

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).

Messages from the children

The objective of certain activities has been the procurement of messages from the children, for example :

- broadcast in the local radio, made by the children.
- 'Children's Magazine' made by children and adults and inserted as a newsletter in the local municipality monthly magazine.
- 'Talk-away-box' where the children, seated in front of a video camera, may express their candid opinions.

The schools

In relation to the schools, it is obvious that the children wish to have more influence - and other forms of influence. The children find it difficult to tackle the representative democracy and the boring meetings with a lot of incomprehensible talk and long agendas. In this respect, the following has been organised :

- courses for those of the children who are members of the school council or the school board
- two-week arrangements during which the children have had real influence on the planning and course of the lessons.

Daycare institutions

In the day care institutions, attempts have equally been made to give way for increased child influence.

- debate on the objective of 'Children's Participation in Decision-making' and courses for the personnel with the intention to make them listen and consider more seriously the children's own ideas and initiatives
- the older children have carried out a critical examination of the everyday life in the local day care institution and kindergarten. Based on their observations, these children pointed out that the grown-ups would ask the children not to talk while eating - and at the same time, they would speak loudly and discuss private matters, ignoring the children. The older children also found it completely unreasonable that all of the youngsters were forced to play outside for at least one hour after lunch.

- the lay-out of a new day care institution : The children make models of the play ground - and criticise the architect's choice of colours ! The children found that wall colours were too pale. The architect was almost frightened at the children's interference with aesthetics... and then he turned pale !

The municipality planning and so on...

On some adults' initiative, the children have been drawn into processes where they would normally have no influence. This applies to, for example :

- **the library's book purchase** : The older children decide on the purchase of books for the youthful readers and have their own budget,
- **the municipality planning of local areas**: 'Grouse Meeting' and later hearings concerning new plans, the children participating in a 'Vision Day' together with the adults in the house-owners' association : What would we like to have in our local area ?
- **influence in local associations**, for example sporting associations, the new golf course, etc.

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The most important experiences

The project has taught us - as adults - that children and young people have many ideas and suggestions on how to improve the quality of different contexts of their everyday lives. When they are taken seriously, and are given the opportunities for greater influence, they develop the necessary maturity. However, children and young people work in a very different way to adults. They make a more concrete approach to things, want to see results quickly, and some-

times their objectives change during the process. Their way of working is almost a provocation to us who are trained to observe formal meeting rituals and decision-making processes. Often their meetings will seem chaotic, since they switch between different topics, make telephone calls, exchange jokes and talk about other things, and nonetheless get things done. Perhaps they could teach us how to make meetings more creative and fun !

The project has also taught us that with regard to giving greater influence to children and young people the biggest barrier - I am ashamed to say - is ourselves as adults. We believe that we see the world through the eyes of the children. But as one representative of the municipal planning department who takes a very active part in getting the children involved in decision-making, says about his experiences :

What is really funny is that so many things come up which I would never have considered a problem, having seen it through the eyes of an adult. Adults are used to consider children's conditions to a certain extent, but the way of thinking and considering is always that of an adult. We rarely hear the children's own version. That is what we have to learn... and that is what should become part of the everyday life !

This is how to put it ! Thanks to 'The Child Citizenship Project', we have come a few steps further in that direction in Denmark. But some time will certainly pass by until all adults are willing to and have time to listen to the children to a larger extent and to give them a co-influence on their own everyday life. ♦