CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

AGENCY AND RESILIENCE
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Building a framework for child-centred disaster risk management in Europe

Israel Rodríguez-Giralt, Maggie Mort, Ana Nunes de Almeida and Ana Sofia Ribeiro

Introduction

What might child-centred disaster risk management (DRM) planning look like? We argue that this would certainly involve a cultural shift within what is a highly adult-centric and often militaristic milieu, towards recognition of the value of young people’s experience and expertise. To examine what this shift involves, we work with two versions of ‘culture’. The first entails regarding children themselves as a cultural group, by virtue of being disenfranchised from DRM matters, which in turn gives children a particular perspective on risk and disaster. Second, and as we saw from Chapter 1, ‘childhood’ itself is often universalised, yet children embody all the cultural differences and diversity found in society as a whole. To help promote culturally sensitive disaster planning, particularly in a changing and increasingly diverse Europe, we have developed a resource to assist decision-makers and practitioners in disaster management work in a more child-friendly way. This Framework draws directly on what we have learned from the children and young people participating in the CUIDAR project (see Figure 4.1). It draws on what they told us they needed to become resilient; how ‘adultist’ plans should change, and how authorities and practitioners within DRM need to listen strategically to benefit from the contributions of children and young people.

This Framework acts to combine evidence, reflection and recommendations to support policy-makers and practitioners who are not used to working with children and young people, to build child-centred disaster management plans. It also serves as a communication tool to help decision-makers and practitioners understand how to take account of children and young people’s needs and capacities in this
Our overarching point is that successful risk reduction requires adults actively to reach out to children to ensure they are heard in DRM processes including preparation, response, reconstruction, adaptation and recovery. In this way, it will be possible for each of the Framework steps to be followed. Whether creating new plans or reviewing existing ones, these steps will support the development of inclusive and culturally sensitive plans relevant before, during and after disasters.

Some readers probably wonder whether this field needs another framework, tool or resource: many of the agreements, recommendations and public policies for disaster risk reduction (DRR) have been articulated and circulated through ‘frameworks’. The Hyogo (2005) and Sendai (2015) Frameworks are good examples of this. Such frameworks provide guidelines for action and can help
communicate research, practice and policy across diverse audiences, although they often fail to reflect the more collaborative, open and controversial dimensions of the issues at stake. Our Framework aims to turn children’s experiences, needs and capacities into actionable knowledge, but without portraying these as incontestable evidence or into policy recommendations that must be ‘followed’ or ‘applied’ acritically, which can be the effect of many toolkits, checklists, and indeed frameworks. Our Framework is not a closed document; rather, it works to foster a staged debate about open, inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to DRM, as explored in part through our international film (see Figure 4.2):¹

Figure 4.2: CUIDAR international film²

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**Challenge adult imaginaries and prejudices about childhood**

As we have seen in Chapter 1, we began with a Scoping Review, collecting data, namely from policies, practices and projects relating to levels of children’s participation in DRM in each of the five partner countries. The majority of this material was in the form of educational programmes and awareness and information campaigns, revealing very little evidence of children meaningfully participating in community resilience-building or DRM more broadly. Interestingly, less than 8 per cent of our findings included either adult-initiated shared decision-making with young people or were led or initiated by children themselves. What seems to inhibit their participation are adult imaginaries about children and young people which consider them as intrinsically vulnerable, as objects of care or as passive beneficiaries/ recipients of plans, policies and decisions. Moreover, it appears that adults consistently fail to consider this age group as internally diverse.
As we have seen, CUIDAR clearly shows that children are not all helpless victims, and nor are they all equally affected by risk and disaster. Some groups of children (for example, coming from deprived social milieu and disabled children) are more exposed to risks than others, and some groups of children are less vulnerable than some groups of adults. Children are also active agents and can competently participate, along with adults, in DRR policies and practices. Some exploratory programmes and projects have been contributing to this move by exploring new ways of hearing from children through creative and participative methodologies (Fothergill and Peek, 2015). This move both supports the right to participation and inspires contemporary political and children/adults rights movements that demand more inclusive and participatory forms of ‘active citizenship’ (Trevisan, 2014).

So, challenging the children at-risk paradigm is a priority to build up resilient communities in contemporary societies. Indeed, the field of childhood studies has challenged this traditionally established paradigm, stating first, that childhood is not a natural reality or an abstract, universal category, but a historical or social construction, anchored in space and time. In line with Philippe Ariès’ influential work (1973), *L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’Ancien Régime*, childhood emerged in modern Western societies framed within the privatised and sentimentalised bourgeois family ideal: a child was regarded as unique (different from the adult) and irreplaceable. Furthermore, the child was attributed a specific place of socialisation, detached from the family working network: this place is now called school.

The statement that childhood is not a homogeneous condition is relevant here: gender, social class, ethnicity and age introduce diversity in an unequal landscape. Children are not abstract entities, deduced from a psychological or biological universal child. Children, like adults, occupy different places within the societies that diversify their childhoods. They are not merely passive recipients of social norms and practices. Children’s agency may become visible showing that they are competent and active in the construction of their lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live. So, children’s social relations are worthy topics of study, irrespective of adults’ perspectives or interests. Furthermore, children deserve to be considered as ‘beings in the present’ and not just as ‘adults in the making’, as sociologists Harden et al (2000) advocated. In this we can see how traditional perspectives, which portray children as mutable, unachieved, dependent or incompetent ‘human becomings’ (Qvortrup, 2009), become problematic. This is why, against the prevalence of
‘children at risk’ and ‘unreadiness’ paradigms, it is crucial to recognise children as active citizens capable of being involved in the development of policies for disaster prevention, preparedness and response.

Create high-quality participation to increase opportunities for children to have their voices heard

Inviting children to participate and engage meaningfully in debates with adults is no simple task. It requires time to engage in a process of reflection and recognition. As the CUIDAR Scoping Review showed (see Chapter 1), participatory initiatives that include children in DRM in Europe are scarce, and despite the existence of programmes such as UNICEF’s ‘Child-Friendly Cities’ we found that children’s right to have a voice was still largely unknown among organisations on the ground.

Unfortunately, where initiatives that require children’s views are gaining ground, there is a danger that their participation becomes instrumentalised. What we mean by this is how organisations may seek to extract information from children in order to legitimise some strategic goal or position, without enabling young people’s ongoing involvement in the development of policies or services. One respondent gives an example here:

‘It’s so good, you can fill a room, I’ve heard it. It’s very easy to work with the kids who fill the rooms and make a good photograph, isn’t it? And they clap their hands and laugh and smile for the pictures…. I heard a head of the parish council talking about “broadening the team”, “let’s work together because we need more hands and arms to work”. That is also instrumental, isn’t it?’ (Practitioner working on participatory projects, Scoping Review interview, Lisbon)

The danger of instrumentalisation was addressed by sociologist Roger Hart (1992), who visualised children’s engagement through a ladder of participation with ascending degrees (as shown in the Introduction to this book), ranging from tokenism and manipulation at the lower end, to higher rungs where adults initiate processes and share decisions with children, or even where children initiate actions and share decisions with adults.

Hence, for children’s full participation to occur it is necessary that adults see children as their partners, allowing them to set the agenda, creating a power shift. Yet, as we have seen, children are often excluded
from participation processes due to prejudices regarding their own competencies. However, as the Portuguese experience reveals, even young children (when supported) can give relevant messages to adults. For example, 4th grade children in Loures (aged 9–10), with the help of their teacher, made a video about flooding in their town. This video was shown at the MLE, where the Loures educational coordinator stated:

‘When I saw the 4th grade movie, … I have stories told by my family, in Bucelas, whenever there were floods people died. So for me the floods scare me a lot. So your film reminded me of some things that I didn’t remember and taught me others that I didn’t know either. It made me feel calm after overall, which is essential in times of disaster!’

The CUIDAR Dialogues with Children closely followed a process of democratisation and development. Designed by Save the Children Italy, as seen in Chapter 2, they aimed to bring about change for children, enhancing their inclusion in decision-making processes and in preparing and managing risk. Involving 552 children and young people in five countries, they engaged children from a wide range of cultural and socio-economic contexts, from areas of high and low economic deprivation to geographical differences, and children belonging to minority ethnic groups and migrant families. In Greece, the Dialogues also included deaf and hard of hearing children and children with vision disabilities. The diversity of participants made us aware of the intersectionality of children as an excluded group, and this required local adaptation of the learning techniques and content employed, respecting each child’s capacities, interests and experiences.

The progressive and incremental structure of the Dialogues began with the introduction of the right to participate as a tool to nurture children’s self-confidence in their own abilities. This unfolded using action-based methodologies, which included community mapping, interviews with local disaster management partners and identification of forms of communication for key messages. We found that our building blocks approach (starting with children’s rights, working with groups of young people over time, facilitating engaging, child-friendly learning and action-taking) was found to be significantly more impactful than a traditional ‘broadcast’ approach in which information or instructions are delivered to children as awareness-raising (Rashid et al, 2016). We found that ‘non-traditional’ methods worked best, such as field trips, engaging community speakers, games, modelling and community mapping (see Chapter 5).
In the Dialogues the children decided to approach different risks in-depth, such as earthquakes, forest fires or floods, choosing what they felt mattered the most for their community. While some Dialogues took place in traditional classroom settings, others were enacted in village halls, youth clubs and other informal community settings. Differences in settings showed us that while in school, expectations and perceptions about children’s capacities are shaped by their age and grade level, whereas in an informal setting, this is less likely to apply, allowing for other social factors to shape their involvement and our approach. Of course, there are some maturity differences between children and young people, and tailoring interactions for different preferences can be useful. Our Spanish partners discovered that when the children engaged with adults through CUIDAR, the younger children showed curiosity and wanting to know more about risk and disaster through question and answer, while the older ones preferred to engage in more interactive ways based on their own experiences. Thus, adults who engage with children also need to be sensitised for children’s particular styles of communication. As the Spanish experience suggests, one way to do this could be through a written agreement between all participants (children and adults) that establishes ground rules for participation.

Considering learning contexts, schools are generally hierarchical settings where children do not always feel at ease expressing their ideas. Also, the rigidity of formal curricula does not always allow the necessary time that participatory approaches require. Referring to her experience in a UK community project with young women, Thomas-Hughes (2018) stressed the importance of ‘mess’ in co-produced knowledge processes, requiring buy-in and flexibility from practitioners, teachers or researchers. As we have seen in CUIDAR, this flexibility may be more compatible with informal learning settings, assuming that facilitators are skilled at letting the children set the pace of the process. Of course, informal learning can and does take place in schools, and some pedagogical techniques involve participation, in the context of DRR, but where the topic involves community resilience building, we found school settings to be more restrictive.

A word of caution must be given concerning the capacity to turn children’s ideas into practice. Achieving influence and impact are among the great challenges for children, as they often feel their voices are not heard. Disillusion with participation can be an unwanted result, when children and young people perceive their participation bears no weight in final decisions. Often, due to economic and political constraints, it is hard to enact change. Hence, there is a need to set
realistic goals with children. During the National Policy Debate in Portugal, while discussing children’s participation in school security issues, one of the adult stakeholders from municipal services stated:

‘Children do not participate because they don’t have enough information and means to, either in security or in other areas. And this is because it doesn’t suit the adults who have the power. The only way to get kids to participate is to guarantee that there will be consequences of their participation. Otherwise the motivation is gone right away, because they come and say: I went there, participated and gave my opinion and nothing changed, so next time I won’t go.’

To concur with Lundy’s critique (2007) in “Voice” is not enough, fostering good and high-quality participation requires an appropriate space and a responsive audience. Through the process of Dialogues with Children, Mutual Learning Exercises and National Policy Debates, CUIDAR advocated for an ethical participation process, where adults commit to taking children seriously, creating a space of recognition for children’s ideas and capacities, facilitating their communication and establishing a trustworthy relationship.

**Inspire engagement with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through examples and tools for participation**

Children’s citizenship has become a relevant theme in contemporary social policy debates (Cockburn, 2012) and a major milestone here is the UNCRC (OHCHR, 1989), a binding agreement for all the signing countries. Very clearly, the Convention’s Article 12 (page 5) assures:

…to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

And consequently:

…for this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.
Article 13 deepens this principle, giving the child:

…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 the child’s choice.

However CUIDAR researchers noted widespread unfamiliarity with Article 12. Although children’s participation in decision-making that affects them is a right acknowledged through the Article, importantly the children we met in CUIDAR had little knowledge of these rights, mostly because very few projects in which they had been involved had ever made these rights transparent. Again, few adult actors – practitioners, experts, teachers – were aware of the rights afforded by the Convention. Yet once we explored Article 12 specifically with children and adults alike, a door opened for them to start seeing DRM as a core matter of concern. For instance, in the UK, the children found the idea of ‘rights’ very empowering, giving them ‘permission’ to speak and make sure they were heard:

‘Today I learnt that everyone has a right, to have a right, because I thought that we are too young to have a right.’

(Lilly, 9 years old, Rochdale, UK)

Article 12 also provided us with a foundation for building adequate spaces and methodologies for child-led identification and prioritisation of risks in their local communities, for discussing which impacts they considered more relevant and what different actors could do to mitigate them. They also had the opportunity to prepare and share communication plans, aimed at adults, the external stakeholders. Children’s feedback about this capacity-building process was positive and encouraging, suggesting an impact on their future attitudes far beyond CUIDAR. For instance, one of the participants discovered the importance of being informed and her active role in the community:

‘The project helped me to better know the risks of the place I live in and I have to explain these to my parents and the rest of the village.’ (Sara, 12 years old, Concordia Sulla Secchia, Italy)
And Magda (14 years old, Loures, Portugal) made a comment that showed the relationship between articulating something and gaining mutual understanding:

‘[In this Dialogue] we could express our opinions but also because we learned how to relate to each other.’

Creating MLEs provided spaces for interchange between children and stakeholders from the community. For some of the stakeholders this was a revelation as it was the very first time they had faced children as active partners in decision-making. These were also exercises in hearing and interacting with them, requiring adults to embrace different ‘codes’ or forms of communication. Testimonies were illuminating: ‘During the meeting, I became aware that there are adults who still care about what teenagers say’, and stakeholders themselves recognised: ‘… the urgency of ensuring the empowerment of children and young people in information and awareness-raising programmes’.

CUIDAR as a project has made visible many of the absences and limitations to children’s participatory rights in DRR. It showed that children’s rights in such decision-making processes are still far from being implemented in established political agendas, settings or processes (de Almeida et al, 2018). But through local participative experiences, ways of unlocking the potential of hearing and engaging children in decision-making processes became apparent. Article 12 of the UNCRC served as a tool of empowerment for both children and adults, affording them a legitimate space to begin work on inclusive DRM.

Create opportunities for intergenerational exchanges and sharing of community memories about disaster

‘Grandmothers and families can tell us very interesting things.’ (Edgar, 11 years old, Gandesa, Spain)

As outlined in Chapter 3, a key feature of our initial approach was to create a space for children themselves to identify what counted as disaster in their lives, in their places. Rather than offering young people a definition developed by the research team, or indeed from the extensive disaster studies literature, participating children worked this out through discussion and their own research. In many cases this began with talking with older adults and relatives. For example, the children in Gandesa interviewed their parents and grandparents, who, apart from speaking about risks and disasters that had happened locally
Building a framework for child-centred disaster risk management

such as forest fires, related memories of the traumatic and pivotal Battle of the Ebro in the Spanish Civil War. This provoked a big debate within the CUIDAR group. For half of the children, the Civil War was the perfect local case to focus on, opening up discussions about conflict-as-disaster, leading to discussions about conflict prevention, which went on to become an important theme for this group.

‘I vote for the Civil War because many people come and always talk about fires, but nobody has ever opted for the Civil War, they have never told us information about this and I think it’s a good time to learn a little about it and understand the suffering that many people experienced.’ (Gabriel, 11 years old, Gandesa, Spain)

‘It is the disaster that has had most impact on Gandesa and we could get a lot of information on the subject.’ (Anna, 11 years old, Gandesa, Spain)

Intergenerational exchanges and sharing of memories about disaster can be effective in encouraging participation, and such exchanges link strongly with recognition of children as citizens. Intergenerational practices can serve to raise awareness about risks, especially those hazards that may materialise less frequently. Working across generations and age groups can also help children expand their knowledge of their neighbourhoods, environments and landscapes, for example passing on specific knowledge about highly localised places that have flooded in the past. Such approaches also introduce a sense of temporality into what counts as disaster. This reveals the before, during and after of disasters, as important and interconnected phases of disaster, and this can promote discussion about prevention and forms of resilience. This sense of temporality implicit in the sharing of memories of extreme events has been explored extensively by disaster sociologist, Kai Erikson (1994), who argued persuasively that the ‘Aristotelian rules of plot’ (a distinct beginning, middle and end to any story) get strangely mangled in disasters. Sense of time gets disrupted in disasters especially where there is traumatic experience. Time becomes measured not by clocks, but by the disaster itself, by notions of before and after distress.

Intergenerational exchanges may also be key to challenging one of the pervasive prejudices about children and young people, in which they are portrayed as mostly self-centred and uninterested in other social groups. By contrast, we found that children have a strong interest in sharing memories and learning from other age groups, as they are
highly aware and concerned about their families, neighbours and the groups they perceive as having distinct vulnerabilities. Fothergill and Peek (2015) also show this from their extensive work with children in the long recovery from the New Orleans floods: children demonstrated eagerness to help care for their communities. A key step, then, in building this Framework has been to draw on such exchanges and to underline the need for adding a more communitarian ‘touch’ to DRM.

For example, in Concordia, Italy, the young people explored their own memories of the 2012 Emilia Romagna earthquake, producing a video about the destruction in order to challenge policy-makers about justice issues related to the town’s reconstruction work. They told the adult stakeholders about how they missed their old school, the theatre and the church. They had to go to school in a temporary building, which they argued was inferior to their old one. Memories of particular local places were important to them culturally, and they felt left out of decisions about reconstruction. This links strongly with research in disaster studies, which has shown that decisions about what is reconstructed after disaster send a powerful message about what is valued in/by that society. This is an aspect of disaster recovery that links strongly with memory and intergenerational relations (DeMond and Rivera, 2010; Cox and Perry, 2011).

Similarly, other groups working with CUIDAR chose to map their local area, creating situated timelines to understand the range of existing risks, before choosing which ones to research more closely. In Glasgow, Scotland, the young people living in densely populated tenement blocks expressed concern about fire risk and about older family members whose first language was not English and who might not understand safety information (see Figure 4.3). In developing a fire prevention resource that expressed situated risks and risk reduction solely through pictures, they were caring for, teaching and protecting their older family members and neighbours.

As the main facilitator of the Glasgow work acknowledged:

‘It’s been such a pleasure to have been involved in this, truly participatory work. I learned so much from the children I worked with and they amazed their teachers when they presented their work and views confidently in English, something that nobody would have thought possible at the start. Of course literacy is so much more than reading and writing, and CUIDAR allowed us to adapt the session plans to move away from the written word. We have some future firefighters and MPs too!’ (Steffi Keir, Save the Children, Scotland)
In an example of reciprocal benefit, adults’ specific cultural and linguistic needs were compensated for by children’s perceptive identification of risks, but older people’s experience also enhanced young people’s knowledge and understanding. As Brockie and Miller (2017) showed in their study following the 2011 and 2013 floods in Queensland, Australia, older people utilise previous experiences when deciding how to respond, and they also share this trusted knowledge with other locals.

**Communicate and explain risks carefully with children and young people**

In the 22 CUIDAR MLEs, children’s knowledge and perspectives about risk became visible to disaster management professionals and stakeholders. It can be seen from our film, ‘Transforming disaster planning – A child-centred approach’, that co-working with significant adults was very important for the children and young people as this allowed them to see evidence of mutual interest. The film shows a growing mutual respect between adults and children. When discussing and finding common solutions with stakeholders, the young people came to realise how much the CUIDAR process had enhanced their knowledge and their communication skills. They realised that much
of what experts, civil protection officials and others were saying about preparedness and mitigation was in fact familiar to them, but now they could make their own contributions.

How did this come about? We found that the avoidance of formal, plenary settings helped to support the sharing of knowledge between adults and young people, and it was important to allow the children to choose their own roles, helping to develop equal exchange with adults. The lack of child-friendly inclusive materials, planning processes and communication strategies in DRM was observed in every location. This showed the need for improvement in stakeholders’ capacity to involve children, and beyond that, to communicate with the general population. As can be seen from the film, young people felt empowered by organising and leading these events and were able to interact with adults as peers, discussing topics on which they, too, had some knowledge or expertise. The children contributed their advice on what methods and services would be appropriate for them and their peers, outlining what would work and what would not, suggesting ways they could contribute to preparedness, response and resilience-building. This set up a positive, equalising foundation for further collaboration and co-design, building partnerships that had great potential to strengthen the work of the professionals and services, as well as the resilience and awareness of the young people.

The children told us they were concerned about the quality and reliability of information that was circulated before, during and after disasters and emergencies. The group in Lorca, Spain, where children’s memories of the earthquake were still alive, spoke of the need to counteract rumour mongering and how to get messages through to sections of the population that may be outside of mainstream channels and networks, particularly very young children and elderly people:

‘It is very important to know the safe roads and places to get to the meeting points, and learn to distinguish between official information and rumours during the crisis.’ (Aitana, 17 years old, Lorca, Spain, 2017)

‘If we are not sure, there is no need to pay attention to the people who are saying that there will be another earthquake … you have to ask him/her: who told you? From where you got the information? Because there are many people who lie.’ (Imane, 16 years old, Lorca, Spain, 2017)
This concern is also accompanied by a clear wish to participate and play a more active role, sometimes a central role, in information and communication activities.

Briony Towers’ research with children on bushfire hazards employed ‘draw and write’ techniques to enhance children’s communication abilities (Towers, 2015). She found that while their knowledge was often characterised by gaps and misconceptions, they demonstrated a capacity for understanding the fundamental principles of emergency response, particularly when they had been involved in bushfire planning within their household. In the aftermath of what has become known as ‘Black Saturday’, where bushfires burned 450,000 hectares of Victorian bushland, killing 173 people (including 27 children) and destroying more than 2,000 homes, we know that where children are included in discussions about risk they show a capacity for serious engagement in emergency planning. Since this disaster, it was decided that bushfire education be made a formal part of the Australian national curriculum, but Towers has argued that, for this to be effective, children’s existing knowledge and perceptions of the risks must be accounted for in designing such programmes. This involves moving away from the attitude that some topics are too frightening or are not suitable for children, to finding ways to engage them meaningfully, for their own and their families’ safety.

Teenagers in particular perceive themselves as a group that is especially qualified to help improve communication in emergency and disaster situations (see Figure 4.4), by helping to explain risks to other children and adults, designing awareness-raising campaigns, reappraising safety materials and emergency plans, fostering and leading mutual support spaces or playing an active role in the social media they use most (especially YouTube and Instagram) (see Figure 4.5). We argue that the keen interest and communicative ability shown by children and young people should provide a productive entry point for co-working with professionals and policy-makers. Such co-working offers the possibility of conceiving a resilience model that is based on fruitful interaction between technologies, communication and young people who are eager to be a part of it:

[Preparedness] [i]nformation should be explained simply, without much text, with many more images … the expert must put the content but we can play a more active role, make proposals, help with our social networks, contribute with our own experiences. (Collective proposal from the communication subgroup, 14– to 15-year-olds, MLE, Sant Celoni, Spain)
Figure 4.4: Tweet resulting from flood awareness workshop with children in Hull, UK

Figure 4.5: Picture from a young participant reporting on the development of the Dialogue in Gandesa, Spain
Build and rely on more diversified networks of children’s ‘allies’

The need for more children to learn (more) about emergencies and risk in school-based settings was clearly acknowledged by participants across several sites. However, while schools are central and common to children’s lives in Europe and can be important sites of DRR work, they can also serve to limit children’s participation. Additionally, as the Scoping Review shows, content about risk education and emergencies is only beginning to emerge in the majority of formal education curricula. Generally, this type of information is encountered in community settings, or on occasional visits of civil protection and emergency officers to schools, who rarely engage in any in-depth dialogue with the children.

As DRR aims to reduce the social vulnerabilities of communities to these sorts of events, a collective and multi-institutional network of actors that reaches outside schools is crucial. First, this is because disaster risk education is best communicated through action-based learning (Rashid et al, 2016). Second, as Towers et al (2014) show for the Australian context, support and engagement from a number of public actors is needed to concretise some of the children’s ideas. For instance, the involvement of adults, such as parents, is critical to turn children’s knowledge into practice, and also to encourage their participation in such activities.

Engaging diverse actors in CUIDAR was an incremental process. We initially introduced the project to local policy DRM personnel, inviting them to participate, either by being interviewed by the children or by allowing the children to visit their headquarters. We kept that connection strong by sending them information about how the project unfolded. Later we sensitised stakeholders to participate in the MLE approach, explaining to them how the meetings and discussions would take place. The MLE experience was pivotal as some of the invitees had never engaged in a dialogue of this nature with children:

‘These kinds of activities are interesting so we can know how young people access the information and gain some clues about how we can improve our communication strategies.’ (Civil protection officer, Albufeira, Portugal)

This enlarged engagement process was amplified during the National Policy Debates. If, during the MLEs, the children and stakeholders
had the opportunity to exchange points of view departing from an expert base and on a local scale, the goal of the National Policy Debates was to reach out to a wider public audience who had not yet been sensitised to the possibility of children’s participation. Across all five countries, these events gathered together professionals from civil protection and emergency, from education and social services, and from NGOs. While these actors and stakeholders may have different interests, the events provided an opportunity for them to meet and explore forms of collaboration:

‘The event was a great opportunity to learn and enrich our knowledge about children and children with disabilities and reflect on our own role in order to enhance their access and participation in activities related with issues of disaster risk reduction.’ (Disaster professional, National Policy Debate, Greece)

These debates, attended by more than 500 children, were transformational for some of those present, leading some stakeholders to consider consulting with children in the future to design educational interventions. Recognition of children and young people’s lived experiences and knowledge was a strong outcome of these high-level policy dialogues. In some cases, the commitments made during the events bore fruit, such as implementing participatory approaches in emergency education in Italy or improving forest fire prevention and education in Spain. As Reed et al (2018) noticed, engagement can facilitate learning and changes in attitudes and values among participants, due to the exchange of multiple sources of knowledge and to the direct attachment of those in power to implement change, who see the outcomes as relevant and reflecting their views. We saw how children themselves were also transformed by these interactions. Luca, 16 years old, from Ancona, explained the effect that these events had on him and his group:

‘This experience made us grow and put us in contact with the adult world that sometimes can appear weird for us, but we were able to work very well together and build very interesting things together. We felt important, credible and that adults trust us…. This can maybe a step to include children’s voices into the policies that concern us and a starting point for the spread of a culture of children’s participation that is not so commonly widespread in our society.’
Partnerships in DRR bring benefits to children and their communities, as they increase cohesion and develop new forms of citizenship through collective deliberation. The possible solutions put forward by children constitute evidence that they are a valuable, untapped resource for addressing problems that stakeholders find intractable. Also, stakeholders remarked that to implement changes such as adopting a participatory approach, they also need to find new ways of collaborating, sharing knowledge, skills, and good practices and making these kinds of initiatives sustainable. This might involve creating new networks: between different sectors and types of expertise, between those involved in DRM and children and young people, and between public and private sector actors and researchers.

**Recognise the need to work with emotions with children and young people**

We learned about the importance of feelings and emotions in how children and young people experience and perceive disasters. In our work in all partner countries, emotions such as fear and anxiety, but also hope and trust, were widely expressed by the children. Also, first responders and practitioners frequently talked about experiencing fear around extreme events. This created a space of mutual recognition that facilitated connections and meaningful communication between the children and adults in this context. Feelings and emotions were a way to acknowledge and articulate affects, voices, and capacities that are often neglected or disregarded. Here, a participant recalls her initial experience of the 2011 earthquake in Lorca:

‘My brothers, who were younger than me, tried to calm me. Then my mother came and we went into the street when the second tremor happened. The glass panes from the street started to fall on top of us. I was really afraid then. I had an image of the earthquake, like it was a monster to me. I was always afraid to go indoors at home.’ (Chaimae, 17 years old, Lorca, Spain)

Young participants from very different age groups taking part in an earlier study recall their flood experience and how they continue to feel about it:

‘I didn’t know there would be a flood so all my toys were on the floor and stuff, and I had really bad dreams about it.'
I just feel scared ’cos I don’t want it to flood again.’ (Martha, 6 years old, St Michaels on Wyre, Lancashire, UK)

‘I’m just kind of like, worried it’s going to happen again this year…. I suppose I’m going to worry every year though. Even if it doesn’t happen, we’re still going to worry.’ (Jodi, 14 years old, Staines Upon Thames, UK)

Through a variety of activities, the children could express their feelings about disasters. In particular, they focused on the importance and pervasiveness of fear. However, the children working with the CUIDAR project told us they wanted to communicate the message that people can lessen their fear through ‘acquiring knowledge and taking action’, together with others:

‘We have no information about what we should do or where we should go if we are at home or in the street if there’s an earthquake because there is a lack of emotional education.’ (Aitana, 17 years old, Lorca, Spain)

Although emotions and feelings are not always recognised immediately by professionals, parents and adults in general, they play a fundamental role in building meaning (Walker et al, 2012), developing risk perception, creating self-reliance and fostering decision-making among children and young people. Therefore, it is essential that this dimension be acknowledged, both individually and collectively, and developed by everyone who works in DRM and seeks greater involvement of children and young people:

‘It’s very interesting that they have chosen the topic of how to manage fear, and I have realised that the population is not prepared: we need to communicate more effectively because the way we have been doing it – leaflets – does not work.’ (Sergio Delgado, Deputy Director of Civil Protection, Barcelona, Spain)

Indeed, these findings need to be shared with disaster professionals, and should be incorporated into their training, practice and forms of communication. They also need to be shared with schools, given their importance in the provision of spaces and activities for individual and collective processing of feelings and emotions (Mutch, 2013; Walker et al, 2012).
‘Listening to them, I have realised that we must work on more effective preventive policies, especially from an emotional point of view. We organise many drills, but they are aimed at more technical parts, and we don’t internalise those. If we do not work on emotions from preventive behaviour, it will be very difficult for children or adults to react in the way they should react.’ (Maria Antonia, psychologist, Lorca, Spain)

But how can managing emotions such as fear and anxiety in an emergency be made central to DRM? In our Dialogues, the children and young people suggested that psychologists and counsellors should give talks about this topic in schools in a child-friendly or interactive way such as role-playing activities, simulations and drills, using real-life or virtual reality tools. ‘Risk experts’ should explain the steps being taken to bring risk under control. If an incident or accident takes place, support should be given to children and young people, but also to adults, particularly teachers. The children from Lorca made this clear after their experience during the 2011 earthquake in specific sessions to deal with the fear they had experienced. This should include advice about ways to deal with fear in case of emergency, and should be contained within key documents such as school plans. If emergency plans recognise that fear is normal and shared, everybody will benefit, not just children.

Finally, finding ways to build resilience appears crucial to empower children and improve their management of fear. As Cox et al (2017) show, children and young people experience emotional support through empathetic encounters with adults, including parents and other caregivers and teachers, as it is important to find someone ‘being there’ and offering guidance and trust. However, while receiving support from adults was an important theme, so, too, was the importance of receiving emotional support from peers. Teenagers in Lorca, for instance, spoke of the importance of peer groups to regain a sense of safety and stability after the 2011 earthquake, emphasising the role of companionship and friendship, in addition to that within schools or families, in developing networks and spaces of self-confidence, resilience and mutual support. Being with others, and experiencing a shared sense of belonging and communality can have a strong and beneficial impact on young people, empowering them, but also creating spaces of emotional release, solidarity and cooperation (Bokszczanin, 2012).

So, for children and young people, managing emotions and feelings are key to understanding and preparing oneself, acting in, and caring
for others in a disaster. For them, knowing, acknowledging and understanding emotions are inextricably linked with self-control, a feeling of safety and resilience.

**Recognise that children and young people may feel vulnerable in public spaces**

While CUIDAR demonstrated children’s skills and capacities to contribute to DRM, it needs to be recognised that young people can have particular vulnerabilities in the event of a disaster. We found from our Scoping Review work (see Chapter 1) that some studies reported difficulties in recruiting 14- to 18-year-olds. Most programmes and actions in the CUIDAR partner countries – and those in international literature and other EU projects – are addressed to children between 8 and 14 years old. This makes very young children a highly vulnerable group, as very young infants and parents of infants are rarely considered in disaster risk management policy (Gribble, 2013). But this also makes teenagers over 15 a rather invisible and neglected group:

‘Children are always taken into account because they are more vulnerable, but this does not happen with young people and adolescents because they do not consider us so vulnerable. But I think we should also get some attention.’
(Aitana, 17 years old, Lorca, Spain)

In consulting with young people directly, we learned how productive and strategic it is to work with teenagers in the field of disasters. Working with two different groups in Spain, for example, in Lorca and Sant Celoni, allowed us to identify the lack of preparedness measures in place for public spaces. For instance, the young people told us one of their main concerns is what to do if an emergency takes place when they are in a public space such as a street or square and when they are ‘alone’, that is, not accompanied by an adult, and away from home or school or places where they, or ‘someone’, usually knows what to do.

In different ways, the same problem also came up in at least two other scenarios. In Gandesa, a rural area of Catalonia, the 12-year-old children also admitted they were afraid of being alone in an emergency. They imagined themselves being in the street, playing, when faced with a forest fire and not knowing what to do. They felt they had little information about how to face these situations, particularly how to manage fear. In Sant Celoni, the 14-year-olds also emphasised fear and uncertainty in the event of a chemical accident (the risk they
had chosen to work on). In particular, they were afraid of ‘freezing’, becoming paralysed by fear if the accident were to take place when they were not at home or at school:

‘What happens when we are alone and we do not know where to go, we don’t know who to call or what to do?… I get scared if I am alone or with my friends and I go around the town or the forest.’ (Marta, 12 years old, Gandesa, Spain)

So, interestingly, the children and young people pointed to important preparedness blind spots. They mentioned the importance of a variety of places that have received less attention, such as streets, squares, local parks or community centres (see Cox et al, 2017). They talked about the importance of these spaces in shaping identities, developing a sense of belonging and also creating fears and exclusions (Gough and Franch, 2005; Rodó-de Zárate, 2010).

Indeed, following the ‘Problem Tree’ technique (Kumar, 2002), young people from Lorca explored this concern about public spaces further:

- Some of the causes added to Lorca’s analysis were: lack of knowledge, awareness and communication; the complexity of multi-hazard situations with different self-protection measures; lack of regular drills; or the feeling that it is ‘hard to tell the truth’ to adolescents and to understand multiple behavioural reactions.
- Some of the consequences added were not feeling safe in many spaces; multiple and amplified fears; or chaos.
- Moreover, some possible solutions emerged during the process, such as: more training, information, knowledge and learning experiences; more drills; use of virtual reality tools; activities for recognising risks (study tour, leisure activities); and young people’s empowerment.

As the young people made clear, they want more knowledge and information about how to deal with emergencies in public spaces, but they don’t want to encourage an over-regulation and securitisation of such spaces. They want to keep these as spaces of autonomy, companionship and self-regulation. In this way, they claim to be recognised as important actors defining, caring and negotiating public spaces (Thomas et al, 2018).

CUIDAR has shown that young people’s relationship with their environment is particularly important for DRM. The next chapter details how participants were invited to think closely about where
they lived; using drawings, aerial photographs and 3D shapes, they
enjoyed making representations of their environment. The young
people would go around their local area noting particular features
such as places they liked to congregate or places they found hazardous.
This has the effect of strengthening children’s spatial knowledge and
allowing them then to re-draw their environment according to their
own interests and needs. In this way, their observation skills were
enhanced and this underpinned some of the recommendations they
were then able to make for emergency planners, for example.

Above all, the young people want to play a more active role and
share responsibility for managing their own safety and that of their
communities. As we said at the start of this chapter, our Framework
is an open document, the steps do not need to be followed in any
particular order, but all steps are integral to creating caring, effective and
inclusive DRM plans that will benefit neighbourhoods, communities
and societies as a whole.

Notes

1 CUIDAR participating countries made their own films, apart from Greece,
   and then each contributed to one international piece. All can be seen at: www.
lancaster.ac.uk/cuidar/en/cuidar-films-resources/
2 See www.lancaster.ac.uk/cuidar/en
3 See www.lancaster.ac.uk/floodrecovery