

As one of the very first Mobilisation of Mutual Learning Action Plans, SiS Catalyst: Children As Change Agents for the future of Science in Society was an ambitious project based on a very simple idea that: 'as children are the future, we must involve them in the decisions of today.' Through the development of this idea the project attempted to initiate new thinking and practice required to address the global challenges of the 21st century.

During the four-year funding period more than 50 organisations from over 30 countries were involved, working and learning together on a collective experiment to develop a model for a new educational ecosystem that places children as the drivers of the learning experience. What the project has illustrated is that spanning the many countries involved, a common feature is inequality in access to knowledge, education and then opportunity. But while this inequality is common, those who suffer from it is not. It is defined locally, the product of historical, economic and cultural forces. The experiences of those brought together by SiS Catalyst show that while the challenges facing the world may be global, the solutions are to a great extent intensely local. They require the building of an ecosystem to engage children that is nuanced, flexible and sensitive to local context if it is to thrive.

However at the heart of SiS Catalyst thinking is the recognition that how we are developing globally is currently unsustainable. We are currently putting the future of ALL human life in the balance. We have to find ways of developing our science with and for the future of the world. This means ALL of us - ALL scientists and ALL societies. This is our shared and collective agenda - all our individual agendas are tiny tributaries of this first and fundamental obligation.

The ultimate need of society is its own survival and this is what our current actions are putting into jeopardy. We as adults can find the simplicity of this concept difficult to embrace. Involvement of the perception of children within research and innovation policy and practice focuses the attention on the children's future as that is what we are collectively co-creating, enabling adults to recall the authenticity of thinking like a child.

In 2009, when the SiS Catalyst proposal was written, the expression Science in Society was being used, however by 2014 the phrase Science With and For Society has been adopted by the European Commission. This transition of thinking has been a fundamental aspect of the SiS Catalyst learning and is also directly linked to the concept of Responsible Research and Innovation. This concept requires that societal actors work together during the whole research and innovation process in order for research and innovation policy to be driven by the needs of society.

This growing recognition of the need for public engagement is the key element of the Responsible Research and Innovation ethos, which underpins Horizon 2020. The major message of SiS Catalyst is that children are societal actors and must be recognised as a 'public' in their own right. If we are going to engage with children as societal actors, then the processes involved must enable the young people to be empowered, to feel respected, to feel more confident in their own ability to make choices and decisions, in the short term but also in the future.

The other key message of SiS Catalyst is fundamentally positive – not only must we change but we can change. The process is well under way and we have to embrace change rather than resist it. This is the paradigm shift needed: our ability to think differently, to think globally, to recognise our shared humanity and to lose our fear of change. Listening to children (and acting upon this) is the quickest way for us to think differently.

The paradigm shift requires us to be open in our thinking and to remember ourselves what it is like to think like a child, free from the judgements that we have absorbed throughout our lifetime. To be curious and excited by the prospect of change but fundamentally thinking ethically and trusting our intuition as to what is right and what is wrong.

In order for this paradigm shift to occur - we recognised that we need to find different ways of thinking about ourselves, our shared future, and the world we want to bequeath our children. We proposed that we do this in partnership with the future i.e. in collaboration with our young people.