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EUROPEAN CENTRE CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME

Childhood as a Social Phenomenon – An Introduction to a Series of National Reports

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Childhood as a Social Phenomenon

A Series of National Reports

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In this volume of *Eurosocial Reports*, light is shed upon childhood from a sociological point of view. Authors from 16 industrialized countries have described the social position of children in their country.

Contrary to custom, childhood is not perceived as “the next generation”, rather, it is seen as a part of today’s society. Even if it is true that children grow up and become adults, it is equally true that they live and lead a life as children. It is astonishing how widely this trivial fact has been ignored by the social sciences. We think that it is about time that it be taken seriously as a research object in its own right.

All national reports basically focus on five broad topics:

- (1) *The Sociography of Childhood*: Here, we begin by looking at demographic perspectives and children’s status in the family.
- (2) *How Do Children Spend Their Time*: Here, we give due credit not only to their leisure time, to household chores, and to child labour, but – more importantly – to their school activities, which we see as representing a vitally important asset to modern society.
- (3) *The Economics of Childhood*: Here, we discuss the “costs” of children for parents and society – while leaving open the thesis that children also contribute their share of input to the economy.
- (4) *Distributive Justice*: Here, we raise the question as to whether or not children get their fair share of society’s resources, and we speculate as to whether or not some real intergenerational inequalities exist.
- (5) *Children’s Rights*: Last but not least, we explore this area and shed light on new perspectives for justice and autonomy.

Apart from the common topics, the national reports vary, depending on the perspectives of the authors and availability of data. However, the general lack of child-oriented information proved to be a common problem. Eventually this methodological problem became a sixth “topic”, one that in itself is in need of interpretation.

On the one hand, we have to ask why – more often than not – children were hidden inside adult-oriented categories; on the other hand, an effort has been made to redirect statistics so that they use children as the unit of observation.

Finally, two appendices will conclude the series: one on *statistics regarding childhood*, and the other giving a *bibliography* with sociologically relevant childhood literature.

The series presents unique and rich material on childhood, and also offers a fresh new approach to the study of this very important part of society's population: *children*. The reports constitute a platform for new and varied research in the many dimensions of childhood.

Childhood as a Social Phenomenon: Authors of National Reports

Canada	Alan R. Pence, Diane Erickson, Anne H. Gauthier, Robert Glossop, Evelyne Lapierre-Adamcyk, Nicole Marcil-Gratton, Scott Murray
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