ANITA BURGUND ISAKOV[1], VIOLETA MARKOVIC[2],
NEVENKA ŽEGARAC[3]

Consultation with Children on the Move – Lessons Learned in Creating a Child-friendly Research Process

Abstract: In order to respond to the growing needs of migrant families with children, and especially unaccompanied children, who were travelling on the Western Balkan route, social workers and other field workers and child protection officers had to acquire new knowledge and develop specific competencies in a relatively short period of time. Although Serbia is mainly a country of transit, migrant children, who have been staying in Serbia for a longer period of time, have experienced challenges in access to services due to language barriers, overstretched capacities and insufficient coordination. The aim of the paper is to describe and reflect on the process used to develop a design, which ensures migrant children are consulted throughout the process and are the co-creators of a social work curriculum responding to their vulnerabilities. In order to gain insights on the views of children on the move regarding competencies of the workforce in both the government and NGO institutions, a consultation process was introduced with both unaccompanied and accompanied children in Serbia. The methodology of consultations was designed as interactive and safe for children

[1] Anita Burgund Isakov is associate professor at Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. Email: anita.burgund@gmail.com
[2] Violeta Markovic is Teaching Assistant at Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. Email: violeta.markovic@fpn.bg.ac.rs
[3] Nevenka Žegarac is full professor at Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. Email: nelazegarac@gmail.com

to express their views and experiences. Results indicate that children should be key participants in the co-creation of knowledge in matters that concern them, and it is necessary to develop, test and evaluate the ways in which we can best understand their experiences, points of view and perspectives and incorporate them into knowledge for action.

Keywords: consultation with children, visual techniques, migrant children, participatory methods, co-creation of knowledge

Konzultacije z otroki na poti – izkušnje, pridobljene pri ustvarjanju otrokom prijaznega raziskovalnega procesa

Izvleček: Odziv na potrebe migrantskih družin z otroki, predvsem pa otrok brez spremstva na zahodno balkanski begunski poti, je od socialnih delavcev, terenskih delavcev ter uradnikov za zaščito otrok v Srbiji zahteval pridobitev novih znanj in razvoj specifičnih kompetenc v relativno kratkem času. Čeprav je Srbija večinoma tranzitna država, so otroci migranti, ki v državi ostajajo dlje časa, imeli težave z dostopom do storitev zaradi jezikovnih ovir, omejenih kapacitet državnih organov in pomanjkljive koordinacije programov. Namen članka je opisati in reflektirati proces razvoja pristopa, ki bi zagotavljal vključenost migrantskih otrok v proces obravnave kot soustvarjalcev kurikuluma socialnega dela in se tako odzival na njihove ranljivosti. Z namenom pridobitve vpogleda v mnenja otrok glede kompetenc zaposlenih v državnih in nevladnih institucijah so bila v Srbiji izvedena posvetovanja z mladoletnimi migranti. Metodologija posvetovanja je bila zasnovana kot interaktivna metoda, ki je spodbujala izražanje otrokovih pogledov in izkušenj. Rezultati so potrdili, da bi morali biti otroci ključni udeleženci pri soustvarjanju znanja o zadevah, ki se jih tičejo; zato bi bilo treba razvijati, testirati in ovrednotiti načine, na katere lahko najbolje

razumemo njihove izkušnje, stališča in poglede ter jih tako vk-ljučimo v odziv in delovanje.

Ključne besede: posvetovanje z otroki, vizualne tehnike, otroci migranti, participativne metode, soustvarjanje znanja

Introduction

The principle of the best interests of the child (UN CRC 1989), as a substantive right, fundamental and interpretative legal principle and a rule of procedure in the context of child migration, is a particularly sensitive and complex issue. On an individual level, it is necessary to consider the situation of each individual child: the culture to which the child belongs, their previous experiences, available support and other aspects that shape the child's perspective. Furthermore, the principle of best interest applies to all children without discrimination, both individually, and as a group, which poses new challenges in understanding and realizing the best interest of particularly vulnerable groups of children, such as children in migration. There are only a small number of studies that document experiences of children in migration told by their own voices (Oh 2012, 383). Such research is important since children play a central role in developing the knowledge on the issues that affect them with the assumption that children themselves are valid sources of data with the ability to communicate information about their own lives (Crivello et al. 2009, 67; Ebrahim 2010, 292; Smith 2011, 15).

However, there is a growing interest in research that is child-oriented and participatory, striving to place children at the centre of the process, with the awareness that participation can be more or less active. This has particularly been the case in qualitative research methods that are designed to examine children's experiences and perspectives, especially about children in vulnerable

situations (Crivello et al. 2009, 70; Due et al. 2014, 215). In a process of wider re-evaluation of research with children (Lewis et al. 2004, 194; Christensen and James 2008, 24), visual participatory methods have become increasingly used. Researchers and practitioners across a range of disciplines employ them as means of exploring children's and youth's experiences, relationships, and lifestyles (Hart 1992, 39; Barker and Weller 2003, 223; Thompson 2008, 12).

In this paper, we discuss our experiences in designing and implementing a child-friendly, participatory consultation methodology concerning children's experiences of migration on the Balkan route. As children from the sample spoke little or no domicile language or English, the research design included both visual techniques to facilitate communication and interpreters who also acted as cultural mediators.

In order to gain insights on the views of children on the move about required competencies of the workforce from both the government and NGO institutions, a consultation process was organized with unaccompanied and accompanied children in Serbia. The purpose of the consultation was to adequately capture child perspectives and their experiences during the journey; identify who and what helped them on the road and in what way, which settings were they placed in Serbia and in which ways they exercise their rights.

This paper discusses and reflects on researchers' experiences on designing and implementing the consultation process, to build on the existing scientific knowledge on both successful and less useful approaches in conceptualizing consultation with children that have refugee or migrant experiences. The consultation was organized from February to April 2019 in Serbia, as part of a needs assessment in the process of developing a new curriculum "Protection of Children in Migration" at the University of Belgrade, for

both social work students and practitioners in the field of migration. The aim of the course is to build skills to design adequate intervention and ensure quality protection services for children affected by migration and displacement, with an additional focus on gender dynamics, gender inequality and GBV also in the context of migration and forced displacement. The starting principle in the development of the new curriculum was the co-creation of knowledge through participatory process that included consultation with children and youth affected by migration, frontline practitioners and experts in the field of Child Migration and Gender Studies, relevant state authorities and institutions and the UN and other relevant agencies. Co-creation of knowledge calls for common and newly emerged issues and engagement of end users to participate actively (Ruoslahti 2018, 129), in order to generate ideas for new products and services and to anticipate future needs (Wilenius 2008, 71). Sharing of knowledge sheds light on the need for new competencies from professionals (Pirinen 2015, 324), and implies end users as active participants with clear roles, common ways to work, and open communication with stakeholders.

When children are the end users in the process of knowledge co-creation, additional methodological, ethical and organizational issues need to be considered, so that their involvement genuinely moves beyond tokenism.

Consultation Process with Children in Migration

For the purposes of this paper, we understand child participation as a process in which children have relevant information, the opportunity to express their opinion, to be heard and respected, as well as to be involved in activities and to initiate activities related to issues that concern them (Avramović 2014, 18) with varying degrees of adult support. During the consultation process children

present their views, needs and preferences and are listened to, which creates the foundation for higher levels of child participation in order to: make choices, decisions and initiatives. Besides that, it includes an explanation of the ways in which their views will influence further processes on topics that matter to them, i.e. receiving feedback on the outcome of the process.

In this way, consultation with children provides pathways of seeking their views as guidance to action (Clark 2005, 490). The advantage of this definition is that the consultations are focused on a clear goal and that listening to children provides insights that are relevant for reviewing existing policies and practices, while also making decisions to improve them.

Groups of children, as well as individual children, often have different experiences and attitudes towards specific issues that need to be taken into account (Christensen 2008a, 30). The consultation process involves the child as an equal interlocutor, not only as the respondent.

With his/her perspective, the child contributes to the consultation framework itself (the topic in focus, questions, consultation techniques, etc.). Children can and should contribute to the choice of issues, which are to be addressed (such as decisions about their access to health care, education, housing or asylum claim as well as interventions undertaken by the government or NGOs), the choice of consulting techniques and their piloting, data collection and analysis, and reporting on consultations (Kellet 2005, 13). It is important that children receive feedback on their participation and the extent to which their opinions influenced decision-making.

Different tools such as mapping and guided tours are used in consultations so that the child can show the adult the environment, which is important and in which the child resides, to indicate the child's attitude towards the environment, his/hers assessment of

the environment and ideas for its improvement. Visual methods are being used creatively in diverse social and cultural contexts. Studies about migrant children views have been done in the following areas (Moskal 2010, 17): on health and illness (Geissler 1998b; Ross et al. 2009, 612; Fernandez et al. 2015, 157), poverty (Sime 2008, 68), tourism (Gamradt 1995, 745), identity (Cowan 1999, 101), identity and consumption (Croghan et al. 2008, 347), time (Christensen and James 2008b, 12), and place and belonging (Orellana 1999, 73). The aims of the research and theoretical background are usually reasons for different methods of collecting visual data (Bagnoli 2009, 560), which can include drawings (Geissler 1998a; Guillemin 2004, 272; van Blerk and Ansell 2006, 456; Fernandez et al. 2015, 151; Liamputtong and Fernandez 2015, 24), maps and diagrams (Bromley and Mackie 2009, 149; Moskal 2010, 29; Copeland and Agosto 2012, 515), and photographs and videos (Radley and Taylor 2003, 150; Tinkler 2008, 261; Marshall 2013, 64; Due et al. 2014, 217). According to some authors (Nieuwenhuys 1996, 52; Mitchell 2006, 63) visual methods are said to be "child-centred" in the sense that they may be familiar, yet enjoyable for the child, but also diminish power imbalances between the researcher and participants. These methods help build trust, enhance children's agency, contribute to the co-creation of knowledge, reflect on the position of the researcher and are useful in bringing out the complexities of child experience.

Children's migration reconsiders and, in a way, opposes the idea of children as innately local beings in the past two decades of researching child's agency (Mitchell 2006, 70). It also presents how children's everyday lives are shaped by structures and constraints originating beyond the local scale. Children's agency can be seen as a process that is "too often local, concrete and conflated into an acceptable focus for research, in opposition to a global, abstract or structuralist perspective that is viewed with suspicion as it is

too 'distant' from real children" (Ansell 2009, 194). Participatory research with child migrants seems to undermine the dualism of the global and local (Massey 2005) as the transnational social spaces in which they live continue to shape their social relations, cultural practices, and identifications (Moskal 2015, 147).

Method

Co-creation of knowledge and building of expertise for the protection of children affected by migration and forced displacement", developed by the Centre for Research in Social Policy and Social Work and Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Belgrade, supported by UNICEF.

The advantage of focus groups and group interviews is that they open up space for interactions and active participation in a common construction of meaning, which is significant when we seek to determine the views of the children as a group. Children are encouraged to discover new options in dialogue with their peers' perspectives, reflect on different points of view, revealing topics in common as well as specific experiences that are unique to them. (Moskal 2017, 8).

Special attention was devoted to a series of issues to ensure ethical and meaningful participation of these vulnerable children. Consultations were carried out by facilitators who were trained in research techniques with children and had master degrees in social work. Five of them conducted the consultations in pairs. Additional criteria for selecting facilitators for consultations was that they had knowledge and experience in research techniques with children and that they have been working prior with children in migration. In doing research with children, team members need to have skills and experience in working with children (Alderson and Morrow 2020). During the consultations, facilitators worked with

children they hadn't previously met or interacted with from other roles (e.g. as a professional helper, animator, activist).

After each consultation, facilitators filled in a report according to the themes, which were predefined by the leading researchers. The defined themes were: organization of consultations (communication with gate-keepers, transportation, recruiting process); relation and communication with interpreters; communication with children during consultations (their motivation, map creation process, questions that were unclear to children, and how the challenges were met); consultation setting (room where the consultations were done, specific events during consultations, presence of other people during the consultation, non-verbal communication); recommendations and further needs. In this way, the leading researchers had a meaningful insight and feedback about the field process. On the other hand, facilitators had an opportunity for a written debriefing. This material is analysed and incorporated into findings.

Description of the Consultation Process

Before the consultation scheduling process, a meeting was held with the facilitators and interpreters. The aim was to explain the methodology in detail (e.g. purpose, and aim of consultation, ethical issues, use of maps and supporting materials), and possible solutions to challenges in communication with children. During the process of scheduling consultations, there were differences in approach depending on whether the children travelled unaccompanied or accompanied. Unaccompanied children were under the guardianship of the Centre for Social Work (CSW), so the first step was to obtain the consent of the legal guardians. Upon that, further agreements and communication were transferred to individual guardians, employees of the Commissariat for Refugees and Mi-

gration (in charge of managing the asylum and reception centres in Serbia), and care workers in the social protection institutions, depending on children's accommodation. All children who were travelling with their parents, as well as parents received informed consents in their native language.

Translation was an integral part of the consultation with participants who speak little or no domicile language. There was a lack of debate on the role that interpreters have in the cross-language consultation and research process. It seems as a misconception that interpreters are technicians with the role of direct translation of content (Wong and Poon 2010, 153). Still, language is an important part of conceptualizing beliefs, culture, values and meanings, not just a tool to convey concepts (Temple and Edwards 2002, 6).

The role of interpreters was carefully considered in these consultations, adopting the principle of "interpreters as collaborators", so due diligence was necessary in selecting the interpreters for this research. Various research (Miller et al. 2005, 38; Gartley and Due 2015, 34; Fenning and Denov 2021, 53) discuss the triadic relationship in the context of both research and mental health practice, stating the importance and a positive practice when interpreters have a role of collaborators in the process. Several criteria were taken into account: language they spoke (preference was given to those interpreters who speak more than one language / dialect of children), experience in working with children (these were interpreters with many years of experience in working with children in migration), skills regarding cultural mediation (we tried to involve interpreters who, also knew the culture of the countries where children came from, either by originating from the same country / region, or by having studied the cultural norms of the countries of origins of children) and avoiding conflicts of interest and double or multiple relationships, (so

translators who had previously worked with consulted children were not involved). Finally, two interpreters were involved in the research, one female and one male. At the preparatory meeting, the dynamics of work with children, the control of the process and the distribution of power were agreed upon with interpreters. Special attention was given to the power dynamics between interpreters and facilitators acknowledging the dangers of power dynamic shifting from facilitators to interpreters, as a spontaneous attempt of children to talk directly to the person speaking their language. It was agreed that the facilitators are those who control and steer the process, taking responsibility for the methodology and ethical considerations (Vara and Patel 2012, 82). Both interpreters and facilitators were encouraged to share any concerns on the power dynamic, if they had one, firstly among themselves and, if necessary, with the research team, who had the ultimate responsibility to maintain the fragile balance in the power dynamic in this context.

The role of gatekeepers in doing research (especially) with vulnerable children has been widely discussed (Neil 2005, 48; Heath et al. 2013, 404; McFadyen and Rakin 2016, 2). Gatekeepers are viewed as persons with a key role to ensure researchers gain access to the participants in the research, as well as persons whose influence can be crucial to the smooth running of the research process (McFadyen and Rankin 2016, 4). On the other hand, gatekeepers are sometimes those who delay, deny or limit access to participants, which is why different approaches are implemented to address these issues (Neil 2005, 54).

One of the dilemmas faced was how to recruit children for consultations regarding gender and age (Punch 2002, 327). The research team and facilitators made sure that the children participating in the individual consultations were all of a similar age.

Regarding gender, unaccompanied minors were all male, and in the groups of younger children travelling with families, one group was organized with only boys and the other only with girls in order to make sure that both girls and boys would feel as comfortable as possible in order to share their views freely.

Sample of Children

Consultations included 14 children – 9 unaccompanied minors (all boys) and 5 children travelling with parents (3 girls and 2 boys). The age range of children was 10-18 years, with children travelling with parents being in the age range of 10-14 and unaccompanied children were mostly in the age range of 14-18. The sample was convenient, and recruitment of children was done with the help of government institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs) working in the field. Unaccompanied children were accommodated in a government institution for placement of unaccompanied minors (2 boys), a shelter run by an NGO (4 boys) and an asylum centre run by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants (3 boys). Selection criteria intended to capture differences in children's perspectives who are accommodated in different types of placements. Children travelling with parents were all placed in an asylum centre.

All 14 children were residing in Belgrade. Government appointed guardians of unaccompanied minors were informed and their consent was obtained before contacting children. After obtaining consent of the guardians, caretakers of children were contacted and informed about the purpose of research and they provided information to children before meeting facilitators. Facilitators then explained the purpose and course of research, after which written consent was obtained. Upon arriving at the consultation and before the written consent, children were once again informed about

the purpose and topics of research. After ensuring that children fully understood how and why the consultations were done, a written consent was given to them for signing in order to obtain a full consent not just an "assent".

Children travelling with parents were consulted in the asylum centre, where facilitators and an interpreter met with their parents. Parents were given space to ask questions about the research, and after all their concerns were addressed, they were asked to sign a consent for their children to participate, and to inform children about their participation. Facilitators and interpreters also explained the purpose and topics of the consultation to the children at the beginning of the consultation process. After ensuring that children were fully informed, they were also asked to sign a consent for participating.

Introducing the Visual Techniques

The consultation method was designed to be interactive and to provide children a safe place to express their views and opinions. The method consisted of both a specially designed setting as well as visual techniques involving three maps that were used during consultations – Support Map, Road Map and Support Team Map. First, the Support Map was used so that children could describe what kind of help is needed for children who are travelling. Second, the Road Map was used by children to mark important spots during their journey when they needed help, containing figurines, transportation vehicles, emoticons for expressing feelings in these spots and clouds made of paper to describe events. All these figurines, small toys and emoticons were used in order to help children express themselves; they could use them on the maps or while explaining some of their experience. Third, the Support Team Map was used to mark helpers who children met while travelling and

who helped them, or were in a particular position to help them.

At the end of consultations, children described and explained the characteristics of good helpers they encountered on their journey. This was done by children writing the various characteristics on a piece of paper and attaching them to a wooden block. After that, children were asked to arrange the blocks in order of most important to least important traits, explaining while they were arranging them what those traits meant to them and why they arranged them in that order.

Results

The results presented in this chapter are derived from the analysis of results of consultations, including reports that facilitators wrote after each consultation process. During the preparation and implementation of consultations with children, several important topics were highlighted, as discussed below.

Preparing the Research Team for Consultations. The facilitators emphasized the importance of asking younger children as short questions as possible, to give simple instructions, and they have been encouraged to look for more examples in the parts that are more interesting to children and to skip questions that are difficult for children to answer even after repeated attempts to clarify them. Flexibility of facilitators is important not only due to differences of children's capacity to take part in some topics as per their understanding and activation capacity but also due to ethical consideration regarding their traumatic experiences. Most of the children have severe experiences and difficult memories of their migrant journeys and their well-being in the consultation process should be the main priority for the facilitators.

Collaboration with Gate-keepers. In scheduling consultations with unaccompanied children, the following gate-keepers were

identified: legal guardians and professionals working in the institutions providing accommodation (care workers of the social protection institutions). The first and second consultations were done with children accommodated in the social protection institutions (one governmental and one run by NGO). In both cases, upon obtaining the consent from guardians, the details of recruiting children for the research were communicated with care workers. They seemed cooperative, and did recruit the children for participation. However, the assessment of children's availability and motivation to participate was performed much better by the NGO run institution as opposed to the government led one. This was visible in a couple of aspects of children's participation. Firstly, transportation of children to the faculty was organized by the NGO led shelter and not organized by the government led one. This resulted in children from the government led shelter getting lost and being late to the consultations, which influenced the atmosphere, their motivation and the time they had to participate. On the other hand, children from the NGO led shelter were much more comfortable, it took them less time to relax as they had a person of trust taking them to the faculty and waiting for them to finish to then take them back. Not having organized transportation led to a sample shedding as two boys from the government led shelter withdrew from participation due to other obligations.

Secondly, language barrier posed a significant obstacle in communication with children from the government led shelter. Namely, the research team was informed by the care worker that the children coming to consultations spoke Serbian language, which is why interpreters were not present during their consultations. On the other hand, the care worker from an NGO led shelter was clear about the need for an interpreter to be present. This is why it is useful to have an interpreter available and present when working

with children whose mother tongue is different from the facilitators, regardless of the assessment of the gatekeepers on the necessity of the interpreters.

Based on this experience, before the last consultations, the facilitators and the interpreter arranged a meeting with the boys in the asylum centre for informed consent, with the presence of their legal guardian and made an agreement that the boys inform facilitators if they try to leave the country.

Two rounds of consultations were conducted with children travelling accompanied by parents/caregivers, and here we encountered several gatekeepers from the institution providing the accommodation and the parents of children. As a result of communication with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of Serbia, responsible for all asylum and reception centres in Serbia, it was implied that a number of documents about the research (including ethical approval) were sent to them in advance. Upon obtaining this consent, a care worker was assigned to provide support in recruitment of families and children. Two separate groups of consultations – one with the girls and one with the boys was done. During the negotiations with the parents, the mothers expressed concern regarding the gender of the facilitator for consultations with girls. However, they felt much more comfortable when it was explained to them that two women will be performing consultations with the girls. In both cases, on the day of the consultation, we received information that the families had changed their minds about participation. Then the parents were invited to come and see the room and the materials that would be used use for the consultations; they were familiarized with the consultation in detail and with the importance of hearing the voice of children. Eventually, they felt comfortable enough and agreed that their children should participate. This leads to the conclusion that prolonging the con-

sultations for days after the initial meeting with the parents and caretakers increases the possibility of sample shedding.

Use of the Maps and Supporting Materials and Tools. Different children had different reactions to the use of maps. Younger children were very happy and active in using all three maps, other tools and building blocks to communicate their experiences and views.

However, unaccompanied boys, mostly in their teenage years, used maps to a lesser extent to communicate their views. At one occasion, boys openly stated that they did not want to use the maps, and that they preferred to communicate by words. In the other two consultations, the boys' initial reaction was the same. However, as they felt more comfortable, they began to use the maps as a support tool in explaining specific events in places of their journey. Thus, they predominantly used a road map, which helped them recall at which points on the road some specific event occurred.

On the other hand, using blocks to construct an "ideal helper" was something that all the children gladly used. The reasons for this could be that it provided space for them to discuss their individual answers with other children in the group in order to come to a consensus between all of them. It can also be because it didn't infantilize them, on the contrary, it gave them an opportunity to suggest, based on their experience, what should be the ideal helpers' characteristics and traits.

The facilitators were instructed that they should not insist on using the maps and supportive tools (figures, clouds, emoticons) but that they should always be available if they want to use them. This was based on the principle of participation of children in research; it provided them with the choice to use the additional aids to communicate their experiences, which eventually almost all of them did use. It is also in line with other au-

thors' observations on the use of visual methods – it mustn't be assumed that all children will be comfortable with using them, and they shouldn't be pressured into it (Punch 2002, 323; Alderson and Morrow 2020).

Atmosphere at the consultations. The research team paid particular attention to the atmosphere at the consultations regarding the place of consultation and additional aids (sweets, juices, food). The team decided to conduct consultations with unaccompanied children at the premises of the Faculty of Political Sciences in an adequately equipped space, in order to move children out of their environment with the hope it would support them to express their opinions more freely. This is considered to be a positive practice in research; finding a more neutral space for children to present their views can facilitate them feeling more comfortable (Involve 2016) and not feeling pressured to give the 'correct' answers to research questions if the research is done in a setting where they live or go to school (Punch 2002, 324; Berman et al. 2016, 7). The impressions of the researchers in this process were that unaccompanied boys did feel pride, respect and appreciation by being invited at the Faculty, as it is an institution which was not available to them beforehand, and is usually the institution, which children don't have access to, but is considered valued.

Regarding the children travelling with families, consultations were conducted in the asylum centre, since those children were young and it seemed that moving them with the means we had at our disposal would be invasive for both the children and the parents. During all sessions it was significant to ensure that other conditions were adjusted to the age of the children. Thus, lunch was provided to the unaccompanied children after the consultations at the faculty, and snacks and sweets were provided to chil-

dren travelling with their parents. Facilitators stated in their notes that this helped children feel more comfortable, and in the case of unaccompanied minors, it helped them finish the consultations on a positive note.

Cooperation with Interpreters

Interpreters were supported in their decisions on when it is important to explain the cultural context of the child's statement to the facilitators in addition to the translation of what the child said. Also, interpreters had and used opportunities to explain certain issues to children in more detail, when they deemed it important, checking with facilitators whether it was acceptable, as well as the reasons why they found it advisable.

With such established rules, and the selection of interpreters who have many years of experience in working with children in migration, communication with children went smoothly. Facilitators state that the interpreter and his sensitivity and familiarity with the culture contributed to parents' confidence and consent.

In the translation process, an additional challenge was encountered when the children spoke different languages in the same group, because that demanded double translation. This was a situation in two consultation groups, in both situations one interpreter knew both languages, so there was no need for the presence of two interpreters. Double translation did slow down the process and affected the group dynamic. However, these challenges are easier to overcome with established relationships with interpreters as collaborators.

Discussion

Lessons learned from this consultation process suggest several directions and issues in organizing consultation with children from vulnerable groups, especially with different languages and cultural backgrounds.

1. Before conducting consultation with children, a detailed preparation of all those who will be involved in this process is vital. This can be performed through a meeting or a short training, with a mandatory open space for everyone to share their doubts and to resolve them. In addition, it would be useful for facilitators to share experiences with each other – a short debriefing after each consultation. This has proven to be a good practice, as the facilitators knew and shared their experiences and challenges mutually. Facilitators should be prepared for possible changes and adjustments of questions in accordance with the specific characteristics of children (such as age and understanding).

2. During cooperation with gatekeepers, it is critical to follow the procedures of the organization / institution, particularly if it is necessary to seek permissions and consents for children's participation through them. Simultaneously, boundaries need to be clearly established. From this experience, it turned out to be important that e.g., the guardian was present in the room during the explanation of the purpose and asking for consent from the unaccompanied boys, but the guardian should not attend the consultations themselves, unless the child explicitly asks for his/her presence. Also, the support of care workers and professionals from the asylum centres in the recruitment of families with children was important and useful, but their presence at the consultations should be restricted unless the child explicitly asks for their presence.

3. It can be important, whenever possible, to make facilitators be the ones who discuss and negotiate the aims and manner of in-

volvement directly with children, including those who travel with parents. This helps in conveying clear and child-friendly messages, which may arise if care workers from the accommodation facilities explain the process, and in identifying support needs of children for meaningful participation (e.g., transportation issues, presence of interpreters, amount of time their participation requires).

4. It is highly desirable that facilitators are persons who are trained in research methods, and are not employed in any of the government or nongovernment institutions that deal directly or indirectly with migrant children, in order to keep their neutral position. If that is not possible, additional training has to be organized where the research neutrality and objectivity is addressed.

5. When scheduling consultations with children travelling with a parent/caregiver, it is very important that the consultations take place on the same day or no later than the following day after obtaining parents' consent. In this way, the shedding of the sample and the withdrawal of the parents could be prevented. Whenever possible, a cultural mediator from the same country/region should be involved to translate information to parents, but also to provide a safe context where all the questions that parents might have can be addressed.

6. When visual or other aids are used, it is necessary to use them flexibly and follow the preferences of children. In this process, the maps were available to the children, while the facilitators were instructed to use them when and if children wanted to. Visual aids need to be considered as an asset to the consultation process, without pressure for children.

7. Collaborative position of the interpreter in consultations with children in migration is highly recommended. Serving also as cultural mediators, they should be capable of decoding the process and influence cultural patterns, when it makes sense. It is crucial to negotiate the relationship with interpreters before involving chil-

dren. In order to clarify roles and responsibilities, a meeting/short training where both interpreters and facilitators are prepared to work collaboratively is recommendable.

8. Whenever possible and appropriate to the aim, research with unaccompanied children accommodated in institutions or collective centres should be conducted outside these facilities. This can help children to move aside from their environment, to remove concerns they may have about the possibility that someone whom they depend on finds out what they shared. Particular efforts are needed to ensure that children participating in group discussions speak the same language so that not too much time (and content) is wasted on double/triple translation. Presence of an interpreter is important, even if it is communicated to the research team that children speak the domicile language well enough. It seems better to ask the interpreter to leave the consultations when the children confirm that they feel comfortable enough to communicate in the domicile language.

9. Child safeguarding procedures need to be incorporated and all parties have to be introduced and familiarized with them. Furthermore, all persons involved have to be familiar with the steps that need to be taken if the child experiences distress during the consultations. In this case, a list with the available NGOs and institutions which provide child protection in Serbia was available to facilitators, who were instructed to provide appropriate information to children and to make referral if it is appropriate.

Conclusion

This consultation brought to light some important methodological considerations regarding suitable approaches with migrant children. Visual techniques as a consultation and research method may be particularly well suited to working with, rather than "on" younger children, and also facilitate communication for adoles-

cents, if they are used flexibly. Two issues seem to be of particular importance when discussing migrant children's participation in visual research: setting and ethics. Findings indicate that setting in a (relatively) neutral place that is warm and welcoming, together with refreshments and food, contribute to the atmosphere, and it opens up the space for children to express their views. When it comes to ethical issues in explaining the aim and purpose of the research to caregivers and children asking for both written and oral consent, it seems that flexibility is essential for this kind of research. Informed consent requires a tangible atmosphere of cooperation and where children are considered as counsellors and advisors if their meaningful and productive participation in the co-construction of knowledge is expected. The approach that truly informs and includes them as equals made a difference both in their willingness to participate and the possibility to express their views and feelings.

Involvement of interpreters who were trained, prepared and familiar with the goal and purpose of the consultations, opened up possibilities to contextualize the answers and to include cultural factors as part of the experience of migrant children. Most of the research treats interpreters as staff and not part of the team. That comes from a stance and belief that interpreters should be objective and focused exclusively on the content of the questions and disregard their human side as one who empathizes with the children's experiences and who can elaborate their answers from the perspective of cultural mediators.

This consultation process created a possibility to conceptualize migrant children as equals and associates with adults. That is a significant shift from previous research in the area, which was framed around a child's vulnerability, helplessness, and their role as victims. Conventional wisdom on research methods with children also highlights their vulnerability to persuasion, adverse influence, and harm

in research (Moskal, 2010, 19). With ethical sensitivity and supportive visual participatory method, this research transcends traditional approaches and demonstrates that visual methods can elucidate children's understanding of their everyday experiences and allow young people to express themselves. Inputs from children during the consultation process have been implemented in curriculum development. Students and professionals can learn from real case scenarios, insights, advice and recommendations of children.

Limitations of these consultations is about the sampling that was rather convenient, as the process did not have enough resources in terms of time and management to include children of different age, gender and status and are represented in the population of migrant children in Serbia. It is noted that children spoke about their experiences in other countries stating both the good and bad experiences while they said that in Serbia everything is fine and works well. It is possible that trying to focus only on positive aspects is the children's strategy to survive and it would be certainly useful to ask about children's experiences in Serbia from another country to maintain objective results. One more limitation comes from the lack of feedback to the children who participated in this study about the ways their experiences and views were implemented into the curricula for students and professionals. This is due to the fact that when the process of creating the curricula was completed all the children have left the country.

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