

Briefing on the Danish Information Campaign on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Kirsten Poulsgaard

In 1991 Denmark launched a major information campaign on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. No less than four different publications were brought out, each of them targeted at a specific group, with free copies to all schoolchildren. The youngest children received a picture book, the intermediate age group a newsletter and for the oldest pupils there was a newspaper. A book was available to adults for a small charge.

Background

Denmark ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the summer of 1991. This ratification implied an obligation to make the convention's principles and provisions generally known to both adults and children. For this reason the Danish Finance Act for 1991 allocated DKK 1 million of the Ministry of Social Affairs' appropriation to a centralised information campaign on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The objective of this campaign was:

- ▶ to give children and young people the knowledge that the UN convention exists, and that its general regulations impose an obligation on the countries ratifying the convention to safeguard a number of rights to protect all children in a large number of situations.
- ▶ To inform adults (parents, adults in contact with children and young people through their profession and/or involvement in voluntary work in clubs and associations) of the provisions of the convention, so that they will be able to respect it.

The information campaign was planned on the basis of this duality, ie that a right granted to children is part and parcel of an obligation imposed on adults. The campaign itself was thus divided into two parts: issue of materials to primarily children and young people, and the publication of a book designed for adults.

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Information to children and young people

The campaign directed at children was a task for the Ministry of Social Affairs Children and Family Division. During planning, we received good advice from representatives of the Danish Youth Council, Unicef, Amnesty International and the Human Rights Centre. In the concrete implementation phase we cooperated with creative individuals who knew how to communicate with different age groups.

All school-age children and young people in the first ten grades of school received information material during March 1992. This means that we sent it out to pupils in primary and lower secondary schools, private schools, observation and day schools, boarding schools and school institutions for mal-adjusted children, and youth colleges and continuation schools. We issued three different types of publication, to cover the wide age range.

The youngest children – ie children aged 6–9 in the first three grades – received a small children's book. A well-known children's writer, Thomas Winding, wrote and illustrated this very fine picture book entitled *What are children allowed to do?* about the dog called Mester which discusses rights with its master. The youngest children, of whom many are not yet readers, got one copy for use in class, so that their teacher could read it out for them. The book was published in an edition of 16,000.

In the intermediate group – defined as children aged 10–12 in the 4th to 6th grades – each child received a fine newsletter with colour illustrations (same format as a pop magazine). The newsletter was called *Right On* and was published in an edition of 210,000 and edited by journalist Marcus Mandal. Besides articles, interviews, photos and comic strips there was also a competition. The prizes were 100 records/CDs, and an extra prize was a trip to Legoland by plane, won by a 4th grader.

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Young people – ie 13–16 year-old pupils in the 7th to 10th grades – all received the newspaper *Zap*, edited by Thomas Heide from the 'Pioneers' youth project. This newspaper was produced in cooperation with young people themselves, and also included articles, reports, interviews and all the other normal newspaper features.

These three publications were sent out to children and young people via the schools. Furthermore, all voluntary club and association leaders were sent copies via the Danish Youth Council. All staff groups in daycare institutions and after-school daycare schemes were sent copies via their respective professional organisations. In this way an effort was

made to inform all the adults who play a central role in the lives of children and young people, ie teachers, pedagogues, youth club leaders, etc. Other interested adults could obtain the material via their libraries, but no opportunities have been given to buy the different publications. In addition to this information material for children and young people, a product was designed especially for adults, for them to get information and arm themselves for discussion with the younger generation.

A book for adults

The information campaign targeted at adults took place in close cooperation with the Danish Unicef Committee and resulted in the joint publication *Convention on Rights of the Child*. It was published on United Nations' Day, October 24, 1991. This book includes the text of the convention, and also presents the world declaration on the survival, protection and development of children, as well as the action plan on implementing the global declaration which was adopted at the global summit in New York in 1990. The book also includes articles based on the convention and an attempt to translate the convention articles from legalese to a language that children can understand, done by a 6th grade of a local school. This book *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is available very cheaply via Danish Unicef.

Press coverage

Throughout this campaign several initiatives were taken to get press coverage to spread the news of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to as many as possible. Publications for children and young people were sent with press releases to newspapers, magazines etc., as well as to TV and radio – particularly editors of programmes for children and young people. Press conferences were also held, for example in connection with the publication of the book for adults, and subsequently on the presentation of the prize to the winning school class by the Minister of Social Affairs. ♦

Denmark : The Child Citizenship Project

Kirsten Poulsen

"The child citizenship project" is a thrilling experiment which has taken place for over a year in five Danish municipalities. The objective is to give the fellow citizens a better chance of being actively involved in local activities. There is a desire for letting the children exercise an influence on all aspects of their everyday life. They should be given larger possibilities to be heard and to have a voice in planning, the contents and the implementation of activities. In these processes, the children should become visible as fellow citizens. One of the most important functions of the whole project is the dialogue between child and adult.

The Interministerial Children's Commission

The Child Citizenship Project' is one among several initiatives of 'The Interministerial Children's Commission', composed of representatives from 15 different Ministries. The presidency and secretarial tasks of the Commission lie with the Ministry of Social Affairs, which plays a central and coordinating role in connection with these new initiatives.

The Child Citizenship Project' is financed by money raised by the state. This project is indeed one of many experiments resulting from the Danish government's wish to promote reorganisation and new ways of thinking in the social sphere.

The Child Citizen Project' it a courageous attempt to cope with the child's everyday life as a whole, and the adults involved are obliged to consider the whole of it. Questions are asked – critical and pertinent questions as children are in the habit of doing. And these questions cut across the lines of school, day institution, clubs, the local community, and others.

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Until now, the course of events have included the employment of a project

manager to take care of the local activities. Apart from five project managers, a coordinator was appointed to assist on a consultancy basis during the course of the project and to carry out the evaluation of the project which was to run over one year.

In the whole course of the project, a close collaboration between the project municipalities has taken place. This way of organising things – ie letting several part-projects be united in a kind of 'experiment club' with the possibility of mutual inspiration and support from a common consultant – has often shown successful in Denmark.

Children's own initiatives

The project has enabled the children to carry into effect a number of their own initiatives. When children are given the possibility to express their own ideas, usually they come up with very concrete wishes like :

- **Skate House** – the possibility of getting the permission to use an empty building and borrowing some money for setting up a few slopes. A couple of parents help the children getting things organised.
- **Pets Club** – with rabbits and a horse, where the children themselves are in charge of running the place and three girls act as managers.
- **Children's Discotheque** – (non-licensed) in the premises of the local sporting association, who help arrange these evenings (as well as the 'real' discotheque evenings for the young people).