilise their resources. (26) 'Everyone' must include children. The report goes on to state that children are subjects, not objects and that children are committed and have consideration for others, a sense of fair play, ideas, suggestions and willingness to take action. (6) I see the Life Before 18 -project and its aim to include children in the reporting process as one proof of this very ideology. According to Norway's third periodic report, it really gave the children, who took part in the project, an actual possibility to state their views concerning various issues, share ideas and make suggestions to how things could be better for them.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Many of the situations which require children's own say in matters happen within the context of welfare system: child welfare services, child protection, education, to name a few. The environment of modern childhood has expanded outside families and childhood has become more institutionalised. Children spend more and more of their time away from their homes in, for example, day care and school. In making it possible for children to participate in decision making in matters and places that affect them and their everyday life, it is easier to make sure that children stay in the centre or processes when children's welfare is being promoted.

One of the overarching themes of my study has been the question of perceiving childhood in a certain way. The discussion evolving around childhood is tilting towards understanding childhood as an independent and valuable time of life, not just a stepping stone into adulthood. Different statements regarding child politics showed earlier in this study that in child politics the question is very much about what society's attitude towards childhood is, that it is about evaluating policies from a child's point of view. And when it comes to participation rights, the question is much about whether children are seen capable or incapable. The phrase "according to the child's age and maturity" comes up many times in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and this leaves deciding what the appropriate age and maturity is to adult discretion. And the themes of age and maturity, capability and incapability, and childhood as an independent stage in life (or not) are present in the third periodic reports as well. One of the differences I found between Finland's and Norway's third periodic reports is in the attitudes they convey. The discussion concerning children's right to participate seems to happen on different levels. According to Norway's third periodic report, it is a question principle, which brings children's participation closer to reality. It could be argued that it means that participation actually exists in Norway and is a question of values. To me it tells that children's participation happens because it is wanted to happen. Whereas the Finnish report talks of children's participation mainly as a matter of the law. Bringing the law into discussion makes it more official and participation seems as something that happens under special circumstances because it is a conscious choice to discuss children's participation rights in legal terms. What this tells me is that children's participation happens in Finland because it has to happen - it is the law. Not entirely desirable. And this lack of desire continues to show itself in various parts of the Finnish report. On municipal level the Finnish report discusses mainly whether children should have a possibility to participate, if it is important to begin with. The Norwegian report discusses how it would be possible to make children's participation a part of every municipality's

functions. The same is repeated in children's possibilities to participate in education-related issues. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has pointed out that enough has not been done in Finnish schools to make it possible for children to be a part of decision-making. And the Finnish report passes this and therefore, in my opinion shows that it is not seen as a priority. Whereas in Norway's report it is shown that children's participation in decision-making in schools is mandatory. Norway's report goes on to say that in order to develop competent children, they must have a genuine possibility to have a say in everyday matters that affect them. In fact it is written in the Norwegian report that children are seen as a resource to society, that their input to decision-making is important and can be useful for society. Although the children who took part in the Life Before 18 -project find this not to be a reality yet, which brings us back to the question of who decides what such matters there are that children should have a say in.

A common thread in both reports seems to be that when it comes to participation rights it is allowed to define children's participation in terms of "in certain cases". This is in sharp contrast to other rights, like protection, for example, because it is not defined to only "certain cases" when a child has a right to be protected. But what should be taken into consideration here, is that giving children participation rights does not have to mean handing over all responsibility for the decisions at the same time. It can quite simply mean that the child's point of view is given due weight in decision-making. That children are asked for their opinion in cases that affect them.

In the Finnish third periodic report children's participation is strongly connected with preventing social exclusion in later life. This, in my opinion, emphasises that there is a distinct 'adults-to-be' - ideology behind it. In other words it means that in the Finnish report childhood is not seen as an independent part of life that in itself is valuable. However, in the Norwegian third periodic report, especially when it comes to children's participation on central government level, it is made apparent that children's input in decision-making is seen important exactly because they are children and therefore have different ideas and priorities than adults. This goes back to the idea of children as a resource for society. According to Norway's third periodic report, this resource is already utilised in Norway in, for example, local planning. Norway's report claims that practices to include children in decision-making exist and are used. And, indeed, the issue was discussed in the report in terms of how to include children more. According to Finland's third periodic report, ways to include children in local planning are being developed in Finland, which is a good start. In my opinion it shows that also in Finland it is considered an area where it could be useful to ask children for their point of view. At the moment children are taken into consideration in local planning, but they are not

necessarily asked. According to the third periodic report it would seem that adults decide what is in the best interest of children.

The main area regarding children's right to participate in the Finnish third periodic report was the issue concerning social welfare and child protection. In these fields possibilities for children to participate exist. I found this to be in connection with prevention of social exclusion, because this part brings participation rights the closest with protection. In fact what was emphasised here was authorities, legislation and protection. And more specifically the position of authorities in different welfare institutions in regards to children's right to participate. One reason for this part being so extensive in comparison to other parts could be that many amendments to legislation concerning children's welfare were made during this particular reporting period. In comparison, Norway's report discussed this part much less. Like children in Finland, Norwegian children have a right to be a part of decision-making in social welfare and child protection, but the children who took part in the Life Before 18 -project found that this is not entirely true in practice. Child welfare issues are the least positive when it comes to issues mentioned in parts concerning participation in the third periodic reports and Norway's report being so meagre with words in this issue makes me wonder if it is an issue that the report does not want to discuss.

Which brings me back to considering the data. Was the data relevant for answering my research question? I have to answer yes and no. Firstly, the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway do not contain all the relevant information concerning children's right to participate, or their possibilities to participate. One reason for this is that both countries have submitted two earlier periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the contents of which I did not include in my study. Information already submitted to the Committee does not need to be repeated, so it is more than likely that some relevant information concerning children's right and possibilities to participate has already been indicated in earlier reports. Secondly, comparing Finland and Norway only based on their third periodic reports can be difficult, mainly because of the reason explained above: both reports do not necessarily contain exactly the same issues. And even if the issues are that same, they are not necessarily given exactly the same amount of emphasis. And finally, Finland and Norway can differ in ways that cannot possibly be found solely by looking into the reports. In order to compare children's right and possibilities to participate in decision-making in Finland and Norway it would require a thorough research on different institutions and systems that have to do with children in both countries. It would require going outside the third periodic report to find all the relevant information concerning children's participation.

I did say, as well, that the data does answer my research question. And the main reason for that is the fact that I included 'according to the third periodic reports' in my research question. The aim was to compare children's right and possibilities to participate in decision-making that affects them in Finland and Norway based on the information found in the third periodic reports. The reports were not conclusive enough to make comparisons on actual participation rights, but offered enough information to compare what the reports tell and do not tell. In my opinion it is possible to summarise that Norway's third periodic report had more to say in regards to participation rights than Finland's third periodic report. Whether this is because in regards to earlier reports, Norway had more reason to make changes and develop children's participation rights or because participation rights are seen as more important in Norway than in Finland, I cannot say. But what I can say is that, according to the third periodic reports of Finland and Norway, children have more possibilities to participate in Norway than in Finland. Also the attitude seemed to be different in Finland than in Norway. The words used in connection to participation had a difference: Norway's report talks about principles whereas Finland's report uses legislation as a motive more. My interpretation of this is that, according to the third periodic reports, in Norway issues regarding children's participation right are more emphasised and seen as more important. And that participation is important for children when they are children, it is not so much a question of developing competent adults for the future, which seems to be Finland's aim.

What I have found out in this study has raised an interesting question of actual participation possibilities in Finland and Norway. It should be studied more, and it is possible to do so using the same data. It just needs more information found elsewhere. What I mean by this is that the information not present in the reports, for one reason or another, should be included to fill in the blanks and thus it would be possible to say something conclusive about children's right and possibilities to participate in Finland and Norway. The periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child offer good guidelines of all the different areas that should be taken into consideration when studying children's right to participate. Using them to guide research and finding all the missing information from other sources can result to a comprehensive study on children's participation rights. And I find it a worthy research subject. In earlier chapters the issue of children's citizenship has come up and in my opinion a right to participate is tightly connected with the concept of citizenship. Would it not be possible then to estimate the level of children's citizenry through realisation of participation rights in any given country?



Within the concept of welfare state children's right to participate in different welfare institutions and systems raises an interesting question of the quality of services provided. Giving children a right to state their views in matters that affect them demands certain professionalism from welfare workers and authorities. A right to participate inevitably develops customers, who are more competent, whether they are children or adults. The more competent the customers are the more aware of their rights and the more capable to make demands they are. And this can cause a need to develop better services that take the views of the customer more into account. Therefore research on children's participation rights can in its part help develop new ways to make sure that children's views are better taken into account than they are nowadays. And more importantly help reach the goal of making children's participation right as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality.

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