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Childhood as a Social Phenomenon: Lessons from an International Project

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In September 1992, a conference organized by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna (Austria), and the University Centre of South Jutland, Esbjerg (Denmark), convened in Billund, Denmark. Around 80 researchers, mainly from Europe, were invited to evaluate and discuss the results of what seems to be the largest international sociological study on childhood so far, i.e. the research project *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon*.

The study produced quite an impressive amount of material: a series of national reports from 16 countries, an introduction to the series as well as a statistical compendium. In addition, the manuscripts for the project's forthcoming book *Childhood Matters* were made available.

On the whole, the project was well received. As had been expected, the invited experts voiced constructive criticism and pointed to omissions and shortcomings. At the same time, they welcomed the framework of the project as a very fruitful basis on which researchers could build, in terms of theories, interpretations and methodology, but also with a view to cooperation with other disciplines.

The conference was an important event in the still very young history of the *sociology of childhood*. A considerable part of the participants met for the first time: sociologists' interest in childhood is relatively recent, and even if this interest is now burgeoning we were lucky enough to have a large fraction of Europe's childhood sociologists attend the conference.

The present report contains the papers of the invited key speakers, each of them presenting either a specific disciplinary approach to childhood (e.g. a pedagogical one) or a neighbouring area of sociological interest (e.g. the family).

Table of Contents

	page
Preface	7
<i>Helmut Wintersberger</i>	
Nine Theses about “Childhood as a Social Phenomenon”	11
<i>Jens Qvortrup</i>	
Childhood in its Social Context	
The Under-socialized Child?	19
<i>Don Edgar</i>	
Reflections on the Sociology of Childhood	29
<i>Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr.</i>	
Childhood Matters: A Critique	45
<i>Wilfried Dumon</i>	
Women and Children First and Last:	
Parallels and Differences between Children’s and Women’s Studies	51
<i>Ann Oakley</i>	
A Sociology of Childhood and Youth – The Need of Both?	
Comments on the “Childhood as a Social Phenomenon” Project	71
<i>Ola Stafseng</i>	
Childhood as a Social Phenomenon:	
Societalization, Individualization, Institutionalization	
Perspectives on and for Social Work and Pedagogics	91
<i>Heinz Sünker</i>	
Children’s Rights since the Constitution of Modern Childhood	
A Comparative Study of Western Nations	105
<i>Göran Therborn</i>	
Conclusions: Encouragement, Critique and New Venues	139
<i>Jens Qvortrup</i>	
Annexes	
Annex I: Agenda of the Meeting	143
Annex II: List of Participants	145
Annex III: Research Interests of Participants	154
Abstracts: English / French / German	159
Publications of the “Childhood as a Social Phenomenon” Project	161