



BCORE21 Designers Sessions - Right To Participate

Report on Istanbul Application –
March 14, 2025

Informal Education-cocukistanbul
May 2025

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PURPOSE AND GENERAL FRAME

Within the scope of the ongoing BCORE21 project and as part of the Designers Sessions, a workshop with children has been designed and realised by Informal Education-cocukistanbul in Istanbul/Turkey on March the 14th 2025. The purpose is to focus on the defined concepts under the “Right to Participate” mission and by working with the primary target groups (in this case with children) to get insights, to understand further the boundries/issues from their perspective and to provide an opportunity to them to develop and voice their own solution proposals.

The concepts (JIC’s) to focus under the “Right To Participate” mission were verified as follows:

- **Overcoming Adultism & Cultural Biases**
 - *Deep-rooted adultism; children often seen as “future” not current citizens*
 - *Gender bias (e.g., boys listened to more than girls)*
- **Designing & Facilitating Genuine Participation**
 - *Lack of structured, well engineered processes*
 - *Tokenism (“false participation”) instead of true co-creation*
- **Child Empowerment & Competence Building**
 - *Perception that children “lack competencies”*
 - *Insufficient opportunities for children to develop and demonstrate skills*
- **Inclusive & Sustainable Civic Platforms**
 - *Few child-friendly spaces or consistent, long-term participation mechanisms*
 - *One-off initiatives with limited sustained impact*
- **Institutionalization & Policy Support**
 - *Minimal formal recognition of children as part of “the public”*
 - *No permanent structures (assemblies, councils) for child participation*
- **Cross-Cultural & Cross-Generational Colloboration**
 - *Global North–South divide and missing partnerships that include children*
 - *Lack of intergenerational dialogue—adult forums often exclude children*

While these issues are strongly linked to each other, this workshop was intended to focus on the issue “No permanent structures (assemblies, councils) for child participation” which has strong ties with the “Adultism” issue.

WORKSHOP CONCEPT, METHOD AND FLOW

This workshop is designed to explore children's perceptions of 'participation' in general and to learn from their own experiences of participation, empower them to voice out the issues and challenges they face and also to provide an opportunity for them to offer their solution ideas/recommendations about children participation in general and specifically on tools and methods they think effective for their participation practice.

The method is based on a **from the bottom to top approach** where children are encouraged to **express the issues** from their eyes without the facilitator putting those on the table for them to discuss, and to come up **with self generated solutions**.

The workshop flow has been designed to maksimize children's active participation;

- **Wellcome and Project info**
- **Warm-up:** A brainstorming about participation
- **Intro to participation and right to participate (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)**
- **Barometer Activity:** This teaching strategy helps students reflect their positions by gathering behind the answers "always/never/sometimes" about an expressed statement. Like "When PARENTS / TEACHERS / MUNICIPALITIES take decisions that affect you, do they ask your opinion?" The selected positions taken are then asked why? This provides a picture, a general understanding of the group aims together with the reasons behind
- **Issue/Challenge seek:** An individual reflection by children about issues they face that prevent or limit their capability and actual participation possibilities. This done by each child by putting down his/her reflection on provided "attention cards" and the cards are placed on the floor or wall to shop around. Facilitator has in his/her pocket a number of issue cards to add with consensus with children to enrich the issue pool if needed
- **Group study on issues and challenges to come up with self generated solutions:** Similar Issues are grouped by the facilitator together with the group, given a title and children are grouped voluntarily as "solution teams" where they discuss and develop solution ideas
- **Group presentations, discussion and further refining**

COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP

Target Group: Students aged 11-15

Number of Participants: 20

Workshop Duration: 120 min.

The BCORE21 Project emphasizes the importance of reaching the disadvantaged children to the extend possible. The selected partner school is a boarding school with more than a hundred and fifty years history that targets boys and girls who are either fatherless or motherless and with low income from all over the country and accepts such children based on their success following an examination. The school's feature offers a quite meaningful opportunity in this regard.

KEY FINDINGS

The workshop does not intend to “educate” children on children rights and/or equip them with ways and tools for effective and genuine participation. The intention is to;

- understand how the children perceive the concept of participation from their perspective
- increase their awareness of the importance of their participation to decision-making processes as their “sole right”
- provide an opportunity for them
 - to think and discuss the barriers they directly face and experience and,
 - to work together to develop solution ideas to tackle with these issues

In this sense not only the “positive and qualified” outputs but also the “weak” outputs are equally valuable to see the picture as a whole and to understand the children’s needs.

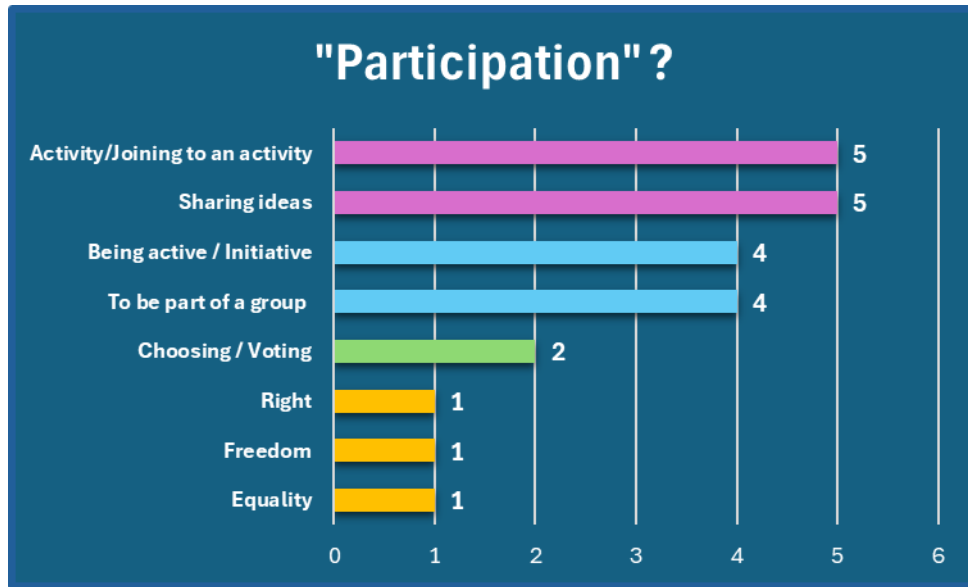
The key findings will be evaluated under the related headings and under the “conclusion” session. As a general glance the key findings can be summarised as follows;

- Children have yet to fully grasp that participating in decisions affecting them is a fundamental right
- Rather than recognizing participation as engagement in meaningful decision-making processes across different settings, they tend to associate it more with “engaging in an activity”
- They often perceive that adults view their involvement in decision-making as inadequate or insignificant, and they rarely experience adults seeking their opinions
- Due to their limited experience in contributing to decisions and the lack of feedback on their input, they remain highly skeptical about whether their voices truly make a difference

II. Project Outputs

1. BRAINSTORMING

What is the first word that comes to your mind when you think of "participation"?



Graphic 1: Outcomes of the Brainstorming Session on the notion of Participation

During the post-evaluation session with the group, it was observed that the expressions categorized under 'being active/initiative' were largely interpreted as 'engaging in an activity' or 'participating in an event.' This indicates that, for children, the concept of participation is more strongly associated with involvement in activities rather than with engagement in decision-making processes across different areas. Furthermore, as illustrated in the graph, the concept of 'rights' was represented at a notably low rate within the group.

This data can be interpreted in multiple ways. In the context of our country, it appears that children do not perceive participation as a 'right', likely due to factors such as the dominant culture and traditions, the weakness of cultural and democratic social capital in society, and their limited experiences and opportunities in this area. Additionally, it is worth considering that a similar brainstorming session conducted in a different culture, country, or climate could yield considerably different outcomes.

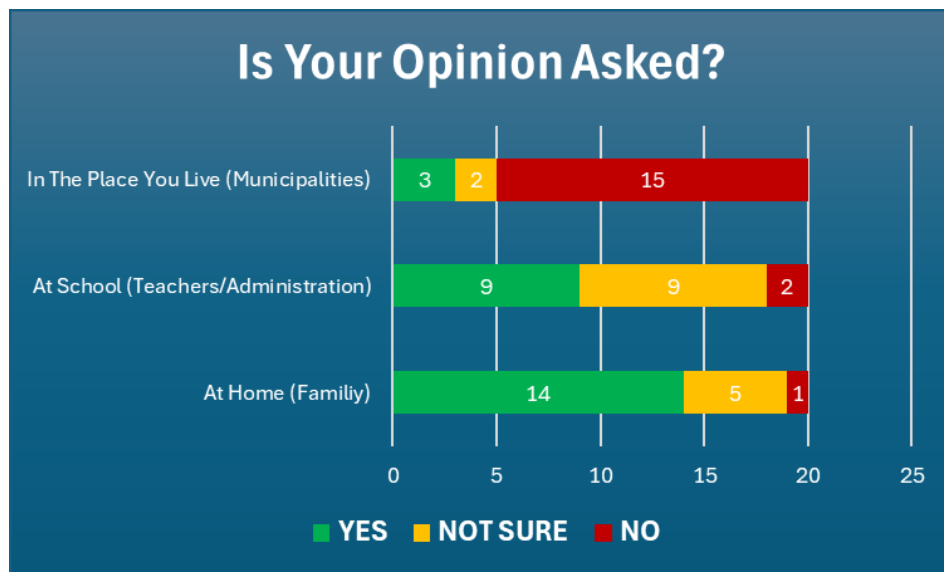


2. BAROMETER

The following graphs have been prepared based on the responses provided on the “Barometer Worksheets” completed by the children before the implementation, where they determined their positions.



2.1 - When Parents / Teachers / Municipalities take decisions that affect you, do they ask your opinion?



Graphic 2: Do the Decision Makers ask your opinion?

Through the “Barometer” application, children conveyed that the extent to which their opinions are considered on matters affecting them varies across different environments.

As clearly illustrated in the graph, the family setting is where they feel most able to express themselves and believe their opinions are valued. When asked about the topics on which their opinions are sought, children predominantly referred to discussions such as 'What should we do?', 'Where should we go?', and 'What should we buy?'. The school environment follows closely behind, and its relatively positive perception is believed to be influenced by the unique characteristics of both the school and the participating group to an extend.

On the other hand, municipalities stand out as the platforms where children participate **the least or not at all**. Our inquiries on this matter revealed that children are largely unfamiliar with the concept of 'participation' at the local government level, though they do perceive this absence as a shortcoming. This finding is considered particularly striking and worthy of attention, especially concerning municipalities.

2.2 - What is your opinion about the below statements. Do you agree or disagree?

2.2.1 Adults believe children are insufficient and not mature enough



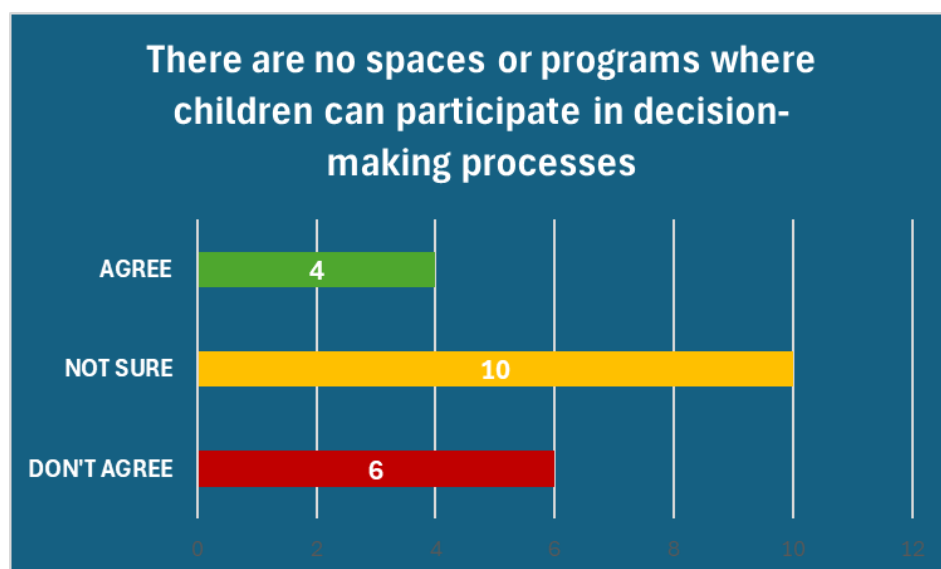
Graphic 3: Adultism

When asked to take a position on this question, children primarily clustered around the response 'I'm not sure.' However, when they were encouraged to explain their reasoning, their answers closely aligned with the arguments of the 'I agree' group. Additionally, some children spontaneously shifted their stance, moving into the 'I agree' category.

In the subsequent discussion about the barriers to their participation in decision-making processes, they strongly and consistently emphasized this issue across a broad spectrum. (Section 3 – The Issues Indicated)



2.2.2 There are no spaces or programs where children can participate in decision-making processes



Graphic 4: Tools and mechanisms for child participation

Regarding this specific question, children predominantly clustered around the response 'I'm not sure.' When encouraged to articulate their reasoning, they struggled to justify their positions and express themselves clearly. This suggests that their perception of, and especially their experience with participation in decision-making processes on matters that concern them is quite limited.

3. THE ISSUES INDICATED

The primary issues that children focused on regarding participation were **“Adultism”**, **“Insufficiency”**, and **“No platform or tools for participation”**. Such grouping of issues was conducted together and in consensus with the group. The facilitator also provided certain additional statements to the pool again in consensus with the group to further enrich the discussions. The challenges identified by children can be summarized as follows:



3.1 Adultism

- Adults often think that children are too young to have valuable opinions and therefore do not ask for their ideas
- Adults see themselves as more knowledgeable compared to children
- Stereotyping
- Adults lack the necessary knowledge and skills for child participation
- Ignorance
- Adults generally do not prioritize projects that ensure children's participation
- Adults have more authority compared to children
- Adults think their ideas are more logical
- Authorities or managers do not provide the necessary support
- Adults speak on behalf of children
- Adults think that children have wrong ideas
- They are told, "How would you know?"

The issues highlighted by children under the “Adultism” category closely mirror those raised by adults during the “BCORE21 Visionary Sessions”, where experts with experience in this field shared their insights. Children emphasized that adults tend to believe they know everything, can think for themselves, and perceive children as ‘incompetent’ which leads them to exclude children from decision-making processes rather than actively involving them.

3.2 Insufficiency

- Children are often seen as inexperienced in participation
- Adults consider children's ideas unnecessary
- Children's ideas are not valued
- Society does not take children's opinions because they are seen as young and developing
- It is believed that children act only on emotions
- Adults believe that children's ideas are insufficient
- Adults do not believe that children are mature enough
- The belief that children are insufficient
- Adults see children as small and immature
- Adults think that children cannot give clear and good answers because they are young and so insufficient and ignorant

The issues expressed by children under this category largely overlap with those outlined in the 'Adultism' section above. Children emphasized that adults do not see them as sufficiently mature or competent and often perceive them as inexperienced in this regard. As a result, they feel that their opinions are not taken into consideration and, at times are even regarded as insignificant.

3.3 No Platform Or Tools For Participation

- There are no systems in place for children's participation, and it relies solely on goodwill
- There are age limits for participation
- Decision-makers do not provide feedback to children even if they take their opinions
- Children's dependence on their families makes participation difficult
- There are no environments or programs where children can participate in decision-making processes
- Adults do not consider children's opinions, leading children to see participation as a waste of time
- Children's participation programs are insufficient and not "child-friendly"
- Children's votes are not accepted, and municipalities do not prioritize children's participation
- Participation practices are not continuous but one-time
- The education system does not support children's participation
- Children are not involved in all stages of decision-making processes

Children identified the absence of established systems and tools to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes as a clear and significant issue. They expressed uncertainty about where, when, how, and in what matters they could engage in decision-making. In particular, they highlighted the lack of structured and sustainable environments and programs for participation, as well as significant gaps in communication.

In the few instances where their opinions were taken into consideration, children pointed out the absence of feedback from decision-makers and the failure to ensure sustained participation. They noted that this led to a lack of motivation and fostered a sense of 'token' participation rather than genuine involvement.

4. THE SOLUTION PROPOSALS

The final stage of the workshop was conducting as group studies on the verified issues and challenges to come up with self generated solutions.

The children were grouped voluntarily as “solution teams” and allowed to discuss and develop their solution ideas. The solution ideas were then presented to the whole group by each solution team and further discussed. Below are the solution proposals developed and presented:



4.1 Adultism

Children's proposed solutions to the issue of 'Adultism' primarily focus on educating adults. They stress that adult training should not only raise awareness about the importance and value of child participation but also public awareness should also be raised by campaigns.

One key suggestion is the active inclusion of children in these training programs, allowing them to participate at various levels and in different capacities.

- Adults can be trained to make them aware of child involvement
- Providing training to adults on children's right to participate
- Children can also take part in adult education as participants or trainers to be more effective
- Programs can be prepared to change adults' negative thoughts about children
- Increasing the number of NGOs related to children
- Encouraging and directing adults to the issue of child participation
- Regular and public sharing of theater, drama and social media posts related to children's participation rights

4.2 Perception Of Children As Inadequate

Among children's proposed solutions to the issue of being perceived as incompetent, media campaigns aimed at reshaping adults' perceptions and organizing events and activities in public spaces to showcase children's capabilities emerged as key strategies. In addition to these suggestions targeting adults, children also emphasized the importance of initiatives designed to boost their confidence in this area and support their freedom of thought.

- Doing bigger tournament-style things for kids to participate in so that kids can prove themselves
- Carrying out projects that ensure children's participation and sharing the results with the public
- Making public service announcements on TV about children's right to participate
- Designing posters about children's right to participate (awareness tools/campaigns in public spaces, banners by football players at football matches...)
- Making informative presentations for adults in municipalities and explaining the great works that children have achieved in the world
- To increase the activities that children can participate in around the world and to ensure that these activities are a reason for awareness for families
- Increasing children's self-confidence and freedom of thought

4.3 Lack Of Participation Environment And Tools

Under the 'Lack of Participation Environments and Tools' category, a striking aspect of children's proposed solutions is their strong focus on ensuring their participation in activities and events specifically organized for them. As previously reflected in the brainstorming section, children's perception of 'participation' appears to center more on access to participation spaces rather than recognizing it as a fundamental child right—an observation that resurfaces in their proposed solutions.

- Municipalities determine the opinions of children through surveys and organizes activities twice a month based on these ideas
- Children's vocational work can be carried out in certain places
- Nature excursions can be made available
- Seminars for children about technology
- At the end of the workshops, a survey called "opinion survey" can be made and shared so that children share their thoughts
- Municipalities to organize family and children's events
- Workshops or events in which children's participation is provided on various topics can be organized and the results can be explained in a wide range
- A report can be prepared by asking a passing child, for example, "What are your thoughts on participation?" Then these can be shared with public

III. Conclusion



It should be recognized that the results of this limited study do not constitute a valid 'general picture' within the widely accepted principles of statistical analysis. However, taking into account both the extensive studies our institution has conducted in this field over the years and the data gathered from research studies and consultation meetings within the BCORE21 project, it would be highly reasonable to say that the findings of this study on child participation are in line with general observations seen on a global scale.

On the other hand, considering a number of factors (culture, beliefs, traditions and habits prevailing in the society they live in, the level of the development of democracy, the education system, level of socio-economic development, prime issues they concretely face...) appear to be key issues that affect how participation is perceived by children and how to tackle with this issue.

Above findings are not surprising under the conditions of our country. The resulting photograph reflects that children in our country highly lack the understanding of “participation” both as a right and as a concept. They cannot experience genuine participation in decision making processes concretely, and opportunities in this field are insufficient. Although this picture will vary in different countries to this or that extent, it is understood that there is a high need for training and concrete application practices in this field.

Based on the above reflected perceptions, issues and solution proposals voiced out by the participating children, some effective approaches to improve children’s genuine participation that need to be evaluated in connection with one another and as a whole, can be summarised as follows:

- Fostering their self-confidence and freedom of thought while ensuring they recognize participation as a right appear to be crucial and as the “first step” to consider
- Giving them opportunities to contribute to family, school, and community decisions that affect them. That is to say involve them in real life issues that affect them
- Children clearly emphasize that municipalities fail to consider them and are highly inadequate in ensuring their participation. Given the critical role of decision-makers, it is equally essential to encourage municipalities, provide guidance on the significance and methods of child participation, and raise public awareness on this issue
- Educating not only children but also adults, families, teachers, and policymakers on how to actively listen and value their perspectives as participation is their sole right
- Creating safe spaces where they feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions. Tailoring decision-making processes to children's developmental levels, using interactive methods to foster active involvement
- Implementing participatory councils or forums where children can voice their concerns and ideas and show them that their input leads to real changes, reinforcing their confidence in participation

NOTE:

The workshop content, flowchart, and materials, along with a video trailer reflecting the workshop process, are complementary parts of this report and can be accessed via the www.bcore21.eu