



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

*Department of Social Work*

*International Master of Science in Social Work*

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# “Inclusion of Participation Rights of Children within Nongovernmental Organizations”

## Fostering Child Participation in Gothenburg

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to find out how the concept of child participation is being used within four selected NGOs working with children in Gothenburg. Child participation is just one of the principles of the CRC and many researches have been carried out about the concept. To understand how nongovernmental organizations in Gothenburg foster child participation, I designed some research questions which getting appropriate answers to the questions give me a broader understanding of how child participation is been enhanced. The study focuses on four nongovernmental organizations, which are Bryggan, Gyllingen, Bonavia and Save the Children and analyzes their different perceptions about the concept of child participation. Data were collected through interviews with the organizations. The paper concludes that Children whose views are taken seriously are also an important tool in protecting the child. When being acknowledged as an individual with rights and competence children are being empowered to act and influence matters of their own concerns.

*Key words:*

**Convention on the Rights of the Child, Child Participation and Nongovernmental organization**

## **Abbreviation**

<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>NGOs</b>	Nongovernmental Organizations

## **Definition of key words**

### **Convention on the Rights of the Child**

It is a legally binding international instrument sets forth the civil, cultural, economic, social, and political rights of children.

### **Child Participation**

It is children influencing issues affecting their lives, by speaking out or taking action in partnership with adults.

### **Nongovernmental Organizations**

It is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information.

## **1. Introduction**

Child participation has been the subject that has led to international and local discourses, ranging from research and publications in conferences and concrete projects. It is a concept that is sometimes misunderstood and a right that is often difficult to ensure. One of the reasons for this is strongly rooted in the traditional view of children in almost all societies. From the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, children were viewed as properties of their parents and biologically immature, making impossible for infants and very young children in particular to manage on their own. This means that, it was the adults or parents who have the power and duty to make all decisions, because it was in the best interest of the children. Children are labeled with roles, obligations and expectations given to them by society, culture, economic status and gender at birth (Corsaro, 2005). Children are seen by adults as individuals who do not know anything and must be taught and molded into traditional society roles (Ibid). Such belief and tradition has made it very difficult for child-right advocates to convince the society that it is in the best interest of the society when children are included. It will benefit the society in the long-run when children are allowed to take an active part in their social lives, and taking part in decisions that affect them.

Every society perceives children as leaders of the future; this is where the problem exists. If children are seen as future leaders but are not allowed to actively participate in all matters affecting their lives, it cannot be guaranteed that after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, they will suddenly become competent and mature. But today, through the promotion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the perception of children and childhood has changed. It has been an important instrument in changing the way children are viewed. One important view is that children today have rights which they didn't have before the CRC was ratified.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child especially the "Participation Right" was a right I never knew that I possessed when I was a child. Every issues that concerned me was decided by my parents, for example where to get my education, religion, where and who to live with etc. I was forced to agree on everything even though this was not what I desired. I never got the chance to contribute in decisions taken on my behalf. My silence as a child affected me for many years even after my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday; I was always shy to express my opinions in my family, in school, among friends. The fact is that I realized I was depressed and felt as if I was an object for adults to manipulate. But my story changed when I learned about the CRC and

one of its principles which is child participation which I was so curious to know more about it that is; what it is all about, how it can be used, what are its impacts and so on. I think this study is meant to satisfy my curiosity.

### ***1.1 Aim and research questions***

The main aim of this study is to achieve an extensive understanding of practical ways used by non-governmental organizations in Gothenburg to enhance child participation within the organizations and in the community. I also want to understand the impact of child participation on children in particular and the community in general. To get a wide understanding, the following questions are aimed to guide the study:

1. What are the Nongovernmental organizations' perceptions of child participation?
2. In what ways have the non-governmental organizations, involved children in identifying their right to participation?
3. To what extent do children participate in decision-making in the organizations?
4. How do the organizations help children to participate in decision making in their communities and also to contribute their views in their communities?
5. What is the impact of child participation according to the organizations?

## **2. Global and National Context of Child Participation**

### ***2.1 Child participation from a global context***

The Convention on the Rights of the Child abbreviated as CRC was adopted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1989 (Ghandhi, 2006) defines a child as any human below 18 years old. The convention was not only intended for young children but also for adolescents who may already be functioning in many ways of adults. The convention defines how children should be treated in different areas of their lives. It recognizes their rights to survival, development and protection and also to take active roles in matters that concern them. It also recognizes the rights of the child to express his or her views when it states " The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of child's choice" (Ibid: 131).



The CRC document is clear evidence which proves that children and young people have the interest and capacity to participate and are able to make decisions to address issues and problems that concern them. Thus the CRC is like a framework for defining obligations, goals and strategies for meeting the needs of children. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child formally and explicitly acknowledges the rights for children in international law and it also introduces a dimension to the status of children by recognizing that children are subjects of rights, rather than just being recipients of adult's protection. The rights demand that children themselves are entitled to be heard (Ibid). Recognizing children as subjects of rights is expressed in some articles in the Conventions. This article requires adults to recognize the values of children's own experience, views and concerns.

Children's rights to participate is based on article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to express an opinion on matters that affect them. These views should be taken seriously, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. According to the article, children are actors of their own development. The articles of the CRC especially article 12, addresses the legal and social status of children. It does not give children the rights to become autonomous, right to control over all decisions irrespective of their implications, does not give them the rights to ride over the rights of their parents but rather it introduces a radical and profound challenge to traditional attitudes, which assume that children should be seen and not heard. The convention does not have the right to participate as an article but it does contain articles that are considered as participation article. The convention provide all necessary means to encourage and enable children to make their views heard rather than forcing children to participate.

The CRC is carried out and implemented in most countries through non-governmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations are powerful structures that can carry or implement policies that will have impacts on the life of many people. NGOs ensure that the problems, development and concerns needs of the citizens are addressed. The NGOs aimed at promoting and facilitating, through specific program and actions, the full implementation of the CRC. They advocate on behalf of children by raising awareness about the convention.

## ***2.2 Initiatives of Swedish Government to promote child participation***

Sweden ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. The aim of children's rights policy in Sweden is to ensure that children and young people are respected, given the opportunity to develop and enjoy security and allow them to participate. The government's policy also aims to implement the rights of every child under the CRC. Children should be seen as competent, respected individuals. It stresses on the fact that children must be allowed to express their views as far as possible, and should be allowed to be important sources of knowledge on issues that concern them. Thus, decision-makers and others working with issues that affect children should take account of the human rights of all girls and boys under the age of 18 (Regeringskansliet, 2010). A national strategy to implement the CRC was adopted by a unanimous Riksdag in 1999 as a basis for child rights policy and the objective is to reflect in all decision-making that affects children (Ibid). The strategy is primarily aimed at decision-makers at national, regional and local level and also at various professional groups whose activities affect children and young people. Another way Sweden has promoted the rights of children and young people in Sweden is by appointing children's Ombudsman whose main duty is to participate in public debates, promote public interest regarding key issues and influence the attitudes of decision-makers and the public. The Ombudsman for children in Sweden submits a report every year to the government and the reports address the situations of children and young people in the country (Ibid).

## ***2.3 Barriers to child participation***

Children and young people lack support from their parents to participate because parents fear of losing control over children and young people when they become more confident as a result of their experiences of participation (ECPAT, 1999).

Today, young people struggle with drug addiction, violence, psychological problems due to environmental stress and other societal problems which damage their capacity to participate in projects (Ibid).

Some communities believe that young people's ideas, opinions and abilities are subordinate to that of adults even when they have received training, the community still rejects their effort to participate.

Many organizations recognize the participation of children and young people in theory but not in practice. Since adults are in the management position, they have the final say on how much responsibility and authority is delegated to young people. Also it is very necessary for the whole organization to be in support of children and young people participation. But in some cases, the organization disagreed regarding the type and manner in which young people may participate in their projects and this hinders their committed involvement (Ibid). Child participation may be hinder when an organization lacks the capacity to follow-up young people seeking to become more involved in program activities (Ibid).

### **3. Previous Studies**

This section is a review of some researches or previous research linked to participation studies, research will be relevant for the practical material and research questions.

A study about participation by John Davis (2007) shows that in the UK, children were prevented from full participation in the normal activities of the society in which they live. Davis discussed some reasons why children and young people in the UK were excluded from participation. It included lack of money, lack of local facilities, lack of trust, lack of opportunities to access employment and lack of participatory process. Participation helps the social development of children and young people and develops their sense of responsibility and independence. When children and young people participate in projects, it stipulate their ability to share, take account of participant's feelings, manage time and communicate with others which can improve decision-making, confidence and self-esteem. Children's participation should be related within work places and it is argued that individual staffs, organizations or services will have something to gain when children and young people are encouraged and supported to participate in decision-making processes. The benefits are that; it will influence the design and delivery of service and it will enable children to introduce new and innovative ideas, child involvement will also help to ensure the effective use of resources. Although children and young people find participation very rewarding, it is also frustrating when the local authority are slow to act or promote children participation. However, the author suggest that the situation can be changed when there is direct and long term contact between children, young people and adults.

According to Barbara Bennett (2003), a way of enhancing children's participation is to invite them in conferences and give them opportunities to be heard. The author views the participation of children as a means of raising awareness. She observed that during the UN Special Session in 2002, there were more than 360 children ages between twelve and eighteen who attended and actively participated in the conference. Children have been left out from the policy making process. Their rights have been defined in an adult-centric manner that ignores their reality and lived experience. Adults have preferred children to be seen rather than heard. Children were interviewed about their opinions on reasons for barriers to participation and the following reasons were highlighted which are; discrimination based on stereotype ideas adults have about children, language barriers and jargon, lack of education, lack of time and resources and lack of information. The author also highlighted strategies and methods for involving children and young people which can also serve as guidelines and there are as follows; clarifying children's responsibilities and clarifying adult's responsibilities. Children also suggested on how governments can involve them in developing policies by providing them with information using child-friendly and simple language, provide outreach in a variety of media, give them regular and prompt feedback and keep them up to date, be open about the resources available and many. There also suggested on how civil society can support them and they also identified gender and other different issues in youth participation. The author did not only argue in favor of child participation but also discuss about the dangers of children and youth involvement.

Sarah and Shyamol (2007) view child participation as a means through which power is expressed and it is seen as a key to other rights. This means that participation has been an empowering tool for children to speak clearly and with authority. As a result, children and young people should be a center of development activities and not be the passive targets of the good intention of others. Participation is a process that is unstable and open to change. Child participation at the macro level aims at promoting liberal democracy and prepares the children to play their part as active citizens in existing structure. The article also highlighted different forms of participation in which consultation is viewed as the dominant form of children participation where children are consulted at key points in the project cycle of NGOs through regular programs of meetings. The article also discusses the experience of a local NGO in Bangladesh known as Amra. In the beginning, it was made up of children in the street. It is a development agency which aims at drawing children into the development agency. This NGO felt increasing pressure to children's participation especially in their

advocacy activities. A part of the culture of child participation is to emphasize the agency of children and downplays the significance of adults. The NGO took a different form due to the influence of adults who have been critical about the form that children's agency has taken. Instead of been an inclusive organization, it became dominated by middle class participants who have the tendency to reproduce the pattern of exclusion in wider society by age, class, gender and (dis)ability. Smaller and slum children no longer feel free to go to the organization or speak in meetings. As a result of the experience of Amra, the authors suggest that the form taken by children's participation in Bangladesh can be explained by the structure of the development industry that promotes it.

Nigel Thomas (2007) develops a theoretical framework for understanding what is meant and talk about children's participation. He focuses largely on children's participation in a political world and he also focuses on collective decision-making by children. He defines participation as taking part in an activity or taking part in decision-making. Participation is often used to mean being listened to or being consulted. This is in contrast with active participation where children have reasons to believe that their involvement will make a difference (Sinclair, 2004). The purpose of child participation is to uphold children's rights, to fulfill legal responsibilities, to improve services, to improve decision-making, to enhance democracy, to promote child protection, to enhance children skills and to empower and enhance self-esteem (Franklin, 2000 cited in Sinclair, 2004 and cited in Nigel 2007). Most participation focuses on service development or delivery with less attention given to policy or strategic development (Kirby et al, 2003). Although Children and young people's participation were having little impact on public decision making, there was evidence that good participatory work improve young people's confidence as well as giving them opportunities to make new friends (Kirby 2002 cited in Nigel, 2007). Some authors criticize the theory and practice of children's participation. They argue that many projects fail to achieve good outcomes because there are unjustly selective in the types of children they recruit, they do not allow the children to take decision-making positions and fail to create dialogue between children and decision-makers. In the UK, there was a demand to lower the age of voting to sixteen years. This is aimed at giving children the opportunity to take part in elections. There are very few signs of children and young people participating in the process that actually produce important political decisions.

Some years ago, the welfare of children was included under the composite concept of 'Women-and-children' (Berry, 2000, p.243). Children's needs were pronounced in the context of mother-child relations rather than looking clearly at children themselves. It becomes more difficult to include children in the society rather than excluding them. Consequently, children must be differentiated from parents, the family and professionals. *"It is through working towards better understanding of the social condition of childhood that we can provide a firm basis for working towards implementation of their rights"*(Ibid, p. 243). Sociology of childhood is very necessary in that it draws attention of some neglected features of childhood and provides a better account of how the social order works; and to use this knowledge as a basis for righting children's wrongs.

The sociology of childhood has changed the understanding of adults about what it is to be a child and also how it is different across time and across societies. The sociology of childhood views children not as being objects of adult work but as being competent and contributing social actors. It is necessary to consider the extent to which children reproduce and transform structures surrounding their lives and also the extent to which they are effective in voicing out the conditions of their childhoods. Consequently, adults should understand that children's own wishes and expressed needs are important to be constructed and implemented in social policies and practices (Ibid). Adults have to carry out work for protecting children and providing for them so that they have a securely based environment within which they may participate in working through issues that affect them(Wintersberger,1996). Berry thinks that if children are socially controlled, their ability or strength to participate may be limited. Therefore, adults should honor the three Ps that focus on children which are protection, provision and participation.

Child participation is just a little part of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many literatures mention the subject in a general way but not limited to local non-governmental organizations. For example how NGOs in Sweden in general and Gothenburg in particular promote child participation. Also there has been very little research on how successful child participation has been so far. There are theories of how to measure child participation but very little or no examples of how successful it has been in practice.

## **4. Theoretical perspectives**

The study is based on the theories of empowerment, social theories of childhood, participation, advocacy and right based approach. These theories are important because with them, I will be able to explain and compare my results. Child participation is part of the right based approach just as the other theories include the concept. The theories belong together with the right based approach.

### **4.1 Empowerment theory:**

Empowerment according to Adams (2003:8) is *“the means by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and to achieve their goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives”*. The theory focus on how people can gain collective control over their lives in order to achieve their interest as a group and also as individuals. Literally, empowerment means *“becoming powerful”* and it also refers to *“users participation in services”* (Ibid: 8). It is a political idea in which the concern of power, ownership of power, inequality of power and the obtaining and redistribution of power are central (Croft & Beresford, 2000, p.117 cited by Adams, 2003). Empowerment is a political concept and the political dimension of the concept is not party politics, it is not even a legal term derived from the law; but it is a concept which is being colonized by professionals especially those in the field of social work. Empowerment is a method used by social workers to raise the power of people who lack it (Thomas & Piersen, 1995 cited in Adams, 2003).

According to Adams, there are different ways of practicing empowerment and these are as follows; self-empowerment, empowering individuals, group empowering, empowering organization and so on. Self-empowerment means to involve people to take power over their own lives (Ibid). For service users, it could mean challenging their disempowerment, have more control over their lives, being able to influence others and bring about change (Croft & Beresford 2000, p. 116 cited by Adams, 2003). It is very important for workers (in an NGO for example) to be empowered before they can empower other people (Stanton 1990, p. 122 cited by Adams 2003). Self-empowerment is used as a basis of challenging oppressive practices in societies.

Groups can work effectively to empower people when individuals in them feel empowered. Service users are empowered when they are given knowledge and information that will enable them to have direct access to their chosen services. Freire (1986 cited by Adams, 2003)) provide a key reference which is essential to an understanding of the process of empowerment. His work based on consciousness raising (that focuses on the individual state of mind) is an important process of empowerment. Dialogue between people and education are very important in the process of empowerment according to Paulo Freire. Barriers to empowerment reflect to those inequalities associated with ageism, racism, sexism, classism, disables and other factors which contribute to people's oppression. The barriers can be overcome when people become aware of the conditions of their existence, they acquire the ability to intervene and change it (Freire, 1986, pp.80-1 cited by Adams, 2003).

*"Groups can provide support for the individual, reduce the risk of isolation, offer a context in which personal skills can be developed and practiced and a means by which an individual, whose consciousness has been raised, can work towards fulfilling heightened personal expectation"*(Adams,2003:77). Some features of self-helped and user-led groups are as follows; all members are equal, each make individual decisions, each member join because of their individual problems, free participation of all members(Michael Moeller,1983,p.69 cited by Adams,2003).

Organizations are empowered when they are committed to promote greater participation by service users and involve them in consultative and planning meetings. It is important for organizations to develop comprehensive empowerment strategies (Barnes & Bowls 2001, p. 165 cited by Adams, 2003).

#### **4.1. 1 Empowering Children**

As a group, children are the least powerful members of the society because usually, they are not expected to have useful ideas and insights of their own. It is not conducive to the development of children when they are portrayed as helpless victims to be rescued. The image of victimized and helpless children often stands for powerless people as a whole. Empowering children within their families, organizations and communities is thus an important element in breaking with false charity which keeps people dependent on gifts of goods and services from more powerful groups. A right-based approach promotes the opportunity for those who are excluded to negotiate from a position of strength and dignity. It means that children are active participants in the processes that involve them, and not passive and dependent objects of



social policy (Barlett et al, 1999). Children are considered to be motivated towards positive change and competence and the emphasis on strengths rather than deficits (Healy, 1998). The concept of children as partner in decision-making is an evidence of equality (Ibid).

Empowering and educating children and youths to have a strong sense of self is very important. It is essential that children know that their opinions matter and that they, even at their young age, have something positive to offer others. Thus it is necessary for organizations to allow the children for the first day to take an active role in the organizations and they should be provided with an environment where they are allowed to express their feelings without any feeling of fear.

#### **4.1.2 Guiding principles in the process of empowerment**

Horelli (2001) highlighted some principles to guide the process of empowerment which are as follows:

Children and young people must be given a sense of ownership that the work being done belongs to them.

It is very destructive to harbor unrealistic expectations of what children and young people can do for both themselves and the adults working with them.

Children and young people should be discouraged from feeling that they have to do everything themselves. They should be encouraged to lay off difficult tasks to the professionals.

Adults and young people must communicate constantly and openly for any partnership to work. They should listen to young people's request and follow through with their ideas in order to encourage them to act.

Children must adhere to democratic principles and establish ground rules of fairness and respect for minorities. They must know the principles of personal choice and democracy, secret ballots, equal time to ensure fair discussions.

Strength of the empowerment perspective recognizes the power of optimism, on the part of the service worker and service user, for achieving significant improvements in the quality of service users lives (Healy, 1998).

#### **4.2 Participation theory**

The term participation is a process of creating a society that is inclusive of young citizens (Boyden & Ennew, 2004). Roger Hart (1992:44), describe participation as *"a process of sharing decisions that affects one's life and the life the community in which one live. It is the*

*means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured*". To him, participation is the "*fundamental right of citizenship*" (Ibid: 64). According to Hart, much work that terms itself child participation is not authentic participation at all but is manipulation, decoration or tokenism which is the bottom three steps. To him, participation is authentic when children clearly understand what they are doing and voluntarily chose to contribute (Hart 1992). He places child-initiative activities at the top of the ladder of participation where he indicated that in practice, it depends on a project's goals and condition whether activities are best initiated by adults, with decision making shared with children, or by children with decisions shared with adults, or initiated and directed by children alone. He considers the top five steps as increasing participation and there are: assigned and informed, adult-initiated, shared decisions with children, child initiated and directed, child initiated, shared decisions with adults (Roger Hart 1992:4 cited by Malcolm Hill & Kay Tisdall, 1997). At the lowest level of the ladder, children may be mobilized to help with short-term actions if they agree with the goals. Genuine democratic processes do not begin until children are consulted about their own ideas and their views are taken seriously.

The term participation is related to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Child participation means involving children in the decisions that affect their lives, the lives of their community and the larger society in which they live. Children's participation is a difficult concept to understand and sometimes difficult to practice. Most the definitions of participation focus on decision-making and taking action. Participation is a term used by those working with children and young people to mean a situation where children think for themselves, express their views effectively, interact in a positive way with other people, a process of listening to children, giving them space to articulate their concerns, taking into account their maturity and capability and enabling them to take part in planning, conduct and evaluation of activities within or outside the family sphere, which may imply them in decision making (Van Beers, 1995). The ability for children and young people to participate is not inherited but instead, it has to be learned in childhood (Hart, 1992). Thus according the CRC, it is their legal rights to participate in matters that affect them.

Children's rights to participate are not limited to few children representing other children at special events but it is about all children having their voices heard. Children have the right to participate in decision-making in the family, in schools, organizations, community, at the

national and international levels. When children are denied their participation rights, other rights such as the right to life, health, education or protection may be weakened.

#### **4.2. I Benefits with child participation**

The benefit of involving children in decisions will become more relevant for children and better solutions will be made. Children themselves will benefit from participation in many ways. They will increase their skills such as dialogue and negotiation, power, confidence and enjoyment while taking part in decisions that concern themselves.

Child capacity is built through participation. This means, they learn specific skills such as leadership skills, health promotion and livelihood skills. Participation empowers children and young people to become political actors through civil society organizations and involvement in community affairs children's clubs, pressure groups. Involving children within the governance systems of organizations and also ensuring that the activities involving children are really in their interest will empower the children.

#### **4.3 Social theories of childhood**

Before, children were neglected and marginalized because of their inferior and dependent position in societies (Jens Qvortrup, 1993 cited by Corsaro, 2005). Adults often look at children in what they will become in future and not the present state of the children. Children are rarely viewed in a way that appreciates what they are. Their needs, desires and lives are often seen as a social problem that are threatening and need to be resolved (Ibid). To understand childhood, Corsaro highlighted two theories; traditional and constructivist theories.

The **traditional theory of socialization** is the "*processes by which children adapt to and internalize society*" (Ibid: p.8). It also means that the child is seen as being apart from the society and must be shaped and guided by external forces in order to become a fully functioning member in the society. There are two models of socialization that explain how a child is viewed (Ibid). The **deterministic model** focuses on how individuals relate to the society. The society was also recognized as a powerful determinant of individual behaviors (Wentworth, 1980, pp.38-39 cited by Corsaro, 2005). The child is trained and directed by the society and the child plays a passive role (Ibid). Two other approaches arose within the deterministic model whose views of the society were different which the functionalist and reproductive models are.

The **functionalist model** focused on what the child needed to internalize and which training strategies to ensure such internalization. The functionalist model was challenged by the **reproductive model** which argues that conditions or requirements of internalization of society could be seen as a kind of social control that could lead to class inequalities (Bernstein, 1981; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977 cited in Corsaro, 2005). They instead focus on the advantages enjoyed by people who have greater access to cultural resources. They also focus on the different treatments of individuals in social institutions particularly the educational system that reflects and support the prevailing class system (Corsaro, 2005). The functionalist and reproductive theories are criticized because they focus more on the outcome of socialization of children. They also underestimate the active and the innovative capacities of some members in societies thereby, minimizing the importance of children and childhood in the society (Ibid).

The **theory constructivist** provides us with a more active role for the child (Bourdieu, 1993 cited by Corsaro 2005). One of the best constructivist approaches is the psychologist Jean Piaget. He has carried out many studies about children and their development that had an impact on the image of the child in developmental psychology. He believes that infancy can interpret, organize and use information from the environment in a way different from adults. He is also concerned with the actual activities a child can undertake to deal with problems in the external world (Ibid). Piaget human development is primarily individualistic and is contrary to Vygotsky's who is another important constructivist theorist in the socio-cultural of human development. He argues that in dealing with problems affecting the child, the child always develop strategies collectively that is interacting with others. Thus his human development is solely collective.

However, the constructivist theory has weaknesses in that its main focus is on individual development which is evident in the repeated references to the child's activity, child's development.

However, a sociological perspective of socialization known as the notion of **interpretive reproduction** was adapted that focuses on the importance of collective activity. That is how children negotiate, share and create culture with adults and each other. Interpretive focuses on the innovative and creative aspects on children's participation in society. This term implies that children create and participate by taking information from the adult world to address their

own matters. The reproduction term focuses on the idea that children are not only internalize in the society but they actively contribute to cultural production and change. The term also implies that children and childhood are been constrained by the societies and cultures of which they are members. The notion of interpretive reproduction emphasizes on language and the participation of children in cultural routines. Language is very important and central to children's participation in cultural routine in that it conceals cultural, social and local structure and also acts as a tool for maintaining social and psychological realities (Ochs, 1988, p.210 cited by Corsaro, 2005). Participating in cultural routine helps children to gain insight in to the productive nature of cultural participation in a play routine from which they derive much pleasure (Ibid).

#### ***4.4 The right-based approach***

A right-based approach is a theoretical framework that focuses on international human rights standards and is aimed at promoting and protecting human rights. A right-based approach seeks to integrate the standard, norms and principles of the international human rights system into the policies, plans and processes of human development (Kirkemann & al, 2007). The plan, policies and processes are contained in international law. Right-based approach helps to promote empowerment of people especially the marginalized, participation in the formulation of policies, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups and accountability (Ibid).

##### **4.4. 1 Empowerment**

The right-based approach provides strategies for empowerment of the marginalized in that it focuses on the beneficiaries as the owners of rights and as the center of development process (Ibid). The goal of empowerment is to give people the power, capacities, and access needed to change their own lives, improve their own communities and also to have an influence in their destinies. A right-based approach works towards strengthening the capacity of the right holder to make their claims and of duty bearers to meet their obligations (Ibid).

##### **4.4. 2 Participation**

A right-based approach requires people to have a high degree of participation in their communities and also in civil societies. This kind of participation must be active, free and meaningful. According to Kirkemann & al (2007), a human rights-based approach requires that people should participate actively in all the stages of activity (which include; design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) and to all types of actions which (include

policies, legislation and programs). Also to ensure that participatory and democratic processes are institutionalized locally and nationally.

#### **4.4. 3 Non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable group**

A right-based approach must give particular attention to issues of discrimination, equality and vulnerability (Ibid). A right-based approach requires program designers and other staff to consider local circumstances when identifying local population. This means that development efforts must engage vulnerable groups such as women, children.

#### **4.4. 4 Accountability**

A right-based approach addresses both the positive and negative obligation of duty bearers. The positive obligation is to respect, recognize, promote, protect and provide rights and the negative obligation which is to abstain from rights violation (Ibid). A right-based approach also provides for the development of adequate laws, policies, institutions and methods used to respond for the violation of rights.

### ***4.5 The advocacy theory***

According to Christian Children's Fund, a non-governmental organization, defines advocacy as "the process of actively engaging in activity to support, plead or argue in favor of a cause with the view to influence and facilitate change. It can also mean an action directed at changing the policies, positions or programs of any type of institution" (Save the Children, 2005). Advocacy involves speaking up, drawing the attention of the community to an important issue, prepare the community or peers to influence policy change, delivering messages to those who influence policy makers and directing decision-makers toward a solution. Advocacy is a strategy that is used by non-governmental organizations, activists and even policy makers themselves to influence policies. Advocacy is about the creation, implementation and enforcement of policies. It is a means of addressing problems that are aimed to solve through other programming strategies. Advocacy is considered as a key mechanism under a rights-based approach, where rights holders strive to claim their rights and hold others to account (Ibid). It is also an important factor of rights-based programming, focusing on building constituencies around different issues and working to change the broader context in which an agency works.

Advocacy is a tool that can enable people's views and desires to be heard, it can stimulate active debates, solve problems and promote awareness. Advocacy can also promote better

identification of real needs and effective solutions and lastly, it can create power from effective representation.

Advocacy works should be based on two important activities; to help duty-bearers meet their obligations and to empower and support rights-holders to claim their rights. An important goal of advocacy is to increase participation by making decision-making a more inclusive and democratic process in which children's opinions, views and wishes are included.

#### **4.5. 1 Types of advocacy**

There are two main types of advocacy which are; people-centered advocacy interventions and policy advocacy interventions (Ibid). People-centered advocacy is a set of organized actions that aims at influencing public policies, societal attitudes and socio-political processes that enable and empower marginalized to speak for themselves (Payne, 2005). People-centered advocacy goes beyond the idea of advocating on behalf of the marginalized to the practice of enabling and empowering the marginalized to speak for themselves (Ibid). The integrating principles of people-centered advocacy are participation, communication and legitimacy. People-centered advocacy helps to clarify the roles of different set of actors in bringing about changes.

Policy advocacy intervention facilitates communication between communities and change agents. This means that it focuses on working with governments and donors in order to influence policies and practices to impact more positively on the beneficiaries. The role of policy advocacy is to change on a macro level.

## **5. Methodology**

In the methodology part, I will discuss the methods I used to achieve the objectives of the research and the reasons why the method is the most appropriate for this study. I will also discuss how the research was carried out and delimitations of the study.

### ***5.1 Method of research***

The aim of the research is to achieve an extensive understanding of practical ways used by local NGOs in Gothenburg to foster child participation within the organization and in the community. I also want to get an understanding and knowledge on the impact of child participation according to the organizations. I found the qualitative method most appropriate in order to seek to understand my research topic from the perspective of the local non-governmental organizations it involves. This method is very effective in obtaining specific information about behaviors and opinions of a particular population. One of the importances of qualitative method is its strength to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. The qualitative research is also important in that it allows the subject being studied to give much richer answers to questions asked to them by the researcher (Holm & Solvang cited by Kvale, 1996). This method also gives valuable insights which might have been missed by any other method. The qualitative method is fairly different from the quantitative method in that the latter is fairly flexible in that researcher asked all participants identical questions in the same order and the response categories which the participants may choose are ‘closed-ended’. While the qualitative method is more flexible in that the researcher ask ‘open-ended’ questions using different words or orders thus allowing the participants to freely respond in their own words and not just simply saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

### ***5.2 Data Collection***

The semi-structured interview guide is considered to be the most accurate tool for data collection. In this kind of interview, the respondents are given enough time to talk about their opinions on the topic. The aim of this form of interview is to understand the point of view of the respondent rather than making generalization about the topic of focus. Open-ended questions are used in this form of interview and some follow up questions arise during the interviews (Kvale, 1996). Kvale states that “*Advanced preparation is essential to the interaction and outcome of an interview*” (Ibid, p. 126)). Before the interview, questions were prepared ahead of time and this allows me to be prepared and appear competent during the interview. The questions were carefully designed to arouse the interviewees’ ideas and



opinions on the topic of interest. The interview started with a definition of the situation, introduction of the topic of conversation and questions that steer the course of the interview (Ibid).

Since it is my first time to meet with the respondents, I first asked a few background questions such as the interviewees' role within the organization, responsibility, duration and others before asking questions that focus on my topic of interest. The background questions are intended to warm up the interviewee and allow him to get in the interviewing mindset. In order not to be leading in my questions, I begin my questions with what, why and how (Ibid). For example, in what ways does your organization use the concept of child participation? How can you enable children to take a role in the organizational aspect of your work? The interviews were duration of one to two hours.

Since I only made interviews with one respondent in each organization, there may be a risk that maybe any of the respondents have over exaggerated their own organizations' capacity when it comes to child participation. They may have their own interest to give more positive picture of how child participation is included within the organization than what is maybe possible.

### ***5.3 Validity and Reliability***

According to Kvale, validity ties into the whole process of the study, from the planning stage to the final report (Kvale, 1996). While designing the interview guides, I endeavoured to make the questions understandable to the interviewees. I did whatever possible to ask questions in the right way, rephrasing and clarifying while maintaining the meaning so that the respondents understand. Follow up questions were asked during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in calm environment where respondents felt secure to express themselves freely. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. In the analysis, I consistently referred to the interview transcripts and some of the voices of the respondents are reflected in the analysis. I reflected on some theories and previous researches that were related to my findings such as empowerment, participation, social theories of childhood, advocacy and right based approach theories which all gave context to my findings and analysis. I tried to formulate the questions in a way that will be well understood by the interviewees. But since some of the interviewees are not familiar with the concept, they did not understand some of the questions. Therefore, gathering data from both primary and secondary sources that is interviews and previous researches strengthens the validity of the

research. However, I was able to investigate what I wanted to investigate about ways nongovernmental organizations in Gothenburg enhance child participation.

### **5.4 Generalization**

My aim as a researcher is to get a wider understanding of NGOs perceptions of child participation; therefore representativeness of the sample is of less important. This is a small scale qualitative research based on a small sample of interviews, therefore the findings cannot be generalized (Kvale, 1996). I have only selected four organizations, by using four organizations I cannot generalize and conclude that the result from these organizations represent other organizations in Gothenburg. I can only present results from these four organizations and compare the results from the different organization with one another. Rather than to draw general conclusion, I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the topic I chose and how it is perceived within the organizations studied(Ibid). According to Stake, single qualitative studies are not an adequate basis for generalization (Stake, 1994, cited by Kvale, 1996). He suggests that qualitative studies should be aimed at producing research that can inform and enhance the reader's understanding (Ibid).

### **5.5 Ethical Considerations**

According to Kvale, informed concern involves “*informing the research subjects*” and “*voluntary participation of the subject*” (Kvale, 1996:112). In respect to what Kvale said about informed concern, I called the organizations on phone to inform them about the topic I want to investigate and the purpose of the investigation. Informing the research subject two to three weeks before the interview, gave them time to be prepared and make time for the interview. To protect confidentiality, I promised the research subject that I will not identify their names or any features that will be recognizable to others (Ibid). Although there was no written agreement between the researcher and the research subjects, I promised to delete all the information I recorded in the tape recorder.

### **5.6 Delimitations**

Although this research has reached its aim, there were some shortcomings or limitations. Firstly, my desire was to carry out a study of more organizations but because of the time limit, I was unable to fulfill my desire. I believe I would have more interesting results if the study would have included more organizations. Secondly, I contacted more organizations but had the opportunity to interview just four because the others complained of not having enough

time for the interview or cannot speak English fluently and some were scared that they may not be able to understand the questions since they are in English. Thirdly, the documents of these organizations were all in Swedish and were not accessible consequently; I may have missed to highlight some points.

My intention was to interview more than one respondents in each organization but due to their tight schedules and limited time, I ended interviewing just one respondent in each organization. I think I would have got more information that will increase the validity of this study if I had the opportunity to interview more respondents. It would have also been very interesting to interview the children to know their points of views about participation and how it affects them but due to limited time I could not realize this goals. Gilberts admits that research verified from more than one perspectives increase the true value and validity of the research (Gilberts, 2001). Another limitation was that three respondents representing their organizations were not familiar with the concept of child participation. As a result they did not understand some of the questions. Sometimes during the interviews I experienced they were not focused when answering my questions. They rather talked about other issues within their organizations. This made it difficult to me collecting the data I aimed for. As an example of this is when I asked one of the respondents for their definition of child participation; *“I don’t know about child participation, it is ehh.... There was a new law that has been around for about a year that children has the same rights as adults to have information about their parents’ illness and any information they want for example the psychiatric hospitals. We have other place where the psychiatric people can send these children to get more information about themselves, their role in the family and mental illness affects the family’s situation. I don’t work directly with child participation but I work directly with the group”*.

Obviously, some of the respondents are confused about the meaning of child participation. This has made it problematic for me to make a comparative study of the organizations. Since the NGOs are working with children, my pre-understanding was that these organizations have a clear perception of child participation and that the concept is being used within the organizations.

## **6. Findings and Analysis**

In this chapter I will present my findings and analysis of the results. The first part is an introduction of the selected organizations. After that I present the NGOs perceptions of child participation, reasons why they don't child participation within their programs, individualistic perspective, benefits, challenges, differences between the organizations and ways of promoting child participation.

### ***6.1 Background of the organizations***

#### **6.1.1 Bonavia**

Bona via is an association that has existed for about twenty years with the objective to help children and young people whose parent or parents are addicts of some kind. The idea Bona via is originally from Minnesota, which has found that abuse affects families in general and children in particular. This idea has now developed into Bona via here in Gothenburg which started in 1991. In a family where there is an addiction, the children become over-involved in the addicts' life. The children demonstrate some behaviors such as trying to rescue the addict.

The codependence children, feels deeply responsible for the addicted person and all the children think and talk about is the problem the parents are facing. The children often think that it is their job to get their addicted parents to stop addiction. To take away the guilt from the children, Bona via teach them how to be able to stand outside his/her parents' abuse and how to survive their parent's addiction. Their main objective is to inform children from families where there is an addiction about different things that can happen in the family when a parent is addicted with drug or alcohol and give them knowledge about roles that can grow out of that specific situation. In order to achieve their objective, they try to get children and young people to realize that they must take responsibility for their parent's abuse and though abuse is not their fault, they can help their parents maybe to change.

In Bona via meetings or classes, they use different themes, for example, they believe that all feelings is okay, and also that addiction is not something that can be cured by a child and this a reflection of their own experience. About ten percent of all children and young people today have parents who are considered to be addicts. So Bona via also aimed at showing the children and young people who go there that there are more who suffer and live with the same type of problems at home such as abusive parent. Children that go to this organization are between the ages 7 to 20 years. The children learn about alcohol and drug addiction and its

consequences for the whole family, meet others in similar situations and share experiences and lastly, recognize and accept their own feelings and needs.

### **6.1.2 Bryggan**

Bryggan is a nonprofit organization working for children whose parents are or have been present in the Probation Service. Its work is based on the child's perspective and based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the child's best interest always comes first. Children often feel responsible for their parent's departure and this leads to the feeling of guilt particularly the younger children who see themselves as the center of the world. They feel relief when they get to know where their parents are and their guilt disappears when they are told why the parents are in prison. The objective of Bryggan is to offer adequate support to the children through their different activities such as playing games, singing, eating and many others. The age ranges of children that go to this organization are between 0 to 18 years.

### **6.1.3 Save the Children**

Save the Children Sweden is a non-governmental organization. Their work is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Declaration of Human Rights. This means that, Save the Children is committed towards children's rights and the organization is driven by a will to influence and change the future in the best interest of the child. Save the Children since its creation in November 19<sup>th</sup> 1919, has been working for children's rights and have been very active in the process of making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality. This organization believes that children have special rights which states have an obligation to protect and also people can contribute to children having their rights fulfilled. It also believes that children themselves can also fight for their rights if they are given the chance and if they receive support and encouragement (Save the Children, 2005).

The main objective is to make the politicians and the community in Sweden aware of children's rights and that they should put the children's rights highest on their agenda. Their vision is a world which respects and values each and every child; listens to and is prepared to learn from children and gives every child hope and opportunity. Child participation which is one of the key features of the CRC is one of the focuses of Save the Children Sweden.

According to Save the Children, all citizens have the right to participate in the society and children are not exempted. Children's participation involves the right of children to be heard and take part in decision making at home, in schools, in the organization, in the community and also at the national level on matters that concern them.

#### **6.1.4 Gyllingen**

This organization focuses on children and adolescent aged 7-17 years. It is important that children get to meet others in the same situation. Through play, role play, painting, individual counseling, education and casual get together in the organization, the children are given an improved ability to handle everyday life with their parents which is the objective of the organization. They have a project which is known as the "Source Group" which started in 1996, where children go there once a week for one semester. The project focuses on an educational program on how children can take care of themselves even if they have sick parents. The program contains 16 different topics such as feelings in which the children are instructed to always listen to their feelings and take them seriously. They also talk about mental defense, the family, family role, communication, alcohol and drugs. They also have an "Adult Source" for both healthy and mentally ill parents where the parents gets education about their situations, how it affects their children and how they can see other needs of the children other than just being able to take care of them.

### **6.2 The NGOs perceptions of child participation**

The concept of participation is defined differently by the four organizations depending on the context of their work and those of their clients.

#### **6.2.1 Education as a tool to participation**

The respondent in **Bona via** view child participation as the *"ability to give children knowledge from their specific situation"*. The children, who go there, receive specific information about what happens in families where one or both parents have an addiction to drug or alcohol. *"Being able to receive knowledge about that specific situation, the children are able to make different choices for themselves within the family, in schools which will prepare them to participate in a different fashion than earlier"*.

This organization shares the same view as Barbara (2003), who also views education and information in a child-friendly way as one of the tools of participation. The respondent in Bona via believes that as long as one is a human being in an environment where they are

several other people, one is automatically participating in some way. *“Participation is by being and doing”* says Bonavia. Children should be recognized as human beings who have a saying in matters that concern them (Bona via). Bona via(respondent) focuses on the children and their needs and help to create opportunity for change and help for family to end their isolation and meet others in similar situations. Bona via is committed to listening to children by giving them the chance to explain their feelings and also to ask questions related to addiction. But it is difficult to say that the opinions and the experiences of the children are taken seriously in this organization because no evidence or practical example was given to prove that. Child participation is not a familiar concept within their program activities. Still it is possible to find patterns of child participation practiced.

Even if **Gyllingen** are not aware of the concept of child participation, they share the same view with Bona via. The respondent believes that children have the same rights as adults to receive information about their parent’s illness, about themselves and their role in the family. Gyllingen (respondent) thinks that children have a problem of saying no or making a decision. *“Children always say yes in helping doing things for others and they are not specially good in saying no I don’t want to do that or yes that is actually good for me, I want to do it, so they have a problem of making decisions of their own”*. In this way, children are believed to respond in a way they themselves perceive is the correct way of how to respond. The problem is that the organization does not trust that children are able to view their own concerns. Instead children act in a way adults expect them to.

Educating the children is a way of helping them to be decisive especially when it comes to helping others. But beside education; the children need to be supported by the adults to participate which this organization does not focus on. According to the traditional belief of adults, children and young people by virtue of their youth are to be protected and seen rather than being supported and being heard has been a barrier to their participation(Barbara,2003).

The children within Gyllingen do not participate actively. They receive education on how to cope with life in their families. It is believed that this will strengthen them to take part within their own family and in the society. The organization listens to the children, but still their views are not implemented within the programs of Gyllingen. Therefore I consider the children’s views are not taken seriously. The children take part and participate only within activities, such as taking part in different games. Instead of children being consulted (Nigel,

2007), they receive information and education by adults within the organization. During class, children talk about their experiences, and different questions are answered about their thoughts and their situations at home. Gyllingen focus on educational matters only and are very little concerned about children's needs and rights to take part and actively participate.

The respondent in **Bryggan** views child participation as *“seeing every question from the point of view of children and seeing what is best for children and also giving children the opportunities to express themselves and also to decide what they think is best for them”*. This is in accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Just like the other two organizations, Bryggan does not actually work with child participation since the respondent is not familiar with the concept. Unlike the two organizations, Bryggan actually don't educate the children. They only make the children aware about the organization, and the facts there are other children facing same situation as them selves. *“What is most important is to protect the children from their parents who are in prison or out from prison and also to create an environment that is safe for the children and that environment is Bryggan”*.

The stereotype ideas that young people need to be protected from harm or stress prevent them from using their available capacities to participate in issues that concern them (Barbara, 2003). Child participation in Bryggan involves refreshment, entertainment activities and other interesting performances where the children take part but end up not having a long effect in the lives of the children (Hart, 1992).

### **6.2.2 Participation promotes the best interest of the child**

Talking about the importance of child participation, the respondent in Save the Children states that “If you make a decision about children that will influence their lives, then we have to think okay, how do this affect the children, how do they think about this, and do they have ideas how we can change like the structure..., then the outcome will be so much better because it will be the outcome that is good for the children and they will feel good in that outcome”. She compared child participation to a democratic system when she said, “And also like in democracy, if people don't feel they have influence then there is no point to have a democracy either”. In accordance to Article 12 of the CRC, the respondent in Save the Children admits that all children, no matter their ability or status, should have a say in all matters that concern them. The respondent also affirms that participation is a means of working and an important principle that should be applied at all levels; home, national, local and international levels when she said, “They should be participating all the way somehow



and also on matters that affect them on the international, national and local level” . Many people that work with children rights neither they are very theoretical like they read about it, studied about it and then when work with children, it is good to also have experiences, meeting children and listening to them”. From the moment children are born, they automatically become citizens. However, they are sometimes treated as less important and their views matter less. Though, naturally adults have more power than children, the exercising of their power can either enable or prevent children from becoming active citizens.

An important aim of Save the Children is that all children of Sweden should have the possibility to influence issues of their own concern. The respondent stated that, “...and also one thing that we do and that I am proud of that we do is when we have like direct activities for children”. To realize its aim, the respondent admits that the organization works with a lot of direct activities with children. They always include the concept of child participation within their projects. According to the respondent, children are always involved in all Save the Children projects. These include involvement in planning processes, implementations and evaluations. Save the Children believes that children should be participating throughout projects and activities. However, one of the challenges of this organization is that the opinions of children are not of much importance to some adults like politicians. She stated some reasons why politicians don’t sometimes listen to children when she argued that, “... even in Sweden, many politicians are not really interested in that and they think that it is like, it takes too much time, it takes too much money to listen to children as well”. The respondent thinks that sometimes it can be difficult to listen to children and make use of what they say. Yet it is very important to listen to children, because it is by doing so that one can understand the best interest of the child.

Save the Children help and encourage children with disabilities and very small children who have difficulties to express their views in words. They do this through writings, play, drawing, poetry. The respondent thinks that children can express their views if adults create the opportunities for them to do so.

The respondent in Save the Children believes that a child should always be free to express his views, feelings and needs. The child should be heard and its views should be respected and it should be taken seriously and have an impact on decisions (Nigel, 2007). Listening and taking into account, the view of the child does not mean that adults are deprived of their responsibilities when it comes to child welfare, safety and protection. Child participation does not also mean that children have all answers on matter that affects them. Children should

not be left alone fighting to achieve respect for their rights. Instead, adults should work in close collaboration with children to develop methods and strategies. When adults support children, it would lead to change and strengthen the children to exercise their rights for their own benefit and the organization (Davis, 2007).

Save the Children as an organization ensures that children are encouraged to contribute their opinions on matters that are important to them. It does not mean that children have to be forced to contribute their opinions if they are not willing to do it, it is voluntary. When adults listen to children and take into consideration of what they say, children will increase their self confidence and develop their participating skills (Ibid).

According to the respondents, the three organizations Bryggan, Gyllingen and Bona via are not familiar with the concept of child participation. The respondents have different perceptions of the concept and none of the organizations include the concept in practice. The three organizations have stereotype image of the child as helpless and a victims. This deprives them of realizing children's capacities and competence when it comes to being active in decisions concerning themselves. The respondents are more familiar with the concept of child protection which is the main objective of their organizations.

### ***6.3 Reasons for not including child participation within their projects and programs***

#### **6.3. 1 Unaware about the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Since neither Bonavia, Bryggan or Gyllingen have a clear understanding of the CRC, child participation is not included within their projects. The CRC clearly express child participation as an important principle in children's development. When I posed the question about what legal framework they work with, the responses of the three organizations were as follows.

Respondent Bryggan: *"we don't actually use any law here, we don't talk about law here but we don't have to break the laws"*; Respondent Gyllingen: *"we have some secret laws; we don't have to if someone gives us a call to know if they are a girl in the organization, we don't have to tell that information to anyone"* and Respondent Bona via: *"... I mean we are not actually in that respect. ... It is more a matter of opinion making"*. Their responses are evidence that the three organizations do not incorporate the CRC in their programs. This could explain the reasons why the respondents did not understand the concept of child participation which is one of the key pillars of the CRC. When asked about their

understanding of child participation, Gyllingen response was *“I don’t know about child participation”*.

Actually the concept of child participation is used within the organizations’ activities but the thing is that they are not aware that they are practicing child participation. With better knowledge, they could develop a method or a strategy how to incorporate child participation within their activities. The three organizations only focus on, what they think are protective strategies within their programs. However, the CRC recognizes special rights of children and their rights for protection. One way to protect the right of the child is to empower them to participate in all levels of decision making (ECPAT, 1999). Thus, participation is a fundamental right of citizenship (Hart, 1992). When children raise their voices and are listened to, they are more likely to protect themselves from exploitation. Children who are aware of their rights are less likely to be victimized.

### **6.3. 2 Protection and Participation**

The CRC dedicates particular attention to the protection of children. This is connected to the vulnerability of children. The CRC does this by articulating principles such as protection from abuse, sexual exploitation, unjustified deprivation of freedom etc. The topic of participation stated in Article 12, express a new status to the child who is no longer only seen as a beneficiary of protection but should be seen as someone whose opinions or views must be heard and taken seriously as an active participant in the decisions that affects all aspects of his/her life. The idea of protection is linked with the common ideas of adults’ views about children that children are vulnerable and should be protected (Corsaro, 2005). The traditional theories viewed children as consumers of the culture established by adults and which also believes that children are not part of a functioning society but they can only be part if they are guided and shaped by adults (Ibid). This is connected to deterministic model views the child as someone who has to be trained and directed by the society and the child plays a passive role (Wentworth, 1980 cited by Corsaro, 2005). This means that the society determines individual behaviors. The traditional theories of socialization (that is deterministic and functionalist models) ignored the active and innovative capacities of children and minimize the importance of children and childhood in the society (Ibid).

Gyllingen’s views about children and childhood is connected to the traditional theory in that they view the child as incompetent of taking responsibility and making decisions by

themselves. In Gyllingen, the children are not given the opportunity to contribute their views in the organization nor to taken any responsibility for anything that happens in the organization; *“Children don’t have to be responsible for anything that happens here... they just do what they are told to do and listen”*.

This means that the organizations is seen as tools of *“social control”* (Bernstein, 1981; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, cited by Corsaro, 2005:10), telling the children what they have to and consequently, turn to under look the importance of childhood and children in the society (Ibid). Although the children within Gyllingen are sometimes given the chance to express their views in words, drawing or writing, they are not taken seriously, *“So we don’t do any analyzing of what they write, draw or say. ... No we don’t consider them”*.

That is they don’t involve the children when taking decisions in the organization. This organization admits that children have a problem in making decisions for themselves, but how could they learn how to become decisive if the organization does not practically give them the chance to do so?. Bona via admits that they do not let the children participate in decision making in the organization but decisions are focus on their needs, *“They don’t actually participate in decision making in the organization..., but the children are absolute focus of the organization. ... They don’t actually come here and make decision about what will happen in the organization. ...the parents do”*.

Just like the functionalist model, Gyllingen and Bona via have very little concern on why and how to integrate children into the society (Corsaro, 2005). Programs based on entirely on adult perceptions of working with children’s needs and priorities are almost certainly destined to get it wrong and hence to waste valuable resources (Boyden et al, 1998). This is because, *“the adults will always look to theories of child development and learning that fit their views for explanations about the mechanism of socialization”* (Corsaro, 2005: 10).

Although the educational programs offered by the organizations have led to positive impacts in the lives of children, I agreed with Piaget(1968) that it will be much more better to adopt children’s perspectives in their works or programs because the way children perceive and organize their worlds is different from adults(cited by Corsaro,2005). Article 5 stresses that the child has the right to direction and the guidance of his/her parents or legal guidance. Directions and guidance are very necessary to compensate for the child’s lack of knowledge,

experience and understanding and should adapt to their evolving capacities. But when the child gains experience, knowledge and understanding, guidance and directions must be limited and the child should be given the opportunities to practically act on what he/she has learned.

Organizations working with children should be aware that the main resources in any project are the children themselves. When organizations treat children as dependent, incompetent, irresponsible and incomplete, children will feel little or no sense of ownership of the program and will probably have little commitment to achieving the goals of the program if they are not involved in establishing them (Ibid). Thus the need to consult children about their own perception of their needs, problems and resources is an important precondition for the development of programs designed to support and assist them. Thus, it is essential for organizations to recognize both children's need for protection and their need developing potential to act on their own behalf. The broad tendency in the child rights movement has been from a primarily protective position towards a growing acceptance of children's capacity to be active, contributing citizens, who deserve the right to exercise that capacity (Bartlett et al, 1999). Piaget (1968: 101) uses the idea of equilibrium which he views it as "*the actual activities which the child undertakes to deal with problems in the external world*" (cited by Corsaro 2005: 12). This means that when activities are based on their opinions, it can help them to overcome their problems because they will feel important and self confidence.

### **6.3. 3 Ethical Consciousness**

The three organizations; Gyllingen, Bryggan and Bona via works with vulnerable children and they fear of exposing the children if they let them participate in the society. One of their ethical considerations is confidentiality. Gyllingen admits that; "*We work with some secret laws; we don't have to if someone gives us a call to know if there is a young girl in the organization, we don't have to tell that information to anyone*".

They believe that there is always danger that the vulnerable children that participate in society may be put at risk due to their marginalized position in the society and their vulnerability. The works of the organizations are much more based on psychological work with families which in many respects have important ethical implications. Professionals in these organizations have the responsibility to protect the children from participating in any research process or in the community that may end up harming the children. The children that

go to those organizations are very depressed, embarrassed by their parents' attitudes, shy and feel guilty as a result of their parents' situations and do not even want to talk about what is happening in their families, so according to the organizations, exposing the children in the society will make them more depressed.

Mental illness, prison and addiction are something that children who see their parents in such situation will not like to talk about. It will be more easier for a child to go to school and say to the teachers my father/mother have heart attack or break the legs rather than talking about their parents being in prison, addicted or mentally ill. Another ethical issue is trust, the parents are the ones that chose the organizations for their children and they did that because they trust that the organizations will be a place where their children will feel safe and comfortable and will keep the secret of the families. The organizations have to maintain and build this trust by not exposing the children and their family through community participation.

Although the organizations do not let the children participate in the public for fear that they will be exposed, I think they can still encourage or promote child participation within the organization and in the family which will prepare the child for a higher level of participation in future. Making the children recognize that they are able to play active roles and are capable agents for social change will help to counter the image of the pathetic, helpless child. This can possibly change public views about these children as problem children to useful active agents of the society through participation and it could also influence policy makers to think anew (Petrén & Hart, 2000).

### **6.3.4 Individualistic perspectives**

The three organizations; Gyllingen, Bryggan and Bona via focus more on the child as an individual rather than a child in a group of children. Rather than looking at the children themselves, the needs of the children are expressed in the context of child-family relationship, or child-professional relationship (Berry, 2000). The individualistic concept views children's social development basically as the child's private input of adult skills and knowledge (Corsaro, 2005). One of the ideas of these organizations is to train and prepare the individual child to overcome specific problems in the future. Such ideas, negatively affect children's ability to participate in the society and their childhoods are also affected by the cultures of which they are members. Childhood should be viewed as an ongoing process of change

during which children come to master increasingly complex levels of thought and action as they move towards self-determination and maturity (Petrén & Hart, 2000).

Although the organizations adapt the sociological concept of socialization, but however, limit themselves only in the matter of adaptation and internalization. According to Corsaro (2005:18), socialization should also be viewed in matters of *“how children negotiate, share and create culture with adults and each other”*. The interpretive reproduction model views children as actively contributing to societal change, making sense of their culture and participate in it and not simply imitate the world around them (Ibid). Children can only make sense of the adult world when they collectively come together to produce their own peers world and culture (Ibid). It is thus important for organizations to stress on the importance of participation and provide children and youths with the security and shared understanding of belonging to a social group and collectively participate actively in the group. Working as a group provides support for the individual to develop and practice his/her personal skills (Adam, 2003).

The organizations should realize that when they work with the child as an individual, they forget to realize that there are also structural obstacles within the society which they cannot handle if they only work on micro level with individual children. That means that they cannot change society's attitude towards for example mental illness.

#### ***6.4 How Save the Children use child participation within their organization***

Save the Children is different from the other three institutions when it comes to how they perceive the concept of child participation, practically use it or promote the concept. The respondent in Save the Children Sweden admits that *“We work for children in institutions to ensure their rights to education, care and reintegration in society. ... It is a lot about school issues because they are in school all the time”*. They fight against discrimination that hinders children's right to education, increase children's participation in school, and end corporal punishments and bullying in school and also guarantee that more children learn about their rights in school. Talking about the benefits of child participation, the respondent states that *“child participation, promote the image of the child as a competent, active, thinking and conscious human being, living in interaction with the surrounding world”*. From the above statement, the child is not just shaped by its environment, but also actively shapes the world in his/her turns. Each child has its own experiences and its own ways to interpret and understand

the world. Children's ability to participate is not innate or inherited; it is something they have to learn in childhood (Hart, 1992). Thus, tools have to be given to the children so that they can change their lives at home, in school and in society.

Save the children has four working method as an organization; listening to children and other people who are experts on child rights, spreading the knowledge about child rights and child participation, direct work with children or direct support and change. They always take into consideration the four methods when carrying out their projects (Save the Children, 2005). One of the biggest projects that Save the Children practically involves children is Child Participation for Real.

#### **6.4. I Child Participation for Real Project**

'Child Participation for Real' is one of the biggest projects of Save the Children which has been going on for three years. According to the respondent the project, *"it is really about fostering child participation...we try to help the children to find their own strength and make their own project"*. The project leaders of this project go to five municipalities and form project groups with politicians, teachers, children and all different kinds of parts in the society are represented. The project leaders discuss with the different people on how to make child participation real and how to really implement it in the municipalities. The children who are involved are usually about 10-15 years old. The children get the chance to represent their municipality in big meeting where they meet politicians, parents and different people from the municipality. The children define the different child right areas themselves and they tell the politicians that they want to be involved in these areas and how they want to be involved.

Before the children meet the politicians and other people, the project leaders, have some meetings with the children to prepare them. In the meetings, the children express to the project leaders what they feel and what they want to discuss with the politicians. Follow up questions are asked to the children so that they can express themselves more. The project leaders do not tell the children what to do but always let the children to make the decisions themselves on what to do and the children always feel very strengthen. The project leaders have different methods to prepare the children for example they bring a video camera, so they have something called participatory video. They film what the children do (that is how they will present the issues to the politicians), and then they watch it and talk about it. According to the respondent, this project has been very successful in that the children learned to develop



their thinking and express it in a way that the politicians could understand them and decision making that takes place always after those meetings is much better.

The project is an example of how save the children conduct advocacy and lobbying activities to strengthen the rights of children in Sweden in general and Gothenburg in particular. Save the children work to influence decision makers and public opinions about children's rights. They do this by reporting on problem areas and rights abuses with the aim of getting the problem solved (Save the Children, 2005). Since children are recognized in the organization as having expertise of knowing what works for them, they are consulted on how to construct effective methods of involving them (Lansdown, 2005). The organization gives direct support to children and young people by giving them the opportunity to voice out their situation and also bring the attention of authorities and the general public to be aware of violation of children's rights. The organization uses the two types of advocacy (Payne, 2005), which is people-centered (that is creating awareness) and policy advocacy where they work with politicians with the aim of influencing policies for the benefit of children (Ibid).

This organization works with the right based approach which is an expression of how and why they work with children by tackling the root causes of the problems, so that the improvement will be lasting and can benefit all children. The right based approach requires a high degree of participation which is the main focus of save the children. Save the Children focuses on the participation of all children as a strategy to fight against violence and discrimination against children. Participation is very important because it empowers the children as individuals and as members of the organization, providing them with the chance to express their views, be involved in decision-making and take action (Adams, 2003). This organization views the children as active members who have the right and duty to contribute in the development of the society. Therefore, active participation of the children signifies that the organization also sees the children as human beings capable of deciding what they want and what they can do to achieve it. The organization helps to facilitate child participation through capacity building.

### ***6.5 Benefits and Challenges***

According to earlier research and theories, there are many benefits and challenges of using child participation. Within this chapter I will briefly describe some of the benefits and challenges that Save the Children has faced. I will begin by mentioning some major benefits

of using child participation. After that I will discuss the challenges and how to overcome these challenges.

### **6.5. 1 Influenced and Empowered**

In the word of the respondent of Save the Children, she emphasized that *“When I hold class with a group of children to discuss something, then like I said before we don’t always have to get involved so that they can make the decisions themselves, they can always feel strengthen if we don’t always tell them what to do. So I think it will... in a positive way. ... Save the children believe that the last step is to give full influence and then you could say that okay, these children will plan, they will decide, they will do everything and then they have full control”*. This means that, children are being empowered through their participation in the activities and projects of the organization so that they can contribute to the decisions that affect them as individuals and as a group at the organizational, local and national level. When children and young people participate in the activities of organizations, they are been empowered in shaping their lives and also to speak clearly and with authority (Sarah & Shyamol, 2007). An example is the project mentioned earlier. When adults listen to children and use their knowledge that is what they think, feel and say in a good way, the children become self confidence. The children in Save the Children are influence in that they learn about their rights, know the rights, learn how to demand and defend their rights. Involving children in programs has given them confidence and increase their self-esteem and the opportunity to enjoy their rights and makes them more dynamic.

### **6.5. 2 Capacity building**

In one of the interviews with the respondent in Save the Children, she expressed that *“... and I think that is the most important thing they can give us; new ideas, new perspectives. It is nice when they shock us a little bit as adults because then it is like oh how can they think like that, and then it is like, oh that is interesting, then we can also change our point of views”*

This means that when children participate, they learn particular skills such as leadership, communication, negotiation, debate skills and the skills they learn depend on the type of activities they take part(ECPAT International, 1999). In the Child Participation for Real project, the children are trained to communicate, negotiate and debate with politicians on issues that have to do with their rights. Actively participating in the different activities of the organization gives the children the chance to be trained on the skills needed to perform the assignments in the activity. Although children’s views need to reflect their level of understanding of the issue involved, it does not mean that young children’s opinions will be

given less importance because there are many issues that very small children can understand and contribute thoughtful views (Lansdown, 2005). The nature of the decision, the life experience of the child and the level of adult support will all affect the capacity of the child to understand the matters affecting them (Ibid). The staffs and volunteers of the organization spend time with the children helping them to understand certain issues relate to what they will be dealing with. For example, the children learn the rights they have as children, what the CRC is, the political system in their country, how the CRC is associated within that system, the laws and the policies that are in place to support children's rights. The children are made to understand the objectives of the organization and projects, the importance of participation and how their views and opinions will be used. This information is important to children because they need the information to participate.

### **6.5. 3 Child development**

The respondent in Save the Children observed that *"... before they(children) came into this project, they didn't know how to put words into what they were thinking but now, but now they understand like okay this is why I think this and I can even develop my thinking like this and I can express it and maybe someone will listen and they feel like they get a lot more self confidence"*. This means that children have interesting ideas that has contributed to the development of the organization. The respondent admitted that children chose to focus on issues that adults in the organization did not think about such as discrimination based on gender.

Organizations that practice genuine and active participation promote the social development of children in that the children learn new aspects of their own potential and learn about individual responsibility (Davis, 2007). The children are able to develop their thinking, understand it, express it, and develop competence ways that are responsible. Participation helps the children to become critical and compare perspectives that are vital to self determination and to the development of their own political beliefs (Save the Children, 2005).

### **6.5. 4 Better protection**

Providing opportunities for children to express their views has resulted to far better protection for the children. The respondent in Save the Children argued that educating the children about their rights, listening to them and giving them the opportunities to participate have led to better protection of children. She points out that *"If the children see something that is wrong or they want to do something about something, then we have to help them. The children act on it with help from us"*. Children are encouraged to talk and this has helped to empowered them

to challenge adults that abuse their rights. The silence of children has exposed them to sexual abuses for example within families which often has been for the protection of only the abuser (Lansdown, 2005). Adults can only protect children if they know what is happening in the lives of children because only the children can give such information. Furthermore, issues affecting the child in school such as racism, in homes can only be solved when children are allowed to express their views to the authorities to take effective actions (Ibid).

Children's participation will also benefit the organization in that it will help them to improve their programs and make them more effective and efficient.

## **6.6 Challenges of child participation**

### **6.6. 1 Limited knowledge**

The interviewee in Save the Children holds the view that, *"the biggest challenge we have is that there is not enough knowledge about child participation and like people don't even think it. It is not like top of the agenda."* According to her, lack of knowledge about child participation in the Swedish society has been and it is still one of their biggest challenges that they face daily. There is little recognition of the need to consult young people in practice, mostly because of the perception that children and young people's opinions and abilities are subordinate to that of adults. Consequently when young people receive necessary training, the community rejects their efforts to participate in projects.

Adults also have the belief that children lack competence and it is sometimes assumed to relate to age (Corsaro, 2005). For children's legal rights to be realized, adults most urgently need to learn about the rights of the child because children's participation rights need that adults should listen to them, understand them and take actions based on what children say (Van Beers, 1995). Save the Children offer courses for adults to educate them on how they can encourage children to participate and provide opportunities for them to do it (Van Beers & al, 2006). Although it has been very challenging to convince adults to order for the courses, however the offering the courses has been very successful in that it changes their perceptions about children and childhood.

### **6.6. 2 Participation as an exercise of power**

According to the staff in Save the Children, "... but I can see why politicians put it far down the agenda because they think it takes too much time and also it is about power off course. It is about given power on someone else especially to a child and it is just difficult for many people". Thus the biggest challenge they encounter is that the politicians are not interested in

child participation because they think it takes too much time to listen to children as well as too much money. The politicians think they have a lot to do especially in the municipalities and child participation is put far down the agenda because they think it is about power; that is giving power on someone else especially to a child. The reasons that the adults sets upon the exercise of power of children has resulted to prejudices based on age difference, classism, racism, which underestimate participation conditions and abilities, and restrain children's opinions by not considering them in decision making processes(Friere, 1986, cited by Adams 2003). In order to overcome this challenge, Save the Children makes a lot of efforts to create a dialogue between children and politicians with the aim of creating awareness (Ibid) and making them understand that the exercise of power that children hold is to have their opinions taken seriously and to responsibly assume decisions taken with others in matters that affect their lives and that of their community.

The organization prepares the mind of the children by letting them know that their proposals for change will often encounter competing interests (Lansdown, 2005). They help the children to arrange the important arguments to present their case with and challenge opposing views (Ibid)

## ***6.7 How Save the Children is different from the other organizations***

### **6.7. 1 Approach**

Save the children focus on children's participation from a child rights based approach which acknowledges the rights of all children to participate in everything that may concern them for example, in all their projects and activities, in the organizational work, when making decisions and others. Just like Hart (1992), Save the Children views participation as the key to ensure the fulfillment of the other rights. According to this organization, children's rights are based on the respect of their values as individuals and also as members of the society. The values concern all things in life every child can access despite the age, gender, religion, nationality and other factors.

The children are seen as rights holders and not passive beneficiaries (Kirkemann & al, 2007). The organization's duty is therefore to support the children to play an active part in achieving their rights including voicing their opinions to politicians to meet their obligation. Save the Children places the children at the center of all their projects and activities in that they always inform and consult the children in all their activities, shared decisions with children and

involve them in the planning or designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all their projects and activities (Hart, 1992).

While Gyllingen, Bryggan and Bona via since they do not use the Convention on the Rights of the Child as their legal framework, signifies that they are not aware of the right based approach which requires that children should have a high degree of participation both in the organization and in their community. According to Hart's ladder of participation, the three organizations manipulate the children in that when the children express their ideas through drawing for example, they have no idea how their ideas were used(Hart,1992). Many of their activities are organized for decoration since children and young people take part in the activities because of the refreshments, some interesting performance rather than the cause (Ibid). Although the organizations sometime give children the chance to talk about a subject designed by the adults, but the fact is that little or no opportunity is given to the children to formulate their own opinions and this according to Hart is called tokenism (Ibid).

### **6.7. 2 Methods and strategies**

Save the Children is different from the other three organizations because they use advocacy which is one of their working methods to influence decision makers and public opinions (Save the Children, 2005). They describe what can be done to promote children's rights by highlighting good examples and reporting on problem areas and rights abuses. Their advocacy methods include lobbying, marketing and working to change public opinion. They work to influence politicians and other decision makers both at the local and national levels in Sweden. They do this by means of direct contacts or dialogue, research, through the media, seminars, conferences, brochures, fund-raising letters, and internet. Their advocacy work are based on helping the politicians who are the duty bearers meet their obligation and helping children who are the right-holders claim their rights(Ibid). One important goal of advocating is to increase participation of children by making decision-making a more inclusive and democratic process in which children's opinions are included (Ibid). Through advocacy, Save the Children is able to confront injustices by working at the international, national, local and individual level to protect children and young people's rights. Using advocacy, they are able to know how to draw more attention to the needs of children and increase the level of their services. Save the Children also work on a structural level approach with the aim of changing

policies that will have an impact in the lives of thousands of children. This means that they work on a collective perspective.

While the three organizations; Gyllingen, Bryggan and Bona via do not work with advocacy method which is seen as the key mechanism under a right-based approach (Save the Children, 2005). These organizations focus just on child right protection but failing to realize that children posses other rights like the right to participation which is the only means through which the other rights such as the rights to protection, life, education, health can be strengthened(Hart,1992). The three organization focus on a child as an individual and their work is aimed at making changes in the life of the child as an individual.

### ***6.8 Ways of promoting child participation***

Many of the organizations in Gothenburg do not use the Convention on the Rights of the Child within their work. From the results I got from the interview, I realized that out of the four organizations I studied, only Save the Children use the CRC as their legal framework. It is therefore necessary for Save the Children to play a role of influencing the other organizations whose targets are children not to only focus on protection rights but also to use the right based approach in all their programs and activities. Below are some of the ways in which Save the Children promotes child participation;

#### **6.8. 1 Highlight good examples**

The staff of Save the Children informed that “the best way is to give good examples like really get the media, get the politicians or anybody to like show good examples on when it worked when children took part in decision making, and when it really had a good effect in the community”.

Child participation has and is still being challenged by many people because it involves opposing children’s traditional roles in the community and balancing power between children and adults. Though the changes of participation are not often welcomed, however through education and practical implementation, and benefits will change attitudes and beliefs (Hart, 1992). To promote child participation, it is therefore necessary that Save the Children show evidence of how successful it has been using child participation. Highlighting existing good evidence of involving children in projects, in decision making, may have an awareness raising effect. Through that, the community that is, organizations working with children, politicians, principals, teachers and others will be affected and this will lead to a more positive attitude towards children’s participation.

Save the Children for example educate teachers and principals about why it is so much better to communicate with children instead of beating them because it was so common. The result was that, the whole culture at that particular school changes so much that the teachers feel like they did not have to beat the children but communicating with them will help the children to stop behaving badly and the children feel that they get respect and everything becomes better. When it become successful, the organization try to make a bigger project out of it and at the same time, their local partners talk to the politicians. They talk to the adults about why relationships get better if they listen to children and have mutual respect for them. Adults need to change their behavior towards children; they need to know what is best for the child and the need to work in partnership with children. Save the Children work in partnership with other organizations like Red Cross in certain activities especially activities that have to do with the right of the child.

Listening to children is very important because it recognizes their rights to be heard and for their views and experience to be taken into account especially on matters that affect them. It is seen as an important tool to build respectful relationships with children they work with and it a key to the learning process. Listening to children help to understand how children feel about themselves and it is not only vital to the children who are listened to but also to the adults who are listening to the children. Adult support is very important because when they give the space and opportunities to children, they themselves will have a lot to offer (Save the children, 2005).

According to Lansdown, to carry out a genuine and effective participation involves three approaches; the consultative processes where adults gets information from children which they can use to improve policies or services, the participative initiatives where adults involve children in the development of services and policies that affect them, and lastly, promoting self advocacy which aims at empowering children and young people to identify and fulfill their own goals and ambitions(Lansdown, 2001).

## **6.8. 2 Increase awareness of child rights**

The CRC describes what children's rights include; protection, participation, prevention. Save the Children plays a role of increasing awareness of child rights by campaigning to protect and promote children's rights in local, national and international arenas. Since Gyllingen,



Bryggan and Bona via are not aware of the CRC, Save the Children can educate them on how to implement the right-based approach in their programs. Save the Children has extensive experience of capacity building on how to analyze and plan from a right-based approach (Save the Children, 2005). Using the right based approach is important because it ensure that projects are inclusive and open for all children active participation. Child participation can be promoted when Save the Children educate other organizations on child rights programming and right based approach by organizing seminars, training, workshops and also create a place for sharing and learning(Ibid). Save the Children should also create partnerships with academia which is important to develop child rights in public domain.

Research activities and dialogue with academia will help to strengthen child rights and promote the concept of child participation (Ibid). Advocacy is the main method of strengthening the right-based approach and to actively involve other organizations to a larger extend. Save the children should use advocacy within programs directed to influence or change laws, structures and policies at different levels from community structures to government bodies. Advocacy works to raise awareness about existing laws against injustice practices done on children.

An example of how Save the Children raises awareness is a case of children who organized themselves into a collective force and presented a report that states that about one thousand children were being discriminated in gym class in Sweden. The children presented the case to Save the Children and the organization try to make a campaign around and release the report, talk to the press, the media and make the public aware of what was going wrong. They work intensely with the children to educate them on how to work against discrimination in schools and also go out and demonstrate. They can make newspaper to write about it so that many people in Sweden and other parts of the world will get to know about it. Thus, participation of children and young people requires the full support of the staffs of the organization, their families, governments and the community for the implementation of their rights. Children are important partners who should be consulted in suitable ways that view them as having a great deal to offer (Save the Children, 2005). Therefore, working with children to prevent discrimination, violence and reduce the consequences where it occurs requires adults to work in partnership with children (Ibid).

## **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

My understanding of this study is that some organizations in Gothenburg such as Bryggan, Gyllingen and Bona via don't use the concept of child participation within their work. They are not even aware about what it includes. Contrary to the three organizations, Save the Children works with child participation and they include it in their programs, activities and projects. Save the Children believes that listening to children and taking their views seriously and involving them in the organizational works and in decision making benefits the children such as empower them, capacity building, social development and better protection of children. The organization and the community also benefit from child participation. Although adults are seen as the main barriers to child participation, however highlighting good examples of the impact of child participation and creating awareness according to Save the Children are some of the ways of promoting the participation rights of children. Children in this organization are being empowered to advocate for their rights through lobbying, dialogue with politicians, via media etc.

I think it is important that all adults, particularly organizations who are working with children, should be aware about the concept of child participation, what it means and how to use it in practice. Child participation doesn't mean that children always have the rights to take decisions about their own life, but it is adults' responsibilities to inform children and seriously take their views into consideration when deciding on matters concerning them. Actually it is children's rights being informed and listened to before decisions are taken that affects them. Children whose views are taken seriously are also an important tool in protecting the child. When being acknowledged as an individual with rights and competence children are being empowered to act and influence matters of their own concerns.

Therefore I think organizations like save the children who use the right based approach has an important role to play in creating awareness about child right principles within the community, government institutions and other organizations who primary targets are children. Organizations whose primary aim is to protect children should be aware that it is not only the protection effort of a child itself that protect the child. To let children take part in decisions affecting themselves creates better protection. Opinions of children should not be minimized because of their ages. It should be noted that those children no matter how small they may be if they are given the opportunity to participate, have often very important and useful ideas since they are experts of their own lives. There is a saying often used by people from my

country that “only the one wearing the shoes knows exactly where it hurts”. Only children know what their problems are and how it affects them. The important thing is to give them the chance, create a comfortable environment for them and support them to express their own concerns and take them into consideration.

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# Appendix

## 1) Background

- Name
- Occupation
- Educational background
- How long the respondent has been within the organization
- The respondent role within the organization

## 2) Reflections about children's rights to participation

- What is your definition of child participation?
- Do you have educational/practical experiences of this topic?
- What are the importance of children's rights to participation?
- The right to participation has, is and may continue to be a right insufficiently recognized and exercised by children, what could be the obstacles to children's participation? And how can the obstacles be overcome?
- In your opinion, what does child participation involve and does not involve?

## 3) Children's participation and organizational structure

- In what ways do your organization use the concept of Child Participation?
- What type of participation do you practice?
- What are the key issues to be aware of when preparing for children's participation?
- To what extend are you committed to listening to children in your work?
- How can you enable children to take a role in the organizational aspects of your work?
- In which projects does your organization foster child participation?
- How do children take part in participatory processes and to what extent do they take part in implementing programs based on their ideas?
- How would the project be improved if children are been involved in monitoring and reviewing the progress that is been made?
- What are the opportunities and constraints in increasing children's participation in project identification?
- What are children's beliefs and attitudes about their participation? What are the conditions under which they believe that they are being treated as partners?
- What happens when children participate? What are the outcomes for the children themselves and the settings of which they are a part?
- What are children's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about participation?
- How does participation change adult-child relationships? Child-child relationships? Local and national cultures of childhood?
- What are the implications for organizations when they support children as partners?

#### **4) Decision-making in the organization**

- To what extent do children participate in decision-making in the organization?
- How can you provide opportunities for them to participate more in the work of the organization?  
What barriers might need to be broken down?

#### **5) Integrating Participation**

- What opportunities do children have to contribute their views in the community?
- What decision-making structures exist in the community in which children can be encouraged to participate?
- How can you help children to take part in decision-making in the community?
- In what ways can you raise awareness about the need for child participation in the community?