Accessible Report

MFWS

FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION PROCESS:

PROGETT KOMUNITARJA

2019-2020

CHILDREN'S HUB

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society February 2021

MFWS

Young Persons' Council

Reported by: Michelle Cilia

Rewritten and made accessible by: Martina Oliva

' Hi everyone, my name is Martina and I am 16 years old student, currently also a member of the MFWS Children's and Young Persons' Council (Malta), member of the National Eurochild Forum and Maltese representative on the Eurochild's Children's Council (ECC, Brussels).

I strongly believe in child participation and the importance of giving children's voices the value they deserve. Children should be heard and taken into consideration, especially when it comes to issues that concern them. Their contributions come from a unique perspective, very different from that of adults, and this is why their opinions are crucial in society. Not only because they are the adults of the future, but because they are **THE CHILDREN OF TODAY**.

It was an honour to work on this accessible report and portray further the ideas children brought forward during this project.

Let us stand together for better open spaces, better wellbeing and even more inclusive child participation in our daily lives.'

Reviewed and improved thanks to:

The Children and Youth from the MFWS Children's and Young Persons' Council.

03/2021



Background:

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS) noticed that the children and society of Malta do not have enough spaces where they can meet and enjoy the feeling of being in a community.

This is why, the MFWS started an initiative called **Projett KomunitArja**, with **children as their priority**.



Article 2: All children have these rights



Article 2 says all children have the rights set out in the UNCRC, and individual children and young people shouldn't be discriminated against when these rights are realised. This covers both direct and indirect discrimination.

Article 12 - The right to have a voice

Article 12 of the UNCRC, clearly shows that children have the right to freely express themselves, be truly heard and taken seriously when it comes to all the things, they are involved in.

Article 24 - Health, Water, Food, Environment

Article 24 of the UNCRC says that healthcare for children and young people should be as good as possible, and also goes further than this by saying children and young people have the right to be both physically and mentally fulfilled.

Among other things, this implies that children and young people: should be able to live in a safe and healthy environment

Article 31 - The right to play

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) says that children and young people have the right to have fun by doing activities which they enjoy, dedicate time for play, rest and be creative with their hobbies. Like adults, children and youth should also be able to take part in cultural activities.

The MFWS together with 4 ministries:



The Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital **Projects**

• The Ministry for Sustainable development, **Environment and Climate change**



• The Ministry for Education



The Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and **Local Government**





- started to reach out to children to understand how they would like their open spaces to be.

Process and Consultation:

A **mixed-method** approach was used to gain information that is more valuable, meaningful and understandable.

In the beginning of the process (2019), the MFWS core team met with children during a number of PHYSICAL meetings with 2 primary schools, a scout group, 2 children's homes and 2 band clubs in the locality of Zabbar, Malta.

Further face to face sessions in other localities could not be held because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, ONLINE sessions were organized for children who attended Skola Sajf in the other 6 localities, being Siggiewi, St Venera, Kalkara, Vittoriosa, Qormi San Gorg, Qormi San Bastjan, Floriana and Pieta'.

In total 33 classes of children participated, with each class having 8 to 12 children.



In both **physical and online meetings**, the children were first given an explanation on the project and then asked to share their own opinion about what they would like to see in open areas by also illustrating their designs on **BLANK PAGES**. This was done in an **OPEN DISCUSSION** together with the MFWS Children's Hub member.

Online Survey:

The MFWS Children's Hub core team members made an online survey.

The MEDE Ethics board, approved this online survey and it was sent to all heads of state, church and independent schools in Malta and Gozo for a far-reaching distribution to all students.



A link to the survey was also uploaded on social media for added exposure.



The online survey was carried out between August and October 2020 and participation was completely voluntary.

Guardians were encouraged to support their young ones when filling in the form and write down what their child was saying about their own design of open spaces, at the back of the design itself.

142 correctly filled online surveys were received, but with no designs.





All the collected children's ideas and drawings will be passed on to a professional designer so that a prototype (MODEL) of the designs of open spaces can be created. This will be done based on the children's wishes expressed throughout the consultation process.

Findings from consultation with children at schools:

8 MAIN THEMES were set up to best represent children's views on how they would like open spaces to be and what they would like them to contain.



Theme 1: Green



Several of the children's drawings showed open spaces to be green.

30 children drew gardens with trees and flowers, picnic areas, green houses and turf.

15 put forward fountains and others voiced that they would like to have ponds with animals such as fish, ducks and turtles.

8 children suggested places for gardening and plantation of crops.

















Theme 2:



The challenge of obtaining renewable energy was brought up 17 times.

Suggestions to overcome this issue included: installing solar panels, solar heaters, water reservoirs, recycling bins, use of sea water and reusable material.

Theme 3: An extensive outdoor play area:

The majority of children mentioned playgrounds with swings and slides of different colours and shapes, such as, dinosaurs and pirate ships. 12 children called for water play, 6 children for a pool, and 9 for a trampoline.



Other suggestions included a sandpit, an outside library, a robot, a ball pit, climbing walls, climbing ropes, merrygo-round, bumping cars, a dog park and a jumping castle. Some children made a reference to treehouses, whilst others suggested a petting farm (zoo). An outdoor gym was proposed by a further 10 children.



Theme 4: An indoor facility (space)

A great reference was made to indoor sheltered areas and game rooms, supported by **2 key reasons**.

• Reason 1:

Activities like painting and crafts, that can be done comfortably inside.

• Reason 2:

Opportunity to play when the weather is not ideal.



In this facility, children wished for a toddler area, as well as areas where they can sing, play music, dance, and have indoor games like table tennis.









Theme 5: Different amenities (features)

Open spaces should be equipped with different amenities: toilets, restrooms with nappy changing and breastfeeding facilities and vending machines with healthy food alternatives.









Children asked for benches, gazebos and garbage bins. A free drinking water fountain and suggestion box were also mentioned.

10 children recommended for the Scouts headquarters to be in this area. 3 brought forward a car park, with some suggesting it to be underground. Only one child recommended wifi.





To make play areas safer, children suggested fences, a security person, and security cameras.

8 children suggested a first aid area with medical attention in place at all times.







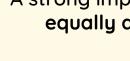
Theme 7: Sports facilities





A football ground was wished for by 10 children, while another 5 wished for a basketball court. Other spoke about a skatepark, bicycle areas, archeru, tennis, and hockeu.

Theme 8: Inclusivity.



A strong importance was given to play areas being equally accessible to children of all abilities.

15 children pointed out that play areas should be accessible for wheelchair users, children with autism or who have impaired sight.



1 mentioned a multi-sensory room which would improve the experience of play. 12 highlighted the necessity of different play areas for different age groups.

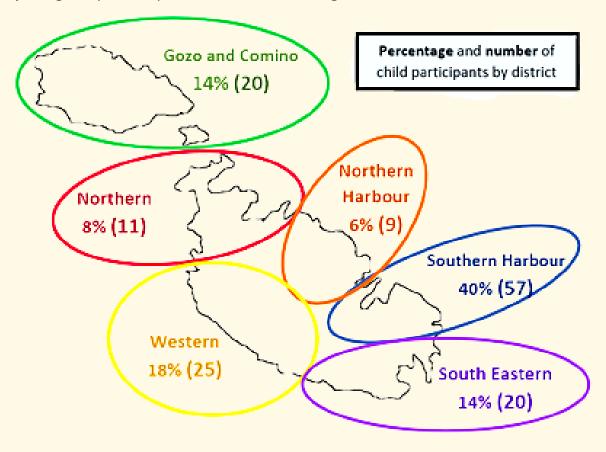




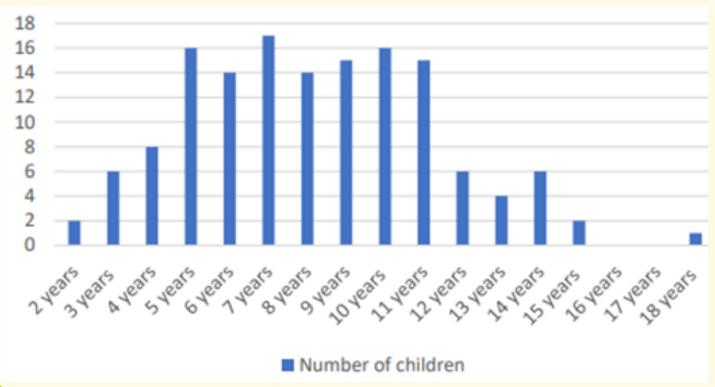
Findings from the Online Survey:

Demographic Data of the Child Participants (Questions 1-6)

A total of **142 children participated** in the online survey, after obtaining consent of their guardian/s. (122 children from Malta, whilst 20 from Gozo). The majority of participants were 5 to 11 years old.



Child participants by age:

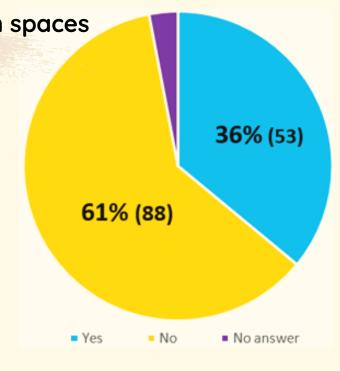


Satisfaction with the number of open spaces

(Question 7)

The majority of children answered that they are not satisfied with the number of open spaces available to them.

Only 1 child did not answer this question.



One thing which the children would like to improve in their community (Question 8)

When being asked to name one thing they would like to improve in their community, 118 children (83%) came up with valuable suggestions, 17 (12%) did not answer this question, and an additional 7 (5%) wrote that there is nothing that they wish to see any different.

Most of the children (over 60%) communicated the need for more open and safer places in which they can play and meet their friends, enjoy time with their family and practice recreational activities, both in the outdoors and indoors.

From these findings, 4 separate yet connected themes could be drawn out. These are:

- Theme 1 Greener spaces
- Theme 2 Open recreational spaces
- Theme 3 Safer spaces
- Theme 4 Cleaner spaces.

Theme 1: Greener spaces

The word 'green' was mentioned **34 times** in the received responses. An emphasis was made by the children to have more gardens and parks, LESS BUILDINGS as well as MORE TREES in their locality.

6 children wrote that the community they live in feels 'crammed' and 'suffocating'.

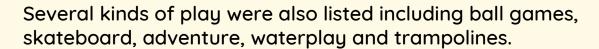
Children also shed light on the need for improvement in ACCESIBILITY and MAINTENANCE of already existing green areas within their community.

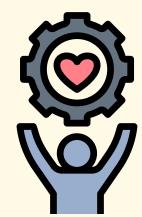




Theme 2: Open Recreational Spaces

Children pointed out the wish to have recreational indoor and outdoor spaces in which they can freely play, practice their sport/s and hobbies - both on an individual level as well as with their family and friends.





Some children stated that they would improve the availability and size of the playgrounds.



They also expressed the need for more spaces where they can practice physical activities, such as a gym, sports complex, areas for trekking, running tracks, football grounds and cycling lanes.

Creative activities for different age groups were also suggested by many. Examples included petting farms, crafts, drawing, as well as youth centres and places for older children to hang out.

Additionally, 4 children referred to the need of having shaded playgrounds and indoor airconditioned areas where they can play during the hot Summer months and also on rainy days.



Theme 3: Safer spaces

The issue of **safety and security was mentioned 20 times**. 3 areas of improvement could be noted:

- 1. More safety and security measures in public places within the community ensured by proper maintenance and security surveillance of children's playgrounds and gardens/parks.
- 2. Introduction of **car-free zones and bicycle lanes**; less traffic; and better roads and pavements for an improved infrastructure.
- 3. Enforcement of COVID-19 measures in the community to feel safer and reduce the risk of transmission of this virus.

Theme 4: Cleaner Spaces

The call for a cleaner environment was stated 20 times in the responses, with reference to the general cleanliness of their locality, less rubbish and more bins. 9 children shared the wish for cleaner air,

less noise pollution and less cars in their locality.



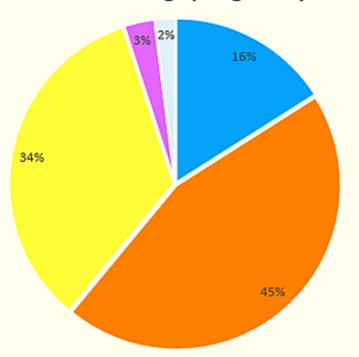


Benefits of having open green spaces (Question 9)

In this question, children could choose 1 of the following 3 benefits: a safe place to play, better health and wellbeing; and a place to meet your friends.

Almost half of the children linked open spaces to better health and wellbeing.

Benefits of having open green spaces



Other as written by the children:

"having adventure time"

"non-littered place, a place for people, and growing place for plants and trees"

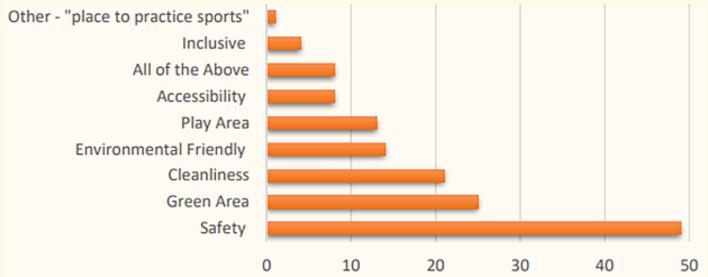
"where children who their parents can't pay to send their kids to practise any sports without paying. In (locality name) we have space, but it is useless for kids to feel free to play and enjoy themselves. It is a long time in court. Children needs space free of charge."

- Safe space to play
- Better health and wellbeing
- A place to meet your friends All of the above

Other

The most important things to keep in mind when designing and regenerating an open space for children (Question 10)

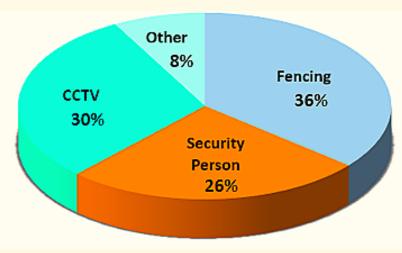
The following figure shows the children's choices, with inclusivity being the least chosen option and safety the most chosen option.



Safety Measures in Open Spaces for Children (Question 11)

51 children suggested open spaces to have **fencing**.

CCTV was chosen by 42 children and a security person by 37.



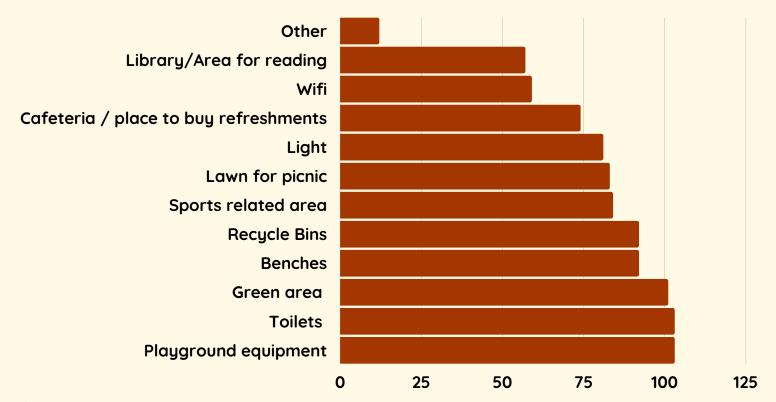
4 children gave the following feedback in the 'Other' section:

- 1. "This space shouldn't turn into a place where drug abuse can take place"
- 2. "No broken equipment or garbage"
- 3. "Soft floor"
- 4. "Sometimes children are left alone doing whatever they want. Perhaps if there will be instructions with CCTV where one can inform children that if they do offend other kids they can be prohibited from playing again in that place"

Amenities in Open Spaces (Question 12)

Children could choose from a selection of 11 options.

Playground equipment, toilets and green areas were the most preferred.



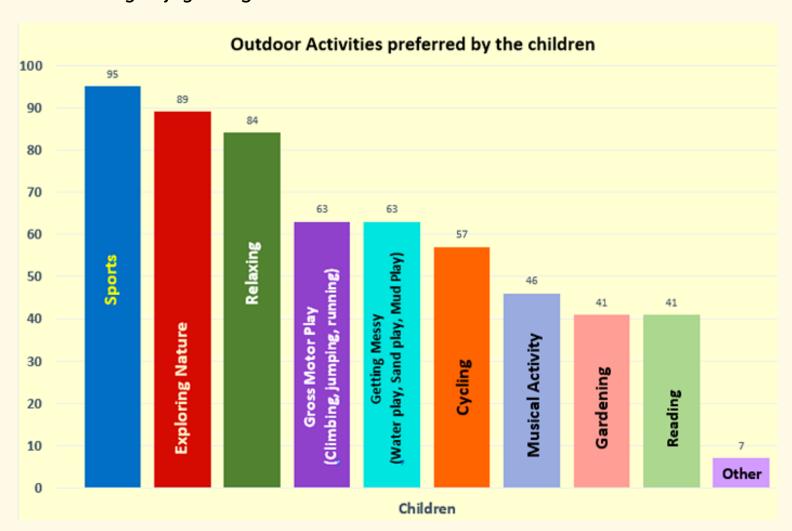
The 12 children that chose the 'other' option, suggested the following:

- Waterplay
- Monkey bars and climbing frames/ walls
- Trampoline
- Camping area
- CCTV and security guards
- Age appropriate playground equipment
- A good example is Kennedy Grove
- Music
- An area for indoor activities in case of rain or blistering sun
- Zip line
- Adventure activities and Obstacle course
- All the above except for Wifi as it distracts parents watching their kids



Outdoor Activities preferred by the children (Question 13)

From a list of 9 activities, children were asked to tick any of the activities which they enjoy doing.





Respondents who selected the 'other' box, gave the following feedback:

- Treehouse and Water fountains
- Kids over 10 years needs grounds to have fun playing, football, basketball and cycling instead of staying home playing online
- Fun play area with lots of slides, water fountains, bubbles
- Big screen movies
- Dancing with friends
- Classes to learn cooking or robotics or chemical experiment
- Trampoline



This consultation process, including the series of discussions with children and responses gathered from the online survey, brought forward 6 crucial and interlinked messages:

1. The majority of the child respondents are not satisfied with the open spaces currently available, and wish to see further improvements in their locality.



2. Half of the them linked the benefit of having an open space in their locality with reaching better health and wellbeing.

This strengthens the need to put much more efforts on the availability of open spaces.



3. The children showed **concerns on the environment**, when it comes to lack of cleanliness and greenery. They put forward ideas on how these open areas can be eco-friendly using recycling materials and renewable energy.





4. This consultation demonstrated how valuable play is in children's lives and intensified the need to provide open and clean spaces in which they can play.



5. Children's responses prioritized the need for **safety**. Throughout this consultation, children called for **better care taking**, **security and surveillance of playgrounds** and family parks, as well as road and traffic infrastructures.

This feedback also urges adults to **look deeper into these issues** so that open spaces can truly be a safe haven for children.









6. Significant weight was put on **open spaces being inclusive**, so that children with different abilities and specific needs can enjoy and make complete use of these areas.

Attention was also put on having areas in open spaces being dedicated to different age groups.

This is because younger and older children, both being at separate developmental stages, may have interests that vary from the interests of school-aged children.



Essentially, the aim of Progett Komunitarja can be summarised using a statement made by a child respondent in the online survey, when describing the benefits an open space as:

"A NON-LITTERED PLACE, A PLACE FOR PEOPLE, AND A GROWING PLACE FOR PLANTS AND TREES"

- in short, a community in which humankind is in harmony with each other and with Mother Earth.





