

**International Workshop**  
**Impact of Poverty and Social Exclusion on Children's Lives  
and their Well-being**

8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> September 2008 (til noon), Bratislava, Slovakia

Hosted by the Institute for Labour and Family Research, Bratislava

Funded by Childwatch International Research Network

**Abstract**

**Well-being and Children's Association:  
Processes of poverty and social exclusion in British civil society**

*Tom Cockburn (with Frances Cleaver), University of Bradford, United Kingdom*

We believe we can make an active contribution to the discussion on the impact of poverty and social exclusion to children's lives and well-being as we have just completed a study on behalf of Carnegie UK into how young people associate in civil society and what barriers they face in doing so? The findings from our work allow us to better understand processes of inclusion and exclusion. One of the major challenges around children and young people's involvement in civil society is to include those who are socially excluded. Indeed, some commentators have noted the exclusionary nature of civil society itself. This research suggests *both* the vibrancy of young people's association and the tenacity of barriers which limit involvement and obstruct the achievement of meaningful outcomes for wellbeing.

The concept of wellbeing is increasingly seen in both research and policy as a useful tool for linking multiple aspects of human flourishing. It provides a promising framework for thinking about children's association and civil society because it links the provision of basic needs with social relatedness, the exercise of meaningful agency and the attainment of enhanced quality of life.

Emerging findings that may form the basis of discussion include:

- The relevance of the concept of '**social capital**' for understanding **bonding**, **binding** and **linking** processes in children's association.
- The relevance of the concept of **wellbeing** to understand the material, social and psychological **outcomes** of association. A focus on wellbeing enabled us to see association as concerned with the **physical** (spaces/places/access), with **social relationships** (bonding, bridging and linking social capital) and with the **psychological** (personal meaning and the exercise of agency). In this study we have used wellbeing as a lens to scrutinise processes of inclusion and exclusion.
- The different processes at work in the ways children and young people express **voice** through association in a variety of ways including; **expression** of self, a **struggle** to be heard and a **dialogue** with other young people and adults.
- The strong interlinkages between the associational activities of **adults** and of children, which change across **lifecourses**. In particular how expecting young people's association to 'mirror' adult structures is likely to reinforce exclusionary processes.

- The enabling and constraining dimensions of the **spaces and places** of association; in particular the positive and negative aspects of strong **attachment to locality**.
- The need to facilitate a **diverse range of approaches** to children's and young people's association, supported over time, to ensure wider and more effective participation in civil society.

A mixed methods approach was adopted including an extensive literature review; 10 formal and informal interviews with academics, activists, practitioners and policy makers; and 4 case studies of children's association that included informal interviews, focus groups, observations and participatory exercises. The case studies included a series of participatory observational visits to a social housing estate; a focus group with 4 young women in a project for teenage mothers; a focus group with 10 members of the 'Bradford and Keighley Youth Parliament'; observations of a facilitated group of refugee and asylum seeker children and a participatory exercise with 5 of the children.

**Contact:**

Dr Tom Cockburn, Lecturer in Applied Social Sciences, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Bradford, United Kingdom

E-mail: [T.D.Cockburn@Bradford.ac.uk](mailto:T.D.Cockburn@Bradford.ac.uk)