



Western Norway
University of
Applied Sciences

KINDknow
Kindergarten Knowledge Centre
for Systemic Research on Diversity
and Sustainable Futures

Intergenerational engagements and programs in early childhood settings: What do we mean?



KINDknow Kindknow Notes series 15, 2025

Introduction

Intergenerational engagements and programs (IGEs&Ps) are happening everywhere around us. We can think of these initiatives as opportunities for different generations to collaborate, communicate and interact with each other within a particular place, context and time.

From our research, we have found that some early childhood educators in Norway think that intergenerational engagements between young children and the elderly are important. These engagements and programs are locally known as “generasjonsmøter,” which translated to generational meetings. Below are quotes of what some of them said in our study:

“[It is] very nice and rewarding for all parties, both the children, us adults they are with, the elderly, the staff of the aged care centres and the relatives. Happy stories should be written in the local newspapers when kindergartens visit. This can inspire other aged care centres and kindergartens to work together.”

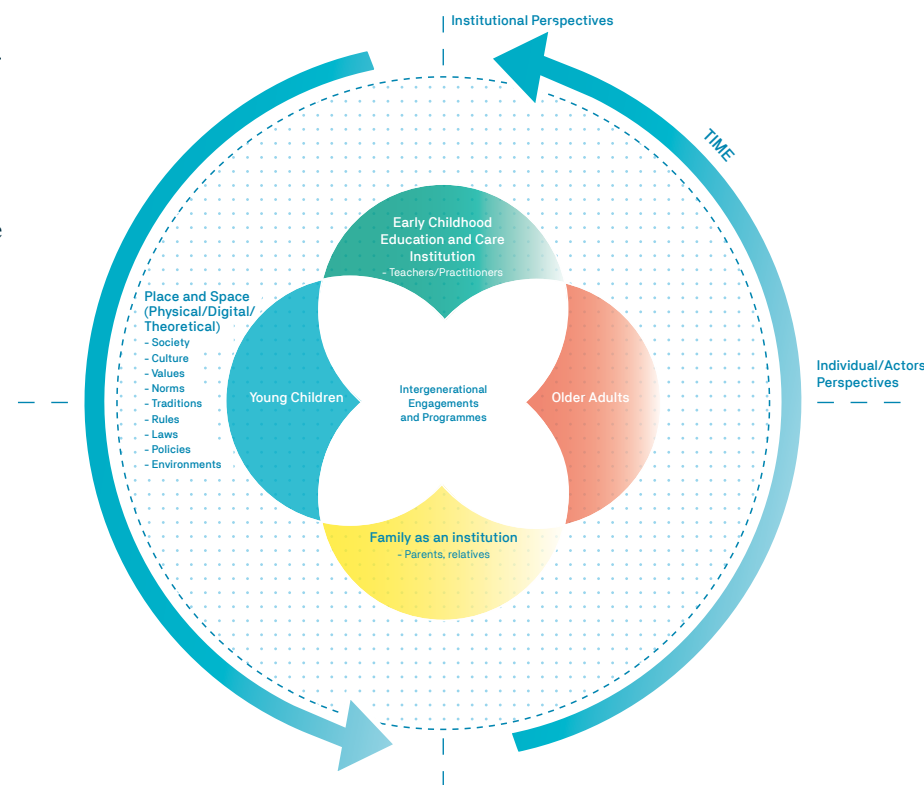
“Yes, I think it is important to have meetings between children and the elderly. There is a lot of culture and knowledge that is relayed in these meetings. And that it is a joyful experience both ways.”

To better understand intergenerational engagements and programs, we have created an intergenerational visual framework that would also help determine if an initiative or project is intergenerational in nature.

This visual framework will also help to determine if you already have an intergenerational engagement or a program.

This intergenerational visual framework highlights the relational and collaborative nature of intergenerational engagements and programs that is necessarily intertwined with the events, philosophies, rules, regulations of a particular place at a particular time (Oropilla & Ødegaard, 2021).

Further, we view intergenerational engagements and programs as initiatives, activities and practices that are shared between and among the different elements (i.e. people, places and time) that are involved. We also see intergenerational engagements and programs as arenas for learning and development that has the potential to contribute to and support sustainable futures for all.



In this booklet, we have broken down each element of the visual framework. We also discuss some of our research findings. Lastly, we have a list of references/publications resulting from a research project on this topic.

What are intergenerational engagements and programs?

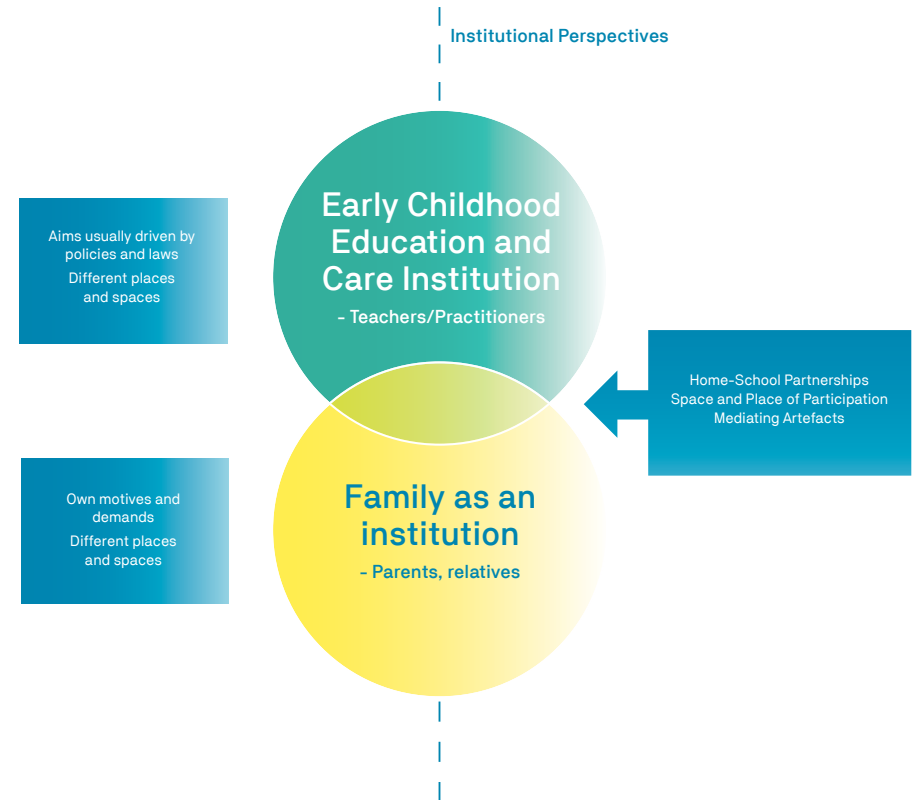
When we say intergenerational engagements, we refer to informal initiatives that occur in family and community settings.

On the other hand, intergenerational programs are engagements between young and old that happen in more formal and institutionalized. For these programs to happen, there must be collaborations and partnerships between and among different institutions. Some examples of these are kindergartens and old-age institutions.

Intergenerational engagements and programs in the field of early childhood education and care ECEC are complex, relational practices that involve different elements. The term “inter” entails something that happens between separate parties or elements.

Some of the most important elements of IGEs&Ps in ECEC are the following:

- **Individuals**
ex. young children, older adults
- **Institutions**
ex. ECEC institutions/kindergartens, families
- **Places and Spaces**
(Physical, Digital, Theoretical)
ex. Countries, Cultures, Environments, Landscapes, theories that contextualize intergenerational engagements and programs
- **Time**

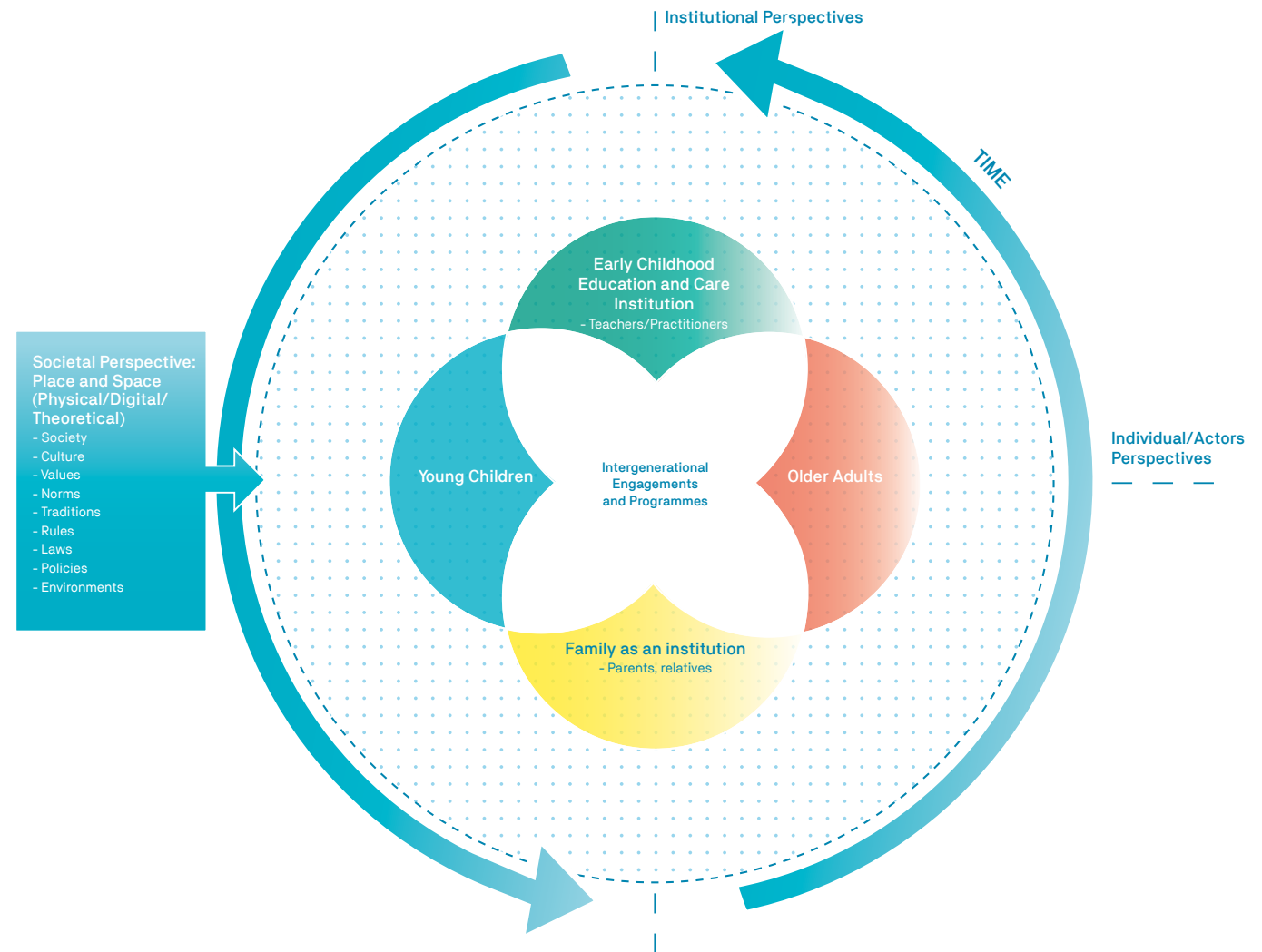


Places and spaces

In our study, we acknowledge that intergenerational engagements and programs happen in different places and contexts. In the intergenerational visual framework, this is represented by a big dotted circle interwoven with the different actors. Places and spaces include specific places such as countries with particular rules, regulations, cultures, values, norms and traditions, but also in different digital and theoretical spaces that also affect social situations and conditions of intergenerational engagements and programs.

In our research, we have been able to generate some data in two countries—Norway and the Philippines. In Norway, we have been able to gain some insights from intergenerational programs that kindergartens are involved in. In the Philippines, we have been able to gain insights of lived intergenerational engagements of two multigenerational families in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the places utilized for intergenerational engagements and programs include, but are not limited to:

- Schools or kindergartens
- Elderly institutions
- Farms
- Community gardens
- Their own household spaces
- Kindergartens
- neighborhood spaces



In our research project, we acknowledge that there are more intergenerational places and spaces with diverse practices and practices all over the world. We hope to explore these more in the future.

Who are involved?

In different settings, young children and older adults have meetings that are usually mediated by the “sandwich generation” comprised of the children’s parents, or the staff of the institutions where the old and young participate in. While the youngest and the oldest generations are referred to as the “book-end generations,” the “sandwich generation” refers to those in between the youngest and the oldest generations. As such, there are many people involved in making intergenerational engagements and programs happen:

Children

In our research project, we have focused on children who are in their kindergarten years (0-6 years old).

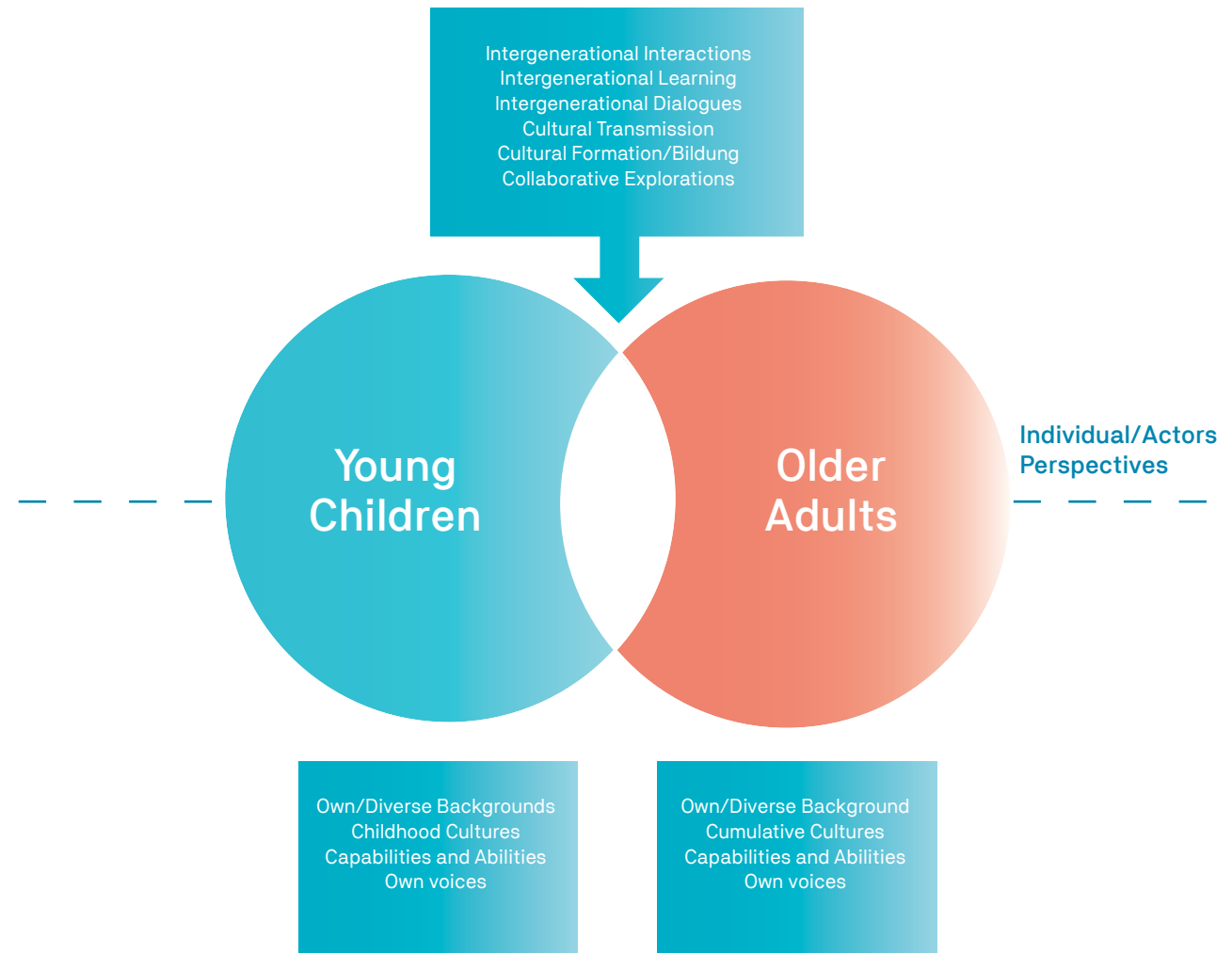
Older adults

We use this term simultaneously and concurrently when also referring to “the elderly,” or those on the opposite end of the life spectrum of children. In our research project, we have included adults who have become grandparents earlier in life—at around 50 years old and above.

Children’s parents

Children’s teachers

Children and older adults’ relatives



Activities and practices

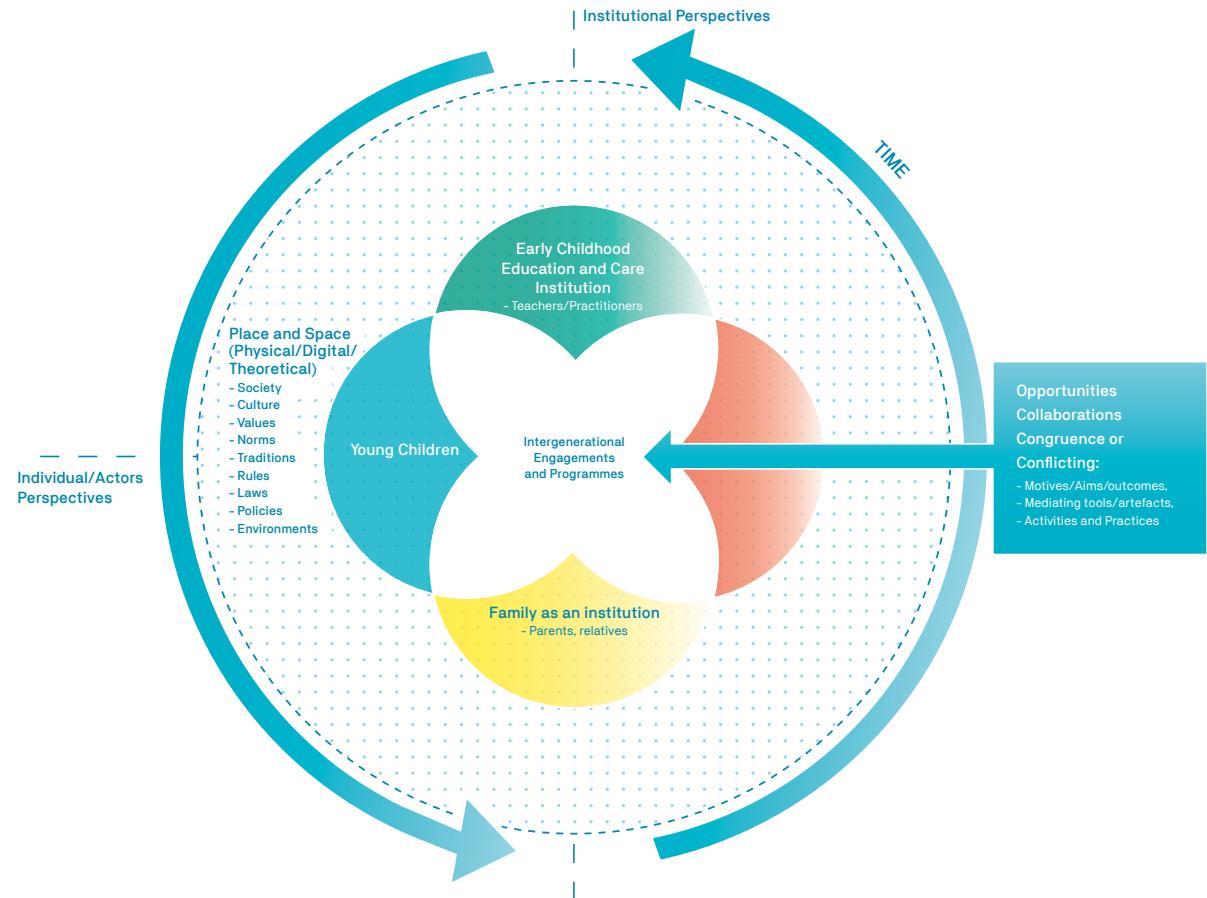
There are many different activities that the young and old can do together. Some of the activities that our research participants have shared with us are the following:

- Farming
- Gardening
- Using different “artefacts”
- Taking photos and films together (Tiktok, etc)
- Playing
- Singing
- Drawings

The most important thing to consider when thinking of intergenerational activities is to let the young and the old talk, collaborate, cooperate and co-create with each other. Ideally, they should be involved in making decisions regarding the activities. Trying out new things is always exciting! Let the creative juices flow :)

Other suggested activities:

- Cooking or baking together
- Co-creating stories and books
- Creating artworks
- Role-play a performance
- Working together
- Repairing something broken together
- Cleaning and tidying together
- Creating a collection of selected items together
- Telling cultural stories about the place or activities
- Telling personal stories of experience
- Transmit craftsmanship
- Transmit local knowledge
- Listening to children
- Being curious of children’s lives
- Learning from children
- Opening up for children’s guidance of a local place
- Eliciting children’s stories
- Walking and talking together
- Using different artefacts for play, for crafts making, for styling



Challenges

We found out that those in the sandwich generations have an important mediating role. However, the children's parents and early childhood educators that we have worked with in the research project have also expressed concerns over how it is sometimes difficult to make intergenerational engagements and programs happen.

For early childhood educators, they have expressed difficulties with planning, organizing and implementing the intergenerational programs as they have to coordinate with the schedules with the staff in elderly institutions. They have also expressed challenges when there are not enough staff members, especially since they also need to prepare the children who might not be so used to interacting with older adults:

“The meeting will be perceived as a major event, which can be experienced violently for some of the vulnerable/sensitive children who find it scary. The meeting will therefore require some time for planning and organizing in advance for the employees to ensure that all children have a good experience.”

“The only drawback I can think of now is that there is a lot of time and planning in and visiting. There must be enough staff in the kindergarten so that we have and support up when we are visiting and that there are people left in the kindergarten with those who do not go to visit.”



Photo: Shutterstock

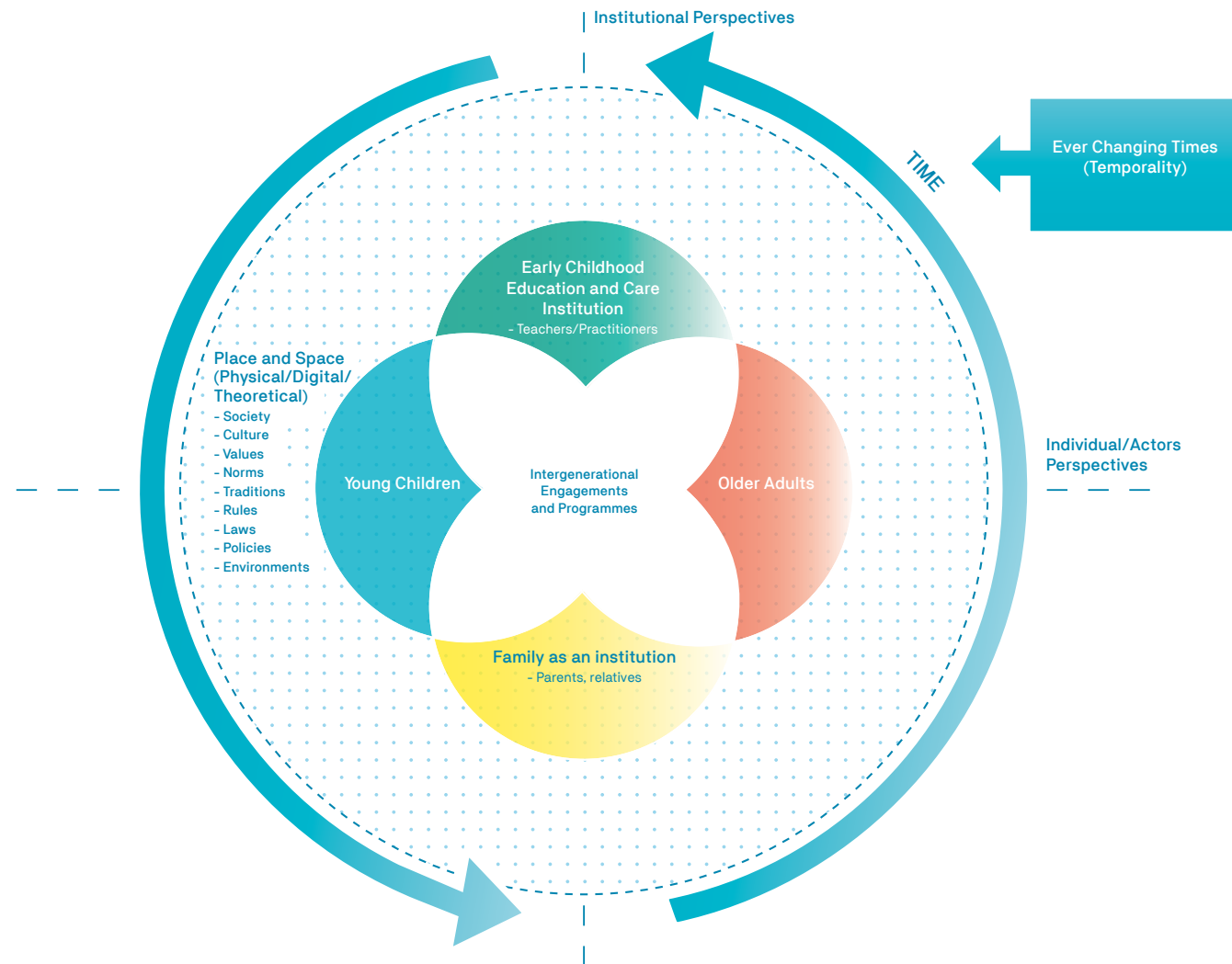
For children's parents, a lot of the challenges came with the pandemic regulations. Even though they wanted the children and older adults to have physical interactions and shared activities, it was difficult due to the rules and regulations of the specific to this time.

The element of time

As above, time is an important element in intergenerational engagements and programs.

Time is a continuum that is relative, fleeting and temporal. This is particularly true for intergenerational engagements and programs where children and older adults collide at different points in time. These collisions represent opportunities to create memories at different points in their lifespans. For these meetings, their past experiences and knowledge guide them for both the present and the future—in this sense, they are never the same person whenever they engage with each other.

In addition, the element of time contextualizes how and why intergenerational engagements and programs happen. A good example of this is the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus which hindered a lot of intergenerational initiatives as older adults were most susceptible to being infected. Despite the challenges of this time of crisis, we have found that there were still learning opportunities for both the young and the old during this time.



How can we better understand intergenerational engagements and programs?

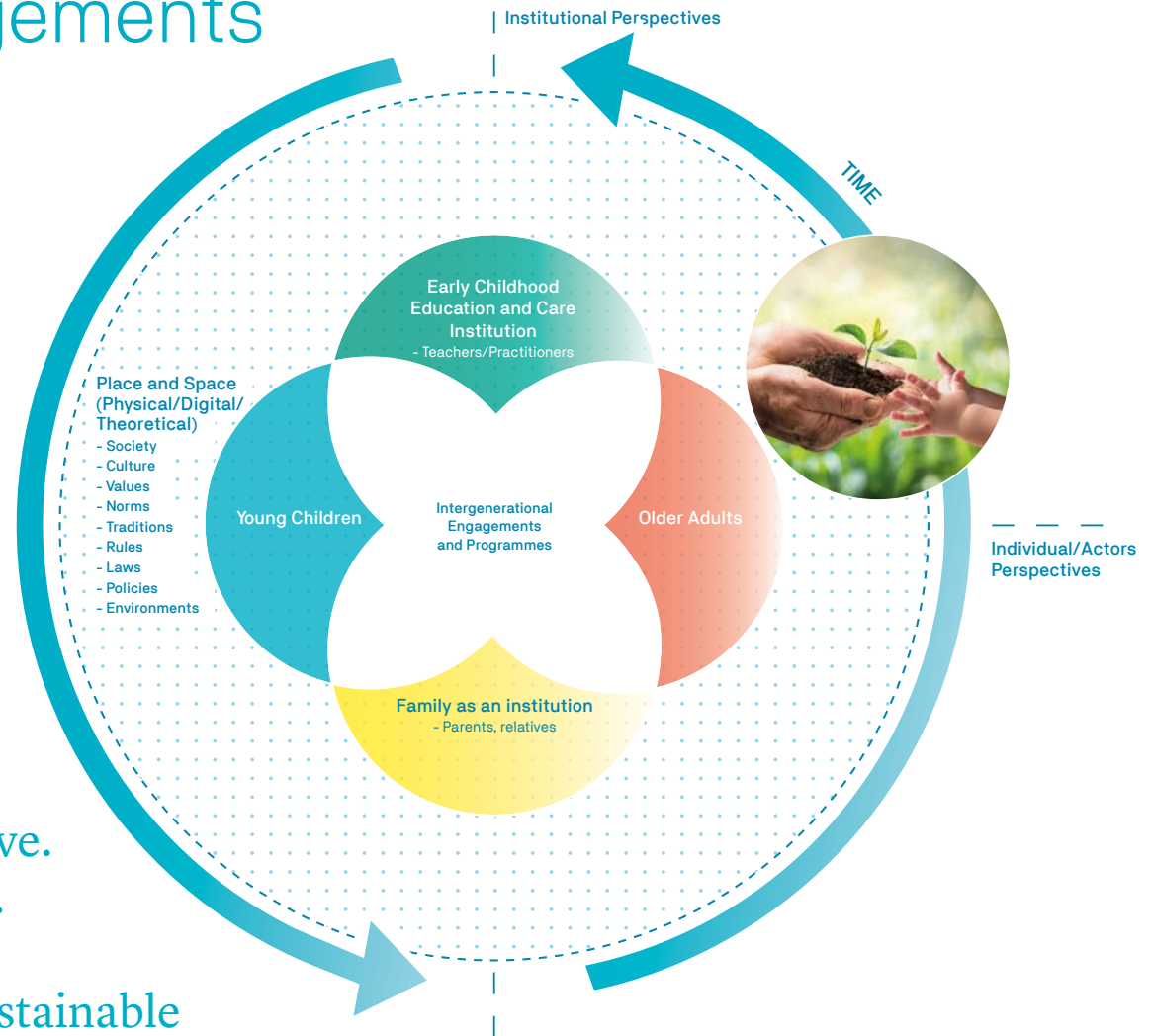
In our research project, we assert that we can better understand intergenerational engagements and programs when we take into consideration cultural nuances specific to each. In doing so we develop local and indigenous understandings alongside global discourses—highlighting Glocality in IGEs&Ps.

We have done this through the use of the more appropriate and locally used terminologies such as the use of “elderly” and “generasjonsmøter” for the Norwegian study. We have also incorporated “culturally sensitive” methods to generate some of the data for the study in the Philippines.

Ultimately, we also have to remember that IGEs&Ps require time and collaborations. It is a relational concept that needs relational processes and solutions.

We also argue that intergenerational engagements and programs are initiatives that strengthen social and cultural sustainability and aligned with attaining UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Therefore, we understand intergenerational engagements and programs as contributing to sustainable futures where the field of early childhood education and care is at the forefront.

Complex.
Relational.
Collaborative.
Intentional.
Glocal.
Towards sustainable futures.



KINDknow - Kindergarten Knowledge Centre for Systemic Research on Diversity and Sustainable Futures

KINDknow generates knowledge that is locally sensitive and internationally relevant. International comparative surveys combined with qualitative, close-to-practice research approaches provide overviews over the diversity of early childhood education and inspiring insights into local practices.

hvl.no/en/KINDknow

Oropilla, C.T., White, E.J., Ødegaard, E. E. (forthcoming). Intergenerational engagements between young children and older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown of 2020: case studies from the Philippines. Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy.



Western Norway
University of
Applied Sciences

KINDknow
Kindergarten Knowledge Centre
for Systemic Research on Diversity
and Sustainable Futures



KINDknow notes series 15, 2025
ISBN 978-82-8461-169-3
ISSN 2704-1778