

# Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic

Final report

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## List of Abbreviations

AAP	Advisory Assistance Programme
ALMŠ	Asociace lesních mateřských škol (Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens)
BMUB	Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit (German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety)
BvNW	Bundesverband der Natur- und Waldkindergärten in Deutschland e.V. (German Association of Nature and Forest Kindergartens)
LaNU	Sächsische Landesstiftung Natur und Umwelt (Saxony State Foundation for Nature and Environment)
MŠMT	Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic)
MŽP	Ministerstvo životního prostředí (Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic)
UBA	Umweltbundesamt (German Environment Agency)

## Summary

The Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic (MŽP) seeks to make environmental education an integral part of elementary education, comprising also preschool education. It perceives the concept of forest kindergartens as an ideal concept for preschool environmental education and, therefore, is motivated to facilitate the founding and operation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic, e.g. by initiating a Czech-German bilateral project on the subject in the context of the Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP).

The intention of the project “Facilitation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic” has been to identify and reduce barriers and levels of reservations towards forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic and, thereby, to facilitate the founding and operation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic. It was implemented 09/2015 – 06/2016 by the Saxony State Foundation for Nature and Environment (LaNU) in close cooperation with MŽP and the Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens (ALMŠ). The two key activities of the project have been a

- workshop, implemented in 11/2015 in Prague, which involved all relevant actors at state level for reflecting the subject, as well as
- the compilation of recommendations, that took account of specific framework conditions in the Czech Republic.

The project’s results comprise an overview of the situation of forest kindergartens in Germany and in the Czech Republic, a set of recommendations addressing particular challenges in the Czech Republic, increased public attention, as well as an extended and intensified cooperation between relevant actors.

The coincidence of the revision of the Czech Republic’s Education Act early 2016 opened a “window of opportunity” for progress on the subject already during the project period. A press conference in 06/2016 in Prague presented this progress and the recommendations derived in the context of this project to the public. The 22<sup>nd</sup> of June was declared a “Day of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic”. First activities to extend the scope of this day towards an “International Day of Forest Kindergartens” have been started.

## 1 Project context

The Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic (Ministerstvo životního prostředí, MŽP) seeks to make environmental education an integral part of elementary education, comprising also preschool education. It perceives the concept of forest kindergartens as an ideal concept for preschool environmental education and, therefore, is motivated to facilitate the founding and operation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic, inter alia by supporting initiatives of the Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens (Asociace lesních mateřských škol, ALMŠ)<sup>1</sup>.

The term „forest kindergarten“ comprises kindergartens that teach and educate children every day mainly outside in nature, most often in a forest, regardless of the weather. Their concept is based on the understanding that children can learn, move and play in nature better than indoors and that they are capable to develop an awareness for ecological phenomena at an early age already. Part of the concept is that education is provided outside of solid buildings. Instead, forest kindergartens use – heatable – trailers or little sheds for storing equipment, for resting after lunch and for finding shelter in cases of severe weather conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Germany and the Czech Republic look at different experiences with forest kindergartens regarding aspects of

- time (period of forest kindergartens existing in a country),
- variety (number and diversity of concepts of forests kindergartens in a country) and
- acceptance by public authorities (operating with or without operating licence).

Referring to these different experiences and in the context of the Czech-German bilateral cooperation in environmental preschool education existing already for several years, MŽP, ALMŠ and the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, MŠMT) wished to exchange

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<sup>1</sup> ALMŠ is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which was established in 01/2011 in order to support the development of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic. It represents a platform to share experiences, it contributes to legislative negotiations, it is active in raising public awareness on forest kindergartens, it offers training courses for teachers and it is engaged in research.  
<http://www.lesnims.cz/> (in Czech language only)

<sup>2</sup> <http://bvnr.de/was-ist-ein-natur-oder-waldkindergarten/> (in German language only);  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest\\_kindergarten](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_kindergarten)



experiences with Germany on establishing and operating forest kindergartens. In the context of the Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit, BMUB), MŽP and the German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA) developed the project “Facilitation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic”. This report summarises this project and its results.

## 2 Project implementation

The intention of the project “Facilitation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic” has been to identify and reduce barriers and levels of reservations towards forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic and thereby to facilitate the founding and operation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic. It was implemented 09/2015 – 06/2016 by the Saxony State Foundation for Nature and the Environment (Sächsische Landesstiftung Natur und Umwelt, LaNU)<sup>3</sup> in close cooperation with MŽP and ALMŠ.

The two key activities of the project have been:

- a workshop and
- the compilation of recommendations.

### 2.1 Workshop

In November 2015, a workshop under the heading “Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic – About authorisation, permits, acceptance and Ministry registers” was organized at the premises of MŽP in Prague, which assembled decision-makers and officers of public authorities as well as of (potential) operators of forest kindergartens, experienced forest kindergarten teachers and representatives of forest kindergarten associations of Germany and of the Czech Republic.

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<sup>3</sup> The Saxony State Foundation for Nature and the Environment (LaNU) is a foundation which pursues exclusively and directly not-for-profit aims for the protection of nature and the environment in the German State of Saxony. “Educate, support, preserve, create“ is the mission of the LaNU.  
<http://www.lanu.de/>

## The participants represented

- on Ministry level: four Ministries of the Czech Republic (MŽP, MŠMT, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Regional Development),
- on state agency level: the Czech Health Institute and the State Office for Social Affairs, Youth and Provisioning (Landesamt für Soziales, Jugend und Versorgung) of Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany),
- on forest kindergarten association level: ALMŠ and the German Association of Nature and Forest Kindergartens (Bundesverband der Natur- und Waldkindergärten in Deutschland e.V., BvNW), as well as
- forest kindergartens in Germany and in the Czech Republic, outdoor education projects in the Czech Republic, a consultancy specialised in advising kindergartens in Germany, and LaNU (see Annex for more details).

The opening of the workshop by Jan Kříž, Deputy Minister of MŽP, expressed the political relevance of the subject.



Picture 1: Jan Kříž, Deputy Minister of MŽP, welcomed the participants of the workshop and emphasised the importance of environmental education. Photo: ALMŠ

In order to facilitate the assessment, exchange and discussion at the workshop LaNU, MŽP and ALMŠ had developed prior to the workshop a handout comprising the agenda and information on the lecturers and their presentations, as well as background information on the current situation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic and the challenges they face.

The workshop's concept comprised:

- a section with presentations and a panel discussion on technical details,
- a section with group work, and
- a concluding panel discussion.

The presentations addressed the topics:

- History and the current situation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic,
- History and the current situation of forest kindergartens in Germany,
- The duty of supervision, safety regulations and child-welfare in forest kindergartens,
- Operation permits, acceptance and regulations of forest kindergartens in Germany: How German authorities deal with different types of forest kindergartens,
- Dealing with problems when establishing a forest kindergarten and finding solutions in Germany, and
- Experiences from establishing a forest kindergarten in Leipzig, Germany.



Picture 2 and 3: The Heads of the German and the Czech Associations of Forest Kindergartens (BvNW and ALMŠ) presented their experiences with forest kindergartens in their countries.  
Photos: ALMŠ

The panel discussion of the first day focussed on the German context and reflected advantages and disadvantages of approaches implemented in Germany.



The group work section focussed on the Czech context and made two groups identify challenges in the Czech Republic and derive options to address them from two different perspectives:

- from the authorities' perspective and
- from the operators' perspective.

With a focus on the specific conditions in the Czech Republic, they reflected the applicability of the approaches implemented in Germany and of possible adaptations.

The panel discussion of the second day reflected ways to raise awareness about forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic.

## 2.2 Compilation of recommendations

In order to facilitate the transfer of the workshop's results into concrete activities in the Czech Republic, a group of experts of MŽP, ALMŠ, of the forest kindergarten Lesmír in Liberec, of the FRÖBEL forest kindergarten in Leipzig, of the German consultancy "kitabberatung.com GbR" and of LaNU met after the workshop to distil its insights and lessons learnt and to compile them towards a set of recommendations.

Because the framework conditions, including decision-making and legislative processes, of Germany and of the Czech Republic vary widely and because no German state (Bundesland)<sup>4</sup> has conditions and processes that are similar to those in the Czech Republic, there is no approach implemented in Germany, which could be transferred unchanged into the Czech framework conditions in order to immediately address all challenges. Instead, Czech-specific recommendations had to be derived. They concern

- the promotion of facilitating legislation, regulations and administrative procedures,
- the increase of financial resources,
- the extension of the communication with relevant authorities, and
- the continuation and extension of the exchange of experiences with international actors (see Chapter 3.3 for more details).

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<sup>4</sup> Germany is a federal republic which consists of 16 states.

Responding to the public attention that the subject had attracted in the Czech Republic during the course of the project and aiming to use this momentum to further raise the awareness for forest kindergartens by arranging a press conference on which the project's results should be presented, MŽP and ALMŠ advanced the mutually developed English draft of the recommendations on short notice towards the Czech language publication “Doporučení pro tvorbu podmínek zakládání a provozu lesních mateřských škol v České republice” (Recommendations for improving the conditions for establishing and operating forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic) and published it in 06/2016.<sup>5</sup>

### 3 Project results

The project generated:

- an overview of the situation of forest kindergartens in Germany,
- an overview of the situation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic, including a list of obstacles challenging the founding and operation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic,
- a set of recommendations addressing these obstacles,
- increased public attention, and
- an extended and intensified cooperation between relevant actors.

#### 3.1 Overview of the situation of forest kindergartens in Germany<sup>6</sup>

In Germany, the first forest kindergartens were established in the late 1960ies in the so-called “western states” (alte Bundesländer). In 1993, the first of them was officially recognised as a preschool institution of education by its competent authority.

Meanwhile there are more than 1.500 forest kindergartens in Germany, teaching and educating their children outdoors.<sup>7</sup> Their concepts vary, e.g. in regard to curriculum,

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.mzp.cz/cz/zakladani\\_provoz\\_lms](http://www.mzp.cz/cz/zakladani_provoz_lms) (in Czech language only)

<sup>6</sup> This chapter presents information, which has been assembled by Anna-Katharina Klauer (LaNU), Ute Schulte-Ostermann (BvNW), Hildegard Stoertz (State Office for Social Affairs, Youth and Provisioning of Rhineland-Palatinate), Ursula Grunert (FRÖBEL forest kindergarten, Leipzig), and Katharina Lenz (UBA).

<sup>7</sup> <http://bvwn.de/uber-uns/> (in German language only)

facilities and equipment, as well as working hours.<sup>8</sup> There is no official definition of forest kindergartens.

The number of working hours still indicates the different experiences and attitudes on educational subjects between the “western states” and the “eastern states” (neue Bundesländer). This originates in the different history that they experienced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the “eastern states”, almost all kindergartens are operated on a full-time basis, whereas in the “western states” kindergartens operating on a half-day-basis still prevail. This aspect did have an effect on the challenges for obtaining an operating license for forest kindergartens (see below). However, the number of forest kindergartens working on a full-time basis has meanwhile increased across all states. In all states, forest kindergartens with all their variety are, in principle, accepted as a type of institution for preschool education that is equivalent to conventional kindergartens. Nevertheless, several specific administrative regulations need to be followed in Germany, too, and details of concepts need to be reflected together with public authorities before a forest kindergarten can obtain an operating license and start its operation officially.

Aspects relevant to all types of kindergartens in Germany are inter alia:

- Competences of state institutions: In the federal system of Germany, the majority of educational policy subjects are regulated at state level (not at federal level). In most cases, subjects of preschool education are in the competence of the State Ministries of Social Affairs<sup>9</sup>, not necessarily in the competence of the State Ministries of Education. Every state has developed its own administrative system for providing preschool education, including decision-making structures and regulations. Within these different administrative systems, several public authorities at state, county (Landkreis) and municipal (local) level cooperate in different ways.

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<sup>8</sup> A forest kindergarten may welcome children directly in a forest and operate in the morning hours only, with a small roof as shelter without walls, toilets, running water, and toys – or it may be part of a conventional kindergarten, using (a part of) the building as meeting place and for the afternoon hours.

<sup>9</sup> In most states, the State Ministries of Social Affairs are also responsible for additional policy fields, e.g. families, health, integration. This is why in the 16 German states, the exact names of the State Ministries of Social Affairs differ.

- The role of Youth Welfare Offices: Youth Welfare Offices exist at state as well as at county level. The State Offices of Youth Welfare (Landesjugendämter) are responsible for accepting operators of kindergartens and of issuing operating licences for kindergartens. In all states, operating licences are issued after consultations with other relevant departments, e.g. for building, public health, and fire prevention.  
The Youth Welfare Offices at county level (Jugendämter) are, inter alia, responsible for providing childcare in a kindergarten to interested parents and coordinate the supervision of kindergartens. These Youth Welfare Offices also offer advice to initiatives that wish to establish a kindergarten, e.g. they inform and advise on regulations and procedures in order to get an operating license.
- Requirement plan (Bedarfsplan): Annually, the Youth Welfare Offices develop a requirement plan which determines in which municipality of a county which kind, number and capacity (= places) of kindergartens shall operate. The local demand of parents for childcare in kindergartens and demographic developments are thereby considered. The issuing of operating licences for kindergartens is related to the demand for childcare in kindergartens expressed in the relevant requirement plan.<sup>10</sup>
- Variety of operators: There is a large variety of institutions operating kindergartens, e.g. municipalities, associations, congregations, parental initiatives, also companies. The acceptance of an operator by the respective State Office for Youth Welfare is a precondition for state funding.
- Financial support: Only kindergartens operated by an accepted operator, with a valid operating license, and justified by the requirement plan can receive financial support from state institutions.
- Framework educational programmes (Bildungspläne or Bildungs- und Erziehungspläne): Framework educational programmes are developed at state level. Each state develops its own programmes. Any kindergarten has to integrate the provisions and requirements of the relevant framework educational programmes into their concepts – and follow them.

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<sup>10</sup> In some cases, a kindergarten can receive an operating licence regardless to the requirement plan, e.g. a kindergarten of a company (Betriebskindergarten). However, kindergartens without the legitimation of the requirement plan do not receive state funding, see bullet point below.

- Risk assessment and risk management: In Germany, it is recommended that, in any kindergarten, risks are to be identified, defined, evaluated and documented in internal documents. The following figure is one example to illustrate the dimensions that risk assessment has to focus on:

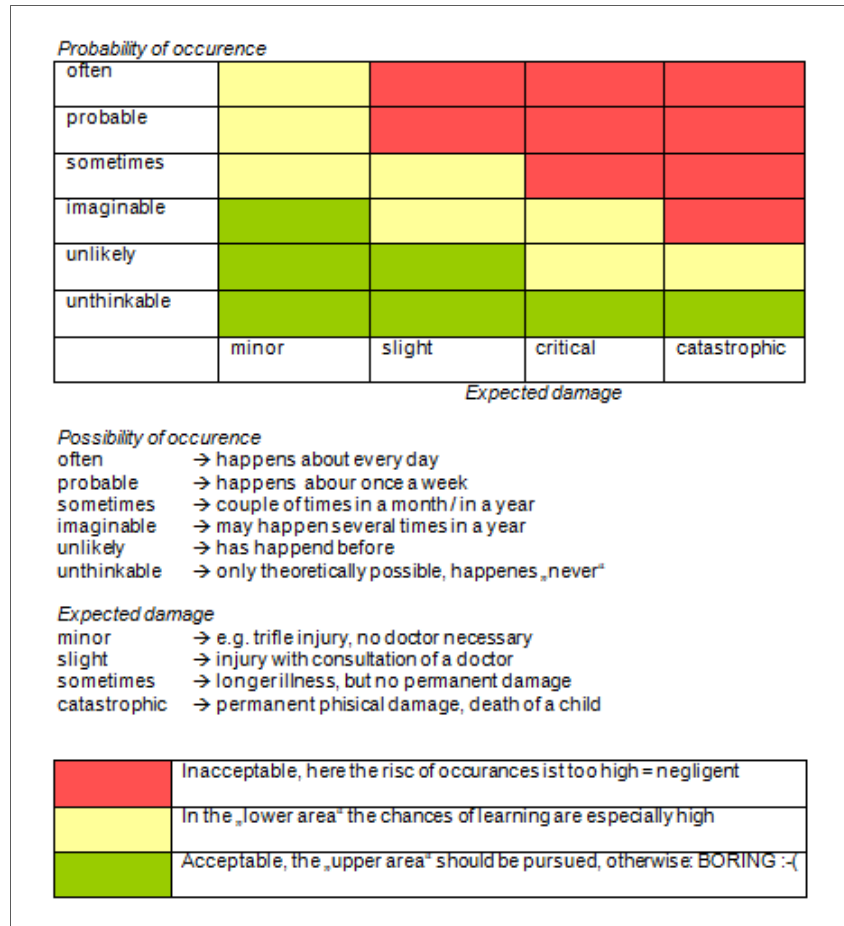


Figure 1: Risk assessment according to Siegfried Oeter (2015): The duty of supervision, safety regulations and child-welfare in forest kindergartens. In: MŽP, ALMŠ and LaNU (2015): Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic – About authorization, permits, acceptance and Ministry registers. Workshop handout. Not published.

Acceptable risks, e.g. when working with sharp knives, have to be addressed with measures that minimise the probability of their occurrence. Children as well as parents should be made familiar with these risks and with the options to adequately address them.

- Support by trainees and volunteers: The team of kindergarten teachers can be supported by trainees, e.g. by kindergarten teachers in education, and by volunteers. Volunteer approaches like the “Voluntary Year of Social Service” attract young people who enrich the education in kindergartens with additional ideas and skills and who release additional capacities of the teachers for



education purposes by taking over simpler tasks. In order to benefit regularly from trainees and volunteers, kindergartens have to define their responsibilities in their internal documents and determine a mentor for them. In any case, trainees and volunteers do not replace kindergarten teachers accounted for in the teacher-child-ratio, but are counted as an addition to the required teacher-child-ratio.

Aspects specific to forest kindergartens in Germany are inter alia:

- Diversity and flexibility of regulations and procedures: Across all states, details of regulations and procedures with respect to forest kindergartens differ, e.g. regarding the teacher-child-ratio, building codes, as well as hygiene and sanitation standards (the latter can differ even between municipalities). The implementation of these regulations is subject to the interpretation and discretion of the county/municipal authorities' contact persons – and, therefore, can vary in its details from municipality to municipality.<sup>11</sup>
- Additional actors to be involved: Besides the authorities, respectively, departments that are to be involved when establishing a conventional kindergarten (see above), establishing a forest kindergarten requires involving additional actors, e.g. forest owners.
- Differentiation related to working hours: There are often more challenges to establish a full-time forest kindergarten compared to establishing a half-day forest kindergarten, because the former face stricter requirements for shelter (buildings/stationary solid shelters vs., e.g., small sheds) and because of the need to provide lunch. The stricter requirements for issuing operating licences to full-time forest kindergartens are one reason why in the “eastern states” the number of forest kindergartens grew more slowly, because there, full-time childcare is more often requested. Receiving an operating licence for a forest kindergarten working only until noon without the need to provide lunch and bedrooms as initiated more often in the “western states” is much less challenging.

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<sup>11</sup> According to Hildegard Stoertz of the State Office for Social Affairs, Youth and Provisioning of Rhineland-Palatinate, one example for the range of acceptable interpretations for „room“ is that in Rhineland-Palatinate the forest itself can be accepted as „room“ (in the sense of place/space) for a forest kindergarten – without the need for another building or shelter.

- Flexible catering requirements: In forest kindergartens, standards are applied that fit into the wide range of EU standards for food supply, including those for outdoor settings. Parents can provide lunch for their children in boxes or caterers can deliver meals. Drinking water can be provided in barrels. The requirements for their utilisation and purification are defined by local health offices and, therefore, vary.<sup>12</sup>
- Additional focus on risk education: Because the residual risk of activities in nature is higher than in a room, risk education of children is an integral part of the curriculum of forest kindergartens. This approach has proven to successfully enable children to acquire competences in risk assessment, which is a valuable skill for later stages in their lives.
- Adequate pedagogical education: In Germany, state and private universities offer single courses as well as complete study programmes on nature and outdoor pedagogy and, thereby, educate also teachers for forest kindergartens.
- Support by volunteers with a focus on ecological subjects: Forest kindergartens in Germany benefit from the involvement of volunteers experiencing the “Voluntary Year of Ecological Service”. They assist the team of kindergarten teachers being an additional adult who accompanies the children and their teachers outside.

### 3.2 Overview of the situation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic<sup>13</sup>

According to the definition of ALMŠ, in the Czech Republic, a kindergarten is considered a forest kindergarten when children are at least 70 % of their time in the kindergarten educated and trained in nature. Instead of solid buildings, shelter is provided by caravans, yurts, teepees and huts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Differences relate, inter alia, to the type of barrels accepted as well as to type, number, and frequency of disinfection treatments.

<sup>13</sup> This chapter presents information, which has been assembled by Tereza Valkounová (ALMŠ), Magda Kvítková (ALMŠ) and Anna-Katharina Klauer (LaNU).

<sup>14</sup> MŽP, ALMŠ and LaNU (2015): Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic – About authorization, permits, acceptance and Ministry registers. Workshop handout. Not published.

In the Czech Republic, the first forest kindergarten was founded in 2009. In June 2016, 144 forest kindergartens existed across the country. Only two of them have officially been recognised as preschool institution of education (kindergarten), possess an operating license and receive state funding. These two are attached to conventional kindergartens and, therefore, can use conventional buildings for shelter, which is currently a precondition for official acceptance (see below). The other forest kindergartens operate as private initiatives without operating licenses. The increasing popularity of forest kindergartens, especially among parents, has increased the demand for legitimacy of this kind of preschool education.<sup>15</sup> But the concept and functioning of forest kindergartens are so new to authorities in the Czech Republic, that their regulations and standards do not seem to allow the issuing of operating licenses, yet.

When summarizing the situation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic, aspects relevant to all types of kindergartens in the Czech Republic are inter alia:

- Competences of state institutions: Preschool education is in the competence of the MŠMT. It is regulated and supervised at state (= national) level. There is no intermediary authority at regional or local level between the national level MŠMT and the local (potential) operators of kindergartens comparable to the Youth Welfare Offices in Germany.
- Relevance of the MŠMT register: The MŠMT keeps a register, into which every kindergarten in the Czech Republic needs to be enrolled, in order to be officially recognised as an institution of preschool education and, thereby, to receive state funding. From 09/2017 onwards, only kindergartens enrolled in this register will be allowed to teach children during their compulsory year of preschool education before they go to school.
- The role of municipalities: Almost all conventional kindergartens in the Czech Republic are operated by municipalities. These do reflect the demand of parents for childcare in kindergartens, but an instrument like the requirement plan in Germany is not systematically applied yet.

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<sup>15</sup> The increasing popularity of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic is, inter alia, illustrated by the rising number of forest kindergartens registered as members of ALMŠ. According to Magda Kvítková (ALMŠ), 120 forest kindergartens had been members of ALMŠ in October 2015. In June 2016, the number of forest kindergartens registered as members of ALMŠ is 144. Personal communication.

According to MŽP and ALMŠ<sup>16</sup>, the challenges specific to forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic comprise:

- Unfavourable definition of preschool education in the Education Act: Until 05/2016, the Czech legislation on preschool education has been focussing on indoor education only. The description of education has referred to education inside of buildings only and has not taken account of concepts for educating children outdoors (see Chapter 4 for information on progress in this aspect).
- Adherence to the Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education of the MŠMT: According to ALMŠ<sup>17</sup>, the pedagogical concept of forest kindergartens is, in principle, in line with this programme. Nevertheless, facilitators of forest kindergartens must repeatedly argue and prove that their concepts of educating outdoors do prepare children for the elementary school, because they do teach the relevant skills and knowledge.
- Unfavourable regulations and standards according to the Education Act, Building Act, Decrees on sanitary requirements and other regulations specifying the provisions of the Acts: There are no regulations specific to forest kindergartens. Existing regulations on conventional kindergartens seem not extensive and flexible enough, in order to allow the issuing of operating licenses also to forest kindergartens. This regards:
  - o technical requirements for buildings: Only “constructed structures” are considered adequate buildings; yurts, tents and caravans are not. The parameters for space-per-child in buildings, the definition of a comfort temperature and requirements for equipment, e.g. beds (in contrast to sleeping pads and sleeping bags), in kindergartens have been defined anticipating that children spend many hours of the day inside of buildings;
  - o hygiene standards: The range of their restrictions comprise the requirement that food and beverages are to be provided by a kitchen that is an integral part of a kindergarten’s built structure (in contrast to lunch boxes prepared by parents and water in barrels) as well as the

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<sup>16</sup> MŽP, ALMŠ and LaNU (2015): Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic – About authorization, permits, acceptance and Ministry registers. Workshop handout. Not published.

<sup>17</sup> Valkounová, Tereza/ALMŠ (2015)

requirement that every child must have an own towel and that, in the bathroom, the distance between the towels must provide that one towel does not touch another one.

These technical and hygiene requirements hamper the establishing of forest kindergartens, because they can hardly be followed with the resources typically available to forest kindergartens – and they are not needed in their strictness because of the different setting of education in nature. Insisting on their adherence for administrative reasons would lead to a waste of (natural and financial) resources and, thereby, contradict the educational message of forest kindergartens: to use resources consciously and sustainably.

- Teacher-per-child-ratio: Because of the different setting and activities, forest kindergartens need a higher teacher-per-child-ratio than conventional kindergartens. The current mode to award state funding to kindergartens related to the number of children disadvantages forest kindergartens, because more teachers have to be paid in comparison to conventional kindergartens.
- Education of teachers: Currently a pedagogical education with a specialisation on preschool education is necessary to become a preschool teacher. This requirement in combination with the lack of a vocational training programme for interested people with a different education background, e.g. elementary school teachers, inhibits the founding and operation of forest kindergartens. At the same time, additional knowledge that is relevant for teaching in a forest kindergarten, e.g. regarding environment-related subjects and risk education, is not yet adequately addressed in preschool teacher education. Therefore, the requirements for being a preschool teacher do not fully reflect the knowledge and capabilities that are necessary to be a forest kindergarten teacher. At the same time they are not flexible enough to enable interested people with a different educational background who already possess the relevant technical knowledge to also obtain the qualification of a preschool teacher.



- Impossibility of enrolment in the MŠMT register implying financial restrictions:  
Because most of the forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic cannot implement the requirements and standards as currently expected (see above), no operating licenses are issued for them and, therefore, they cannot be enrolled in the MŠMT register. This lack of registration means that they are not officially recognised as institutions for preschool education which implies the following consequences: Forest kindergartens
  - cannot receive state funding,
  - cannot apply for funds from other sources, incl. EU funds,
  - can operate with private funds only,
  - are, therefore, more expensive for parents than conventional kindergartens,
  - are, therefore, no options for families with less income,
  - cannot educate children until they go to school, because the compulsory year of preschool education can be provided only by registered kindergartens.
  
- Lack of exchange between (potential) operators and permitting authorities:  
Identifying relevant contact persons for negotiating requirements for establishing forest kindergartens as well as the exchange itself can be a challenge when decision-making competences on municipal level seem restricted. There is, yet, almost no tradition of exchange and advice at local level when negotiating options for alternative concepts.

### 3.3 Recommendations<sup>18</sup>

Increasing the motivation to found forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic requires favourable administrative framework conditions for an effective and diverse preschool education as well as a conscious and positive communication between the involved actors.

During the course of the project, German and Czech experts derived the following set of recommendations – with the intention to offer a starting point for discussions on details. The recommendations' presentation is not structured according to particular addressees, but instead according to the subject they concern. The rationale of several of the presented recommendations can be found in previous chapters and are, therefore, not repeated in this one.

The most obvious and urgent recommendations have been published in the Czech language publication “Doporučení pro tvorbu podmínek zakládání a provozu lesních mateřských škol v České republice” in 06/2016.

#### 3.3.1 Promote facilitating legislation, regulations and administrative procedures

The most inhibiting barrier to forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic is the challenge to enrol the kindergarten in the MŠMT register. The regulations and standards that currently have to be followed and applied by conventional kindergartens, in order to receive an operating license and, therefore, to qualify for enrolment, do not take the specifics of forest kindergartens into account. Because of the novelty of the concept of forest kindergartens for authorities in the Czech Republic, guidance in form of definitions, official statements, as well as differentiating regulations, standards and procedures is needed.

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<sup>18</sup> This chapter presents information, which has been assembled by Anna-Katharina Klauer (LaNU), Magda Kvítková and Tereza Valkounová (ALMŠ), Ute Schulte-Ostermann (BvNW), Hildegard Stoertz (State Office for Social Affairs, Youth and Provisioning of Rhineland-Palatinate), Siegfried Oeter (kitaberatung.com GbR), Ursula Grunert (FRÖBEL forest kindergarten, Leipzig), and Katharina Lenz (UBA).

### Define forest kindergartens at state level

According to Czech experts, the definition of forest kindergartens as an adequate type of preschool education by the MŠMT would be a precondition to facilitate negotiations on regulative details, which allow the issuing of operating licenses also for this type of kindergarten.

### Specify the focus in the Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education

The Framework Programme should make explicit that, when evaluating a concept for a kindergarten, a stronger emphasis should be given to the curriculum and to the teacher-child interaction and less to technical aspects like the form of shelter. The range of preschool education considered adequate should explicitly include the approach of environment and outdoor education, too.

### Identify existing flexibility of regulations and processes – and facilitating adaptations

In an exchange at state level, the following aspects could be reflected:

- the range of discretion and, therefore, flexibility of existing regulations and standards, e.g. regarding shelter, safety and hygiene,
- the appropriateness of the structure of decision-making and supervising competences between state and municipal level authorities,
- if necessary, adaptations to regulations and standards that suit also to the particular situation of forest kindergartens and – nevertheless – facilitate the necessary objectives, e.g. safety, health and education.

According to experiences from Germany, these standards concern in principle<sup>19</sup>:

- educational standards: forest kindergartens have to fulfil the duty of education, including cooperation with other institutions, e.g. with elementary schools, for adequately preparing children,
- teacher-related standards: in the team of teachers conventional preschool education expertise has to be present as well as additional qualifications in ecological education and outdoor experiences,
- safety standards: according to applicable laws and only in limited and controlled forest areas,

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<sup>19</sup> According to Oeter, Siegfried (2015)

- hygiene standards: the appropriate standards must be applied,
- supply of food and drinks: must be possible also in bad weather conditions,
- mid-term prospects: financial viability and permit for forest usage for at least 3 years should be confirmed,
- plans for emergencies and crises: have to be established before they are necessary, management with checklists is recommended,
- data privacy standards: have to be maintained by the teachers,
- child-welfare standards: have to be maintained, problems in the (forest) kindergarten as well as at home should be addressed by teachers,
- inclusion of disabled: integration of physically or mentally disabled children has to be made possible according to relevant legislation.

Addressing the situation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic, the experts derived the following recommendations for possible adaptations in existing regulations and standards:

- a wider interpretation of “room”, also comprising the interpretation that the forest itself represents a “room”,
- a wider range of acceptable forms for shelter, e.g. yurts, and equipment, e.g. sleeping pads and sleeping bags,
- a wider range of acceptable parameters for space-per-child and comfort temperature,
- options to provide food and drinks without a solidly built kitchen, e.g.
  - o availability, benefits and costs to engage caterers that deliver the food to a particular place,
  - o suitability and feasibility of the approach of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)<sup>20</sup>,
  - o prerequisites for providing food and drinks by parents, also considering instruments like lists with recommendations for disinfecting boxes, and

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<sup>20</sup> Hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) is a systematic preventive approach to food safety. It assesses biological, chemical, and physical hazards in production processes that can cause the finished product to be unsafe. The approach comprises ways to reduce these risks to a safe level. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazard\\_analysis\\_and\\_critical\\_control\\_points](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazard_analysis_and_critical_control_points)

- prerequisites for providing water in barrels, also considering instruments like lists with regulations for disinfecting barrels.
- a wider range of options for bathroom equipment, e.g. number of toilets etc.
- the possibility for forest kindergartens to deviate from particular requirements and standards or to omit particular requirements and standards, because they are in their substance not relevant for a particular case,
- a wider range of as adequate accepted teacher-child-ratios, e.g. 2:16 for forest kindergartens instead of 1:26 as required for conventional kindergartens,
- more flexible requirements for the teachers' qualifications, e.g. per group: one conventionally educated preschool teacher (to guarantee the fulfilment of the compulsory curriculum of the Educational Framework Programme) and one teacher with forest kindergarten-specific knowledge and skills (ecology, biology, crafts), also allowing trainees and volunteers to take over tasks,
- complementing educational programmes for (preschool) teachers with nature and outdoor pedagogy, including lectures on risk assessment, risk management and risk education,
- possible new approaches for determining the objectives of regulations and standards, e.g.
  - focus on the curriculum and the teacher-child interaction<sup>21</sup> instead on technical details as well as
  - risk assessment and risk management.
- identification and reduction of further barriers that, in principle, inhibit the enrolment of forest kindergartens in the MŠMT register.

Any decision-making or supervising authority should be authorised and willing to advise interested people on details of the regulations and standards they implement and enforce. According to experiences in Germany, sharing relevant information on regulations and standards with those who are expected to follow and apply them is one decisive factor to realise the objectives of these regulations and standards.

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<sup>21</sup> According to Oeter (2015), supervision is sometimes easier to accomplish in a forest kindergarten than in a conventional kindergarten, because the individual responsibility of the teachers is more evident.



### **3.3.2 Increase the financial resources**

The most decisive recommendation to improve the financial situation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic is:

- to make the enrolment in the MŠMT register possible.

Further recommendations comprise:

- to award state funding to kindergartens related to the number of teachers instead of children,
- to motivate municipalities to fund forest kindergartens, e.g. by referring to aspects of diversity (of kindergartens in their jurisdiction) and sustainability (teaching the conscious utilisation of natural resources relevant for the well-being of future generations, including municipalities),
- to motivate parents to accept higher costs, e.g. by referring to the smaller teacher-child-ratio,
- to allow trainees and volunteers to support forest kindergarten teachers on a regular basis as additional members of the teams.

### **3.3.3 Extent communication with relevant authorities**

Exchanging information and attitudes is important, in order to comprehend the range of options and to detect the adequate one for a particular case. Arising challenges may be discussed and solved directly and, therefore, quicker.

At state level, the experts recommend to reflect, whether competences of advice, decision-making and supervision could be delegated to one or more authorities, which are closer to (potential) operators of forest kindergartens and, therefore, are more easily available for an exchange on particular (local) cases.

When intending to found a forest kindergarten, the experts recommend:

- to consciously decide about the planned working hours, because the necessity to provide lunch and a possibility for resting after lunch increases the number of regulations that are to be followed – and, therefore, the challenges to be addressed in the communication with authorities,
- to approach relevant authorities at municipal and state level very early when drafting the concept,

- to explicitly state in the concept, that the provisions and requirements of the Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education and the relevant regulations and standards are considered and applied, and
- to actively plan and implement risk assessment and risk management – and to document them.

When operating a forest kindergarten, the experts recommend:

- to continue the exchange with relevant authorities, e.g. with inspectors for hygiene.

By assembling administrative expertise and innovative ideas, the recommended exchange helps advancing preschool education – conceptually as well as in practice.

For any concern regarding forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic, ALMŠ can be approached. It will be willing to help with its members' expertise and experiences.

### **3.3.4 Continue and extent the exchange of experiences with international actors**

Looking at the inspiring mutual exchange during the workshop and assessing its results, the experts recommend to continue the exchange between Czech and German actors, in particular between the countries' forest kindergarten associations – and also to extent this exchange to other European countries, e.g. by an European conference on forest kindergartens in 2017. Thereby, Czech actors would not only share their experiences with other countries' experts, but they would have the chance to benefit from these countries' lessons learnt. Increasing the knowledge on challenges and options to address them on a broader geographical basis and, thereby, increasing the acceptance of forest kindergartens on a broader geographical basis, may in return increase the domestic attention for the concept and its advocates and, therefore, may facilitate the founding and operating of forest kindergartens also by an improved (international) image.

### 3.4 Increased public attention

The fact that a bilateral project with Germany at state level assesses options to facilitate the founding and operation of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic and the success of the project's workshop related to the range and relevance of participants as well as related to the magnitude and relevance of the exchanged information, contributed to the increasing public attention to forest kindergartens that could be experienced during the course of the project.

Responding to this increased interest and reacting on the positive momentum it created, ALMŠ championed the idea to declare a particular day, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, a "Day of Forest Kindergartens". With this intention, ALMŠ and MŽP organised a press conference on 22.06.2016 in the forest kindergarten Šárynka<sup>22</sup>,

- which informed the public about the progress in facilitating forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic (see Chapter 4) and about the different actors that have contributed to this progress,
- which presented the – on short notice compiled – Czech language publication "Doporučení pro tvorbu podmínek zakládání a provozu lesních mateřských škol v České republice", and
- which officially declared the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June a "Day of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic".

The presence and statements of

- Jan Kříž, Deputy Minister of MŽP,
- Jana Prudíková, Deputy Minister of MŠMT, and of
- Jiří Mihola, member of the Senate of the Czech Parliament and Head of the Senate's Committee of Education

expressed the high political relevance of the subject and the extent of political support for it.

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<sup>22</sup> Šárynka is one of the first forest kindergartens in Prague. <http://www.ekodomov.cz/detsky-klub-sarynka/> (in Czech language only)

Petr Danis, Director of TEREZA, a non-profit organization fostering environmental education in the Czech Republic<sup>23</sup>, presented valuable scientific information that supports the approach of forest kindergartens. The recommendations derived in the context of the AAP project in Czech language contributed substance to the press conference.

All this, including the range of institutions being present at the press conference and the position of their representatives, contributed to the positive public reception of this press conference and, thereby, to a further increased public attention on the subject.



Picture 4: The press conference in the forest kindergarten Šárynka informed, inter alia, about recommendations for facilitating forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic, which have been derived during the course of the AAP project. From the right: Jan Kříž, Deputy Minister of MŽP, Dominika Pospíšilová, press officer at MŽP, and Jana Prudíková, Deputy Minister of MŠMT. Photo: Katharina Lenz (UBA)

### 3.5 Extended and intensified cooperation

The workshop “Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic – About authorisation, permits, acceptance and Ministry registers“, for the first time, assembled facilitators and advocates of forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic as well as representatives of all relevant Ministries and state authorities responsible for drafting and supervising those regulations and standards that currently represent challenges to the founding and operation of forest kindergartens in the Czech

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<sup>23</sup> <http://terezanet.cz/en>

Republic. Having brought them together in a positive and results-oriented conversational atmosphere represents one important result of the project.

Having intensified existing contacts and having established new contacts between representatives of associations and state authorities from the Czech Republic and Germany, who expressed their intention to continue the cross-border cooperation in the future, represents another result of the project.

However, the most important result of the project, that has already been realised and, therefore, can be experienced already now, is the improved and intensified cooperation between MŽP, MŠMT, the Senate's Committee of Education and ALMŠ for facilitating forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic. The project gave their existing cooperation a new, also internationally recognised, and intensifying momentum. The political and regulative progress in facilitating forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic that could be experienced already during the project period (see Chapter 4) and the mutually presented press conference (see Chapter 3.4) are results of this new quality of cooperation.

## 4 Progress and outlook

Already the exchange during the workshop in 11/2015 revealed that some regulations are, in their substance, less inhibiting than perceived.

All representatives present at the workshop confirmed their approval of the concept of forest kindergartens as an adequate type of preschool education if particular regulations and standards are followed and applied. They also expressed their consent that sensibly differentiating regulations and standards could be sought for.

The coincidence of the revision of the Czech Republic's Education Act early 2016 opened a "window of opportunity" for integrating a definition of forest kindergartens and provisions that take account of specifics of forest kindergartens into Czech legislation.

The revised Education Act includes the following definition of forest kindergartens "The status of forest kindergarten can be used by those kindergartens, who realize their educational process mainly in an outdoor area, outside the shelter of a kindergarten. The kindergarten's shelter is used only for an occasional stay. The



shelter of a forest kindergarten mustn't be a building"<sup>24</sup>. The Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament adopted the revised Education Act in 03/2016; the Senate of the Czech Parliament adopted it in 04/2016. Since 05/2016, the revised Education Act, including the definition of forest kindergartens, is in effect.

This definition means a success for facilitators of forest kindergartens in at least two aspects:

- Since 05/2016, forest kindergartens are, in principle, regarded as adequate institutes of preschool education in the Czech Republic, and
- it is accepted that forest kindergartens have particular specifics, e.g. different types of shelter, in comparison to conventional kindergartens.

Currently the regulations and standards specifying and complementing the provisions of the Educational Act are reviewed in order to identify details that allow differentiation in a way that facilitates the issuing of operating licences also for forest kindergartens. Progress in adapting also these regulations and standards would make the enrolment of forest kindergartens in the MŠMT register possible – and, thereby, overcome the most inhibiting barrier to forest kindergartens in the Czech Republic.

Since the adoption of the revised Education Act, the enrolment in the MŠMT register has become even more important, because the requirement of a compulsory year of preschool education has also been adopted with its revision. The first compulsory year of preschool education will start in 09/2017.

Regarding the extension and intensification of international cooperation in favour of forest kindergartens, progress has been made, too: In 06/2016, ALMŠ informed about the idea of extending the “Day of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic” towards an “International Day of Forest Kindergartens”, if possible even in the context of the UNECE international days. For the 22.06.2017, at least a “Czech-German Day of Forest Kindergartens” is imagined. A first exchange on this idea with BvNW has been fruitful. Furthermore, an exchange on the idea of an “International Day of Forest Kindergartens” with Slovak facilitators of forest kindergartens has been started.

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<sup>24</sup> Translation according to Magda Kvítková (ALMŠ)

## 5 Acknowledgements

The author thanks Miroslav Novák of MŽP for his tireless support in the entire project. She thanks Tereza Valkounová, Martina Dvořáková and Magda Kvítková of ALMŠ for their valuable input and enthusiasm, as well as Ute Schulte-Ostermann of BvNW, Hildegard Stoertz of the State Office for Social Affairs, Youth and Provisioning of Rhineland-Palatinate, Siegfried Oeter of “kitabberatung.com GbR” and Ursula Grunert of the FRÖBEL forest kindergarten, Leipzig, for their substantial contributions and engagement in this project. Thanks also to Katharina Lenz of UBA who has added helpful annotations and given adjuvant feedback. Only the professional, creative and result-oriented exchange with them led to the presented recommendations.

## 6 References and links

### References

Valkounová, Tereza; Novák, Miroslav and Magda Kvítková (2016): Doporučení pro tvorbu podmínek zakládání a provozu lesních mateřských škol v České republice.

[http://www.mzp.cz/cz/zakladani\\_provoz\\_lms](http://www.mzp.cz/cz/zakladani_provoz_lms)

Project documents, not published:

- MŽP, ALMŠ and LaNU (2015): Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic – About authorisation, permits, acceptance and Ministry registers. Workshop handout.
- Klauer, Anna-Katharina (2015): Facilitation of Forest Kindergartens in the Czech Republic. Recommendations and results.

This final report also integrates information from personal communication with German and Czech experts.

### Links

<http://bvwn.de/> (in German language only) – Website of the German Association of Nature and Forest Kindergartens

<http://www.lesnims.cz/> (in Czech language only) – Website of ALMŠ



## 7 Annex

### List of participants having attended the workshop on 02.-03.11.2015 in Prague

Name	Organisation	
Bojková, Hana		
Brezinová, Martina	Škola Muj Projekt	Outdoor education project
Cihaková, Katerina	ALMŠ	Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens
Dvoráková, Martina	ALMŠ	Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens
Dymácková, Blanka	LMŠ Kulisek	Czech forest kindergarten
Eratouvá, Vera	Tlumocnici	Conference interpreter
Formánková, Veronika	LMŠ Věvicka	Czech forest kindergarten
Grunert, Ursula	FRÖBEL- Waldkindergarten, Leipzig	German forest kindergarten, Head
Jechová, Libuše	Ministerstvo pro místní rozvoj	Czech Ministry of Regional Development
Jonáš, Petr	Škola Muj Projekt	Outdoor education project
Kapuciánová, Magdalena	LMŠ Semínko	Czech forest kindergarten
Kažmierski, Tomáš	MŽP	Czech Ministry of the Environment
Klauer, Anna-Katharina	LaNU	Saxony State Foundation for Nature and Environment
Klímová, Karolína	Komise pro projekt Zdravá MČ a MA21	Health and hygiene organisation
Kříž, Jan	MŽP	Czech Ministry of the Environment, Deputy Minister
Krupová, Jana		
Kršiak, Filip	ALMŠ	Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens
Kucerová, Blanka	Hygienická stanice hl.m.Prahy	Hygienic station of the capital city of Prague
Kvítková, Magda	ALMŠ	Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens
Laláková, Alena	LMŠ Jeden Storm	Czech forest kindergarten
Levá Poděličková, Lenka	Ministerstvo zemědělství	Czech Ministry of Agriculture
Lukasíková, Ivana	Krajská hygienická stanice Zlínského kraje	Regional Hygiene Station
Nejedlá, Marie	Státní zdravotní ústav	State Health Institute, Agency of the Ministry of Health
Nedělová, Karolína	Prostor pro rodinu	Civic Association, "Area for children, space for parents"
Novák, Miroslav	MŽP	Czech Ministry of the Environment
Oeter, Siegfried	kitaberatung.com GbR	German consulting office
Paserin, Johana	ALMŠ	Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens
Pohořelý, Svatopluk	MŠMT	Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
Schulte-Ostermann, Ute	BvNW	German Association of Nature and Forest Kindergartens
Soběslavská, Vendula		
Stoertz, Hildegard	Landesjugendamt, Landesamt für Soziales, Jugend und Versorgung, Rheinland- Pfalz	State Office for Social Affairs, Youth and Provisioning of Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany
Trestrová, Zdenka	Ministerstvo zdravotnictví	Czech Ministry of Health
Valkounová, Tereza	ALMŠ	Czech Association of Forest Kindergartens, Director
Vatalová, Jaroslava	MŠMT	Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
Woithe, Anja	kitaberatung.com GbR	German consulting office
Zázvorková, Karolína	MŽP	Czech Ministry of the Environment