



# Children and the Mediated Experiences of the Welfare State: The International Year of the Child (1979) in the Finnish Public Sphere

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1979, there were 970,009 children under the age of 15 years in Finland—20.5 percent of the entire population.<sup>1</sup> These children had grown up during the years when the construction of the Finnish welfare state had accelerated and, thus, their childhood looked rather different

<sup>1</sup>SVT Official Statistics of Finland (1979). Väestö VI A 144, Table 2, 14.

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from that of earlier generations. An interest in the emotional reconstruction of children as part of social policy was characteristic of all Global North countries during the postwar years,<sup>2</sup> and economic growth enabled the socio-political decisions that made this possible. In Finland, gender equality, education, and citizenship were placed at the center of the modern society, in which the discussion of children's rights entangled with debates on daycare services and women's right to work, among others.<sup>3</sup> The birth control pill and the redefined Abortion Act (1970) diminished the number of unwanted children, and the Daycare Act (1973) allowed women to enter the labor market on a larger scale. Ideals of equality were expanded to include children when the little ones spent their days in professional care and older children's opportunities for education were equalized via school reform.<sup>4</sup>

The building of the Finnish welfare state coincided with the years of the development for improving children's rights led by the United Nations (UN). An important milestone in this process was the year 1979, when the 20th anniversary of the UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) was commemorated with the International Year of the Child (IYC).<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, the media discussion of the IYC is used as an entry point for an analysis of how the ideals of the welfare state were produced in the media by presenting children's experiences of Finnish society. Using

<sup>2</sup>Malinen, A. and Vahtikari, T. (2021). Feeling the nation through exploring the city: Urban pedagogy and children's lived experiences in postwar Helsinki. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 320, 342. See also Kozlovsky, R. (2015). Architecture, emotions and the history of childhood. In S. Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, youth and emotions in modern history: National, colonial and global perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, 100–101.

<sup>3</sup>Kivimäki, V, Suodenjoki, S., and Vahtikari, T. (2021). Lived nation: Histories of experience and emotion in understanding nationalism. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 21–22; Julkunen, R. (2017). *Muuttuvat hyvinvointivaltiot: Eurooppalaiset hyvinvointivaltiot reformoitavina*. SoPhi, 41–43.

<sup>4</sup>Julkunen, R. (2010). *Sukupuolen järjestykset ja tasa-arvon paradoksit*. Vastapaino, 89–99; Kotkas, T. (2019). Nordic welfare states, trust and the rights discourse: The history of the children's day care system in Finland. In S. Hänninen et al. (eds.), *The relational Nordic welfare state: Between utopia and ideology*. Edward Elgar.

<sup>5</sup>Woodhead, M. (2010). Foreword. In N. Thomas and B. Percy-Smith (eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice*. Routledge, xix–xxi; Musgrove, N., Leahy, C. P., and Moruzi, K. (2019). Hearing children's voices. In K. Moruzi et al. (eds.), *Children's voices from the past*. Palgrave Macmillan, 5.

previous literature on lived experiences as inspiration, the lived welfare state is viewed as “a more multifaceted and ‘messier’ phenomenon” than the mere focus on societal practices and institutional frameworks would show.<sup>6</sup> The welfare state—a concept under construction—formed one of the categories through which people lived out their everyday lives in the late 1970s, and the institutional development of the society inevitably also framed the experiences of children.<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously, the “mediated worldliness,” to use Thompson’s concept, shaped these experiences when the accelerating mediatization of the society affected people’s understanding of their place in the world.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, public discussion reveals the wider societal context in which people’s lived experiences have been constructed, as is the case in this chapter, which focuses on the mediated version of the experiences of Finnish children. I examine how journalists portrayed children’s experiences of society when reporting on the IYC. Was there room for child-specific voices, or were the experiences always mediated by adults? How were children’s mediated experiences of the IYC entangled with the ideals of the welfare state?

Childhood historians have emphasized the importance of studying children’s first-hand experiences instead of relying on adult-authored sources. This chapter agrees with the critique but argues that new insights into children’s experiences can also be gained by analyzing mainstream media texts produced by adult journalists.<sup>9</sup> In this case, the media texts covering the IYC show how children’s experiences of the welfare state were embedded with the wider societal discussion and defined by an adult’s understanding of what constitutes a good childhood. Furthermore, the manner in which children’s experiences were presented was an adult-defined journalism practice informed by the 1970s realistic and informative emphasis on public discussion. Arlie Russell Hochschild’s understanding of framing rules based on which people “ascribe definitions or meanings to

<sup>6</sup>Kivimäki et al. (2021), 1.

<sup>7</sup>Kivimäki et al. (2021), 12–13; Boddice, R. and Smith, M. (2020). *Emotion, sense, experience*. Cambridge University Press, 32–33; Katajala-Peltomaa, S. and Toivo, R. M. (2021). *Lived Religion and gender in late medieval and early modern Europe*. Routledge, 2–4.

<sup>8</sup>Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity: A social theory of the media*. Stanford University Press, 33–35.

<sup>9</sup>For example, Pooley, S. and Taylor, J. (2021). Introduction. In S. Pooley and J. Taylor (eds.), *Children’s experiences of welfare in modern Britain*. University of London Press, 2, 18.

situations” is particularly relevant here.<sup>10</sup> Active citizenship has been viewed as an indication of the decline of the welfare state in neoliberal times,<sup>11</sup> but in this chapter, I argue that a socially active citizen—in the way it was understood at that time—formed the framing rule of late 1970s Finland. The citizen was a central player in a society in which the welfare contract was negotiated during the 1960s and 1970s. Resulting from this and the increased social consciousness produced by welfare reforms,<sup>12</sup> the media texts covering the IYC also used active citizenship as their main framing for children. Thus, the socially aware child was included in the understanding of a good childhood.<sup>13</sup>

The chapter will focus on the discussion of the IYC in newspapers and the news and current affairs programs of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) in 1979. The practices of digital history have been used in the collection of the research data. The sample of newspaper articles has been gathered from the National Library of Finland’s digital interface by using the search word “year of the child” (*lapsen vuosi*) in its various written forms.<sup>14</sup> These data consist of 1744 news articles from four morning papers that were either politically non-aligned or had right-wing leanings, plus the only tabloid of that time.<sup>15</sup> The sample of articles is not representative, but it nevertheless offers an entry point into the manner in which the print media discussed the IYC. To broaden the scope of the study, the digitized news texts have been complemented by manually collecting

<sup>10</sup>Hochschild, A. (2003). *The commercialization of intimate life: Notes from home and work*. University of California Press, 99.

<sup>11</sup>For example, Verhoveen, I. and Tonkens, E. (2013). Talking active citizenship: Framing welfare state reform in England and the Netherlands. *Social Policy & Society* 12(3), 415–416.

<sup>12</sup>About the concepts of the welfare state and welfare society, see Rodger, J. J. (2000). *From a welfare state to a welfare society*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

<sup>13</sup>Wagner, J. T. and Einarsdottir, J. (2008). The good childhood: Nordic ideals and educational practice. *International Journal of Educational Research* 47, 265.

<sup>14</sup>The spelling of the IYC varied in the media. It was referred to as *lapsen vuosi* (the year of the child) and *lasten vuosi* (the year of the children). Additionally, the words “child” and “year” were either written together or separated (*lapsenvuosi*, *lapsen vuosi*, *lastenvuosi*, *lasten vuosi*).

<sup>15</sup>At the time of writing this chapter, the digitized collection did not include all the Finnish newspapers and tabloids from the year 1979. Only five of them were available via the National Library of Finland’s digital interface. These include four morning papers, *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, *Länsi-Savo*, *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, and *Uusi Suomi*, as well as one tabloid, *Ilta-Sanomat*. The chapter does not discuss the coverage of the IYC in the Finnish-Swedish media or texts in magazines. A comparison between the language groups and different journalism genres might have offered new insights into the topic, but the data would have been too extensive for a single chapter, and it would have needed to have been collected manually.

articles from the main national newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* as well as two political newspapers—the radical left *Kansan Uutiset* and the social democratic *Demari*—all of which are currently excluded from the digitized collections of the National Library of Finland. These papers have not been searched in their entirety, but the articles have been collected from the beginning and end of the year as well as from the papers' weekend editions. Furthermore, the newspaper material has been enriched with metadata from YLE's television and radio programs.<sup>16</sup> Metadata are used instead of the original programs because only a limited number of television and radio programs have been preserved in Finland before 1984.<sup>17</sup> However, a television program titled *A Greeting of the International Year of the Child: A View of Children's Lives* (*Lapsen vuoden tervehdys: Katsaus lasten elämään*) is available via the public interface of YLE's program archive (*Elävä arkisto*), and it has been included in the data.<sup>18</sup>

The collected data do not cover the entire public discussion relating to the IYC in Finland, but the representativeness of the analysis has been increased by collecting news articles from both the national and local level as well as from political newspapers. More precisely, the analysis reaches three national media (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat*, and YLE), four morning papers presenting different sides of the political spectrum (*Demari*, *Kansan Uutiset*, *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, and *Uusi Suomi*) as well as two local newspapers (*Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* and *Länsi-Savo*). Consequently, the data can also be viewed as indicative of the so-called Nordic media welfare states in which the state and the media system are closely intertwined. More specifically, the state intervened in the media systems through ownership, as was the case with YLE, or through press subsidies, which were introduced in 1967. Simultaneously, the institutional media ideologies reflected the characteristics of the welfare state, such as the enlightenment of citizens and the reduction of social inequalities.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>The programs have been identified in collaboration with YLE's archivist, Eva Andberg.

<sup>17</sup>Kannisto, M. and Kauppinen, P. (2019). Kekkonen, euroviisut ja Helsinki: Kansallinen audiovisuaalinen perintö NER-analyysin tunnistamana. *Ennen ja nyt: Historian tietosanomat* 2. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://journal.fi/ennenjannyt/article/view/108929/63921>.

<sup>18</sup>The program can be watched at YLE's public interface, <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2006/10/31/lapsen-vuoden-tervehdys-1979>.

<sup>19</sup>Enli, G., Syvertsen, T., and Mjøs, O. J. (2018). The welfare state and the media system. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 43(5), 601–602, 609–612; Syvertsen, T., Enli, E. S., Mjøs, O. J., and Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. University of Michigan Press; Normo, E. (1998). Sanomalehdistön tukeminen Pohjoismaissa. In *Joukkoviestimet: Finnish Mass Media 1998*. Tilastokeskus, 41.

The analysis focuses on the contextual close reading of the media texts, but looking at the relatively large dataset from a distance has helped to identify certain patterns in them.<sup>20</sup> These include the official events as hot spots of interest toward the IYC, the emphasis on adult viewpoints of the year, and the societal framing of children's voices that form the main argument of the chapter.

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE IYC

The welfare state and human rights were intertwined when the future world was being built in postwar societies. The 1960s social movements in particular awakened an increasing interest in marginalized groups and their equal rights, but it was in the 1970s that human rights entered as a major framing of the discussion of equality between different groups of people throughout the Global North.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the construction of the Finnish welfare state coincided with the more explicit use of the human rights framework.<sup>22</sup> As evidence, the concept of the child's rights (*lapsen oikeudet*) was used in the Finnish-language press somewhat sporadically until 1968, after which it became more common. However, two peaks can be identified in the coverage, as shown in Fig. 11.1. The first one occurred in 1970 and can be explained by the Abortion Act, which was redefined in March that year.<sup>23</sup> It caused an intense media discussion of women's right to make decisions about their own bodies that intertwined with the discussion of children's rights. The second peak can be seen in 1979,<sup>24</sup> and

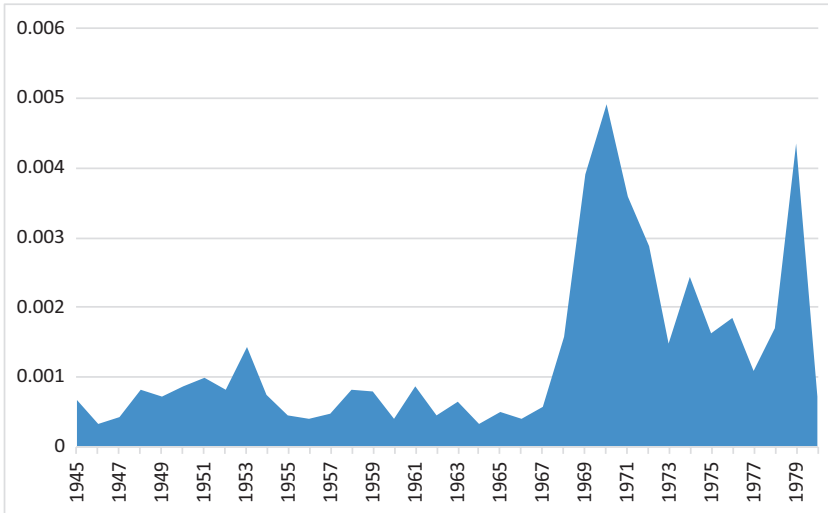
<sup>20</sup>About close and distant reading, see, for example, Salmi, H. (2020). *What is Digital History?* Polity.

<sup>21</sup>van Trigt, P. (2016). Human rights and the welfare state: An exploratory history of social rights in the postwar Netherlands. In S. Agnoletto, B. J. Griffith and C. Palmieri (eds.), *Zapruder World: An International Journal for the History of Social Conflict* 3; Moyn, S. (2014). The Return of the prodigal: The 1970s as a turning point in human rights history. In J. Eckel and S. Moyn (eds.), *The breakthrough: Human rights in the 1970s*. University of Pennsylvania Press; Moyn, S. (2018). *Human rights in an unequal world*. Harvard University Press, 8–9; Baár, M. and van Trigt, P. (2020). Introduction. In M. Baár and P. van Trigt (eds.), *Marginalized groups, inequalities and the post-war welfare state: Whose welfare?* Routledge, 3–4.

<sup>22</sup>The increase in the use of the concept of *welfare state* in public speech has been located to the 1970s. Julkunen (2017), 41, 43–44.

<sup>23</sup>Julkunen (2010), 91.

<sup>24</sup>See Fig. 11.1, in which the hits have been proportioned with the number of pages from which the analysis has been made. When the search was conducted, the extent of digitized newspaper content from the 1960s and 1970s was considerably lower than the material concerning the immediate postwar decades.



**Fig. 11.1** The use of the concept of children's rights in Finnish newspapers during the postwar decades. The hits have been proportioned with the number of pages that are included in the National Library of Finland's digital interface at the time of writing of the article

arguably it was the IYC that made this a special year in terms of children's rights.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was used as a main reference point in the education campaigns of the IYC in many countries.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, many Finnish journalists used the year 1959 as a starting point for their articles. For instance, Leena Jokinen concluded her article in the tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat* as follows in July 1979:

The 20-year-old Declaration of the Rights of the Child has not lost its topicality. More work needs to be done in order to fulfill its goals. For that we need money. Where could we find it?<sup>26</sup>

Altogether, 1744 articles on the IYC were published in 1979 in the digitized newspapers used in this chapter. The relatively wide media coverage was not unique to Finland; the IYC received worldwide interest and

<sup>25</sup> Black, M. (1986). *The children and the nations*. UNICEF, 374. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from [www.unicef.org/about/history/files/Child-Nation-M-Black-Ch15-p353-377-year-or-child.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/history/files/Child-Nation-M-Black-Ch15-p353-377-year-or-child.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Jokinen, L. (July 2, 1979). Lapsen oikeuksien juhluvuosi. *Ilta-Sanomat*, 15.

became one of the most successful public relations campaigns of the UN. It followed the previous international years of various human rights issues and marginalized groups highlighted by the UN since 1959.<sup>27</sup> These years were a new kind of PR activity that had contradictory results. On the one hand, they advanced awareness of human rights issues in the postwar world, but on the other, they seemed to trivialize them. Nevertheless, the IYC in particular was a successful media phenomenon that adopted the entire package of communication channels typical for the international years—that is, newspaper and magazine articles, photographs, radio and television programs, poster exhibitions, international congresses, mega-concerts, documentaries, and feature films were produced relating to the year.<sup>28</sup>

In Finland, the news coverage included major articles and short news but also small references and information concerning television and radio programs. Most news focused on official events that were placed at the beginning of the year and around the International Day of the Child on November 20.<sup>29</sup> However, the celebration was referred to throughout the year in connection with various local seminars, concerts, and children's

<sup>27</sup> The first UN year was the World Refugee Year, which was celebrated in 1959 and 1960.

<sup>28</sup> Baár, M. (2018). Singing and painting global awareness: International years and human rights at the United Nations. In J. Brendebach, M. Herzer, and H. Tworek (eds.), *International organizations and the media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Exorbitant expectations*. Routledge, 182–184, 188–189.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example (January 2, 1979). Lapsen vuosi 1979. *Kansan Uutiset*, 4, editorial; (January 3, 1979). Yliponnistuksen Lapsen Vuosi. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14; (January 3, 1979). Lapsella oikeus elämään. *Kansan Uutiset*, 8; (January 3, 1979). UKK: Lapsen vuoden viettoon talkoohenkeä. *Demari*, 6; (January 4, 1979). Lapsen vuosi toistaa tuttuja vaatimuksia. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 10; (January 4, 1979). Lyhentämällä työaikaa annetaan aikaa lapselle. *Demari*, 9; (January 4, 1979). Suomen komitea: Lapsen vuoden tavoiteohjelma. *Kansan Uutiset*, 10; (January 6, 1979). Perheen elatus on lastenkin harteilla. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20; Vihavainen, R. (January 6, 1979). Suomen pääsihteeri lupaa: Suunnitelmat valmiina, Lapsen vuosi voi alkaa. *Uusi Suomi*, 13; (January 10, 1979). Lapsen vuoden kunnallisten toimikuntien tehtävä. *Kansan Uutiset*, 10; (November 20, 1979). UKK: Lasten ääni kuulunut Suomessa. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 10; (November 20, 1979). ”Lapset ovat ihmisiä.” *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15; (November 20, 1979). Kekkonen Lapsen Vuoden juhlassa: Tulevaisuus perustuu suvaitsevaisuudelle. *Länsi-Savo*, 20, 1; (November 20, 1979). UKK teroitti nousevan polven vastuuta. *Demari*, 1, 6; (November 20, 1979). Erkki Aho: Suomen tunnettava vastuunsa kansainvälisessä yhteistyössä. *Demari*, 6; (November 20, 1979). Pakolaisavun lapsenvuoden avustusohjelma on toteutunut hyvin. *Demari*; (November 21, 1979). Lapsen asiat vesittyvät ilman kaikenkattavaa tutkimustyötä. *Demari*, 9; RU. (November 24, 1979). Linja-autopeli opettaa: Turvallisen koulutien voi oppia leikkienkin. *Demari*, 9; (November 20, 1979). Lapsen vuoden huipentuma. *Kansan Uutiset*, 1, 6.

events all around the country.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the IYC was used to advertise a popular soft drink, Jaffa, and IYC bread was sold to collect money for children in less developed countries, among other campaigns.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, official statements were given by the local organizing committee to guide the future political work on children's rights in Finland.<sup>32</sup> However, children's rights as an explicit viewpoint were not the main framing for the IYC. Instead, the focus was on society and its responsibility to take care of citizens, a typical characteristic for the Nordic welfare states of the 1970s.<sup>33</sup>

The UN years were preceded by several years of preparation and consisted of national organization committees that planned most events in individual countries.<sup>34</sup> As the above-described list of activities suggests, most of the IYC events in Finland were organized by adults, while children appeared in their media representation as participants or performers. Therefore, when zooming out, the media coverage of the IYC seems to focus on adults. It was the adults' view of children that was portrayed in the media when journalists reported on seminars or other activities that were organized relating to the year. Similarly, the authority to define the status of children in Finland was handed to adults. Arvo Ylppö, the Finnish medical doctor known for his studies on premature children, was one of the household names to be interviewed during the year.<sup>35</sup> The

<sup>30</sup> For example, Saarivuori, T. (January 3, 1979). Iltapäiväleikit klo 13–16. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 13; Kyllönen, M. (January 8, 1979). Lapsen vuosi avattiin Oulussa: ”Haluamme lisää päätösvaltaa ja lisää yhtä mukavia juhlia.” *Iltä-Sanomat*, 5; (January 22, 1979). Avajaisjuhla Mikkelissä: Lapsi huomioitava joka vuosi. *Länsi-Savo*, 1; (February 27, 1979). Lapsen vuosi 1979: Museo kartuttaa tietoja. *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, 5; (March 2, 1979); Vikman, H. (March 9, 1979). Lastenannoksiksi muutakin kuin musia. *Demari*, 13; Saarivuori, T. (March 11, 1979). Aurora viihtyy Aurorassa. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15; Tervapadat loistivat Jäppilän jääjuhlassa. *Länsi-Savo*, 9; Forsström, R. (April 21, 1979). Viisi tuntia musiikkimaassa. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17; Kero, E. (May 27, 1979). Lintsilä on tänään lastenjuhlat. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21; Kettunen, R. (November 12, 1979). Jääkö Lapsen vuosi pelkäksi tietoisuudeksi? *Uusi Suomi*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Kameleontti (January 6, 1979). Lapsen vuoden leipä maaherralle. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 6; (April 6, 1979). *Apu*, 93.

<sup>32</sup> For example (January 4, 1979). Lapsen vuoden komitea: Hallitukselta eduskunnalle perhepoliittinen selonteko. *Länsi-Savo*, 7; (January 4, 1979). Suomen komitea: Lapsen vuoden tavoiteohjelma. *Kansan Uutiset*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Kotkas (2019), 125.

<sup>34</sup> Baár (2018), 183; Black (1986).

<sup>35</sup> For example (May 6, 1979). Arkkiatri Arvo Ylppö: Lapsen arvostus ja lastentautiopion kehitys Suomessa. *Länsi-Savo*, 4; Arkkiatri (October 1, 1979). Arvo Ylppö: Huomio lapsen psyykkiseen kehitykseen. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 7.

right-leaning newspaper *Uusi Suomi* launched the year with an interview of a group of adults who were known for their contributions to children's culture and well-being. The journalist was particularly interested in their predictions for the success of the year. This was also used as the main framing in the lead paragraph: "Will the child's status really improve during the Child's year or will it remain plain rhetoric? We asked from those to whom a child is important also otherwise than during the Child's Year."<sup>36</sup>

The adult-specific viewpoint was also applied in the broadcast media. In television, children were mostly used as visual imagery in news and feature programs in which the IYC was discussed. Television viewers were shown children who performed in the various festivities of the IYC or else images of children playing were used as illustrations.<sup>37</sup> In addition, children appeared as assistants in programs that focused on child-related issues. For instance, Commercial Television (*Mainostelevisio*) aired a documentary series on children's rights during the twentieth century in January 1979. The theme was framed by adults, but a group of children was, for example, seen to show the changing children's fashions of the decade.<sup>38</sup> The meta-data of YLE's programs indicates a similar interpretation: Children were rarely given an active role in the broadcasts. An exception is a news piece that dealt with a sports event in which local schools could participate.<sup>39</sup>

Partly, the framing can be explained by the journalism conventions of the time. The 1970s news media relied on an understanding of objective reporting in which expert interviewees were placed at the center.<sup>40</sup> Objectivity was not viewed as non-partiality per se but as the professional intent to offer a balanced view of the object of the news to media

<sup>36</sup> Javanainen, P. (January 6, 1979). Lapsen Vuosi: tositoimia vai sanahelinää. *Uusi Suomi*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> For example, metadata for the following programs: Television News (January 3, 1979), (January 7, 1979), and (June 8, 1979).

<sup>38</sup> (January 23, 1979). Lapsen vuosisata. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> For example (April 19, 1979). Urheilureena.

<sup>40</sup> Kurvinen, H. (2013). *"En mä oo mies enkä nainen. Mä oon toimittaja": Sukupuoli ja suomalainen toimittajakunta 1960- ja 1970-luvulla*. University of Oulu.

consumers.<sup>41</sup> This was done by selecting interviewees whose different viewpoints would help construct a multifaceted picture of the topic at hand.<sup>42</sup> In practice, the professional norms identified some sources as more objective than others. For instance, men were viewed as more rational—and thus objective—than women, and expert viewpoints were favored over the opinions of ordinary citizens. In terms of age, the search for convincing interviewees meant that adults were preferred and children rarely appeared in media texts.<sup>43</sup>

The professional culture that emphasized objectivity thus explicates why the texts rarely used children as interviewees and the year was mostly addressed by using adults' viewpoints and their definitions of the meanings of the year. This was acknowledged already in 1979. For instance, *Helsingin Sanomat* published a satirical article on the IYC celebrations in an imaginary village called *Yliponnistus*. In the text, children as a group are portrayed as an annoyance to adults, who celebrate the year by launching different commercial IYC products and organizing fancy gala dinners.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, many of the articles published at the end of the year reflected, mostly critically, on the results of the celebrations.<sup>45</sup> This kind of self-reflexive manner of commenting on the IYC—which some journalists managed to do—probably illuminates the few articles and programs in which the lived experiences of children were placed at the center, as will be shown next.

<sup>41</sup> Miettinen, J. Kalliomäki, I., and Suominen, E. (1976). *Journalistinen työprosessi*. Gaudeamus, 9–10; Oinonen, P. (2019). *Vain parasta kansalaisille: Yleisradiotoiminta julkisena palveluna*. K&h, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Miettinen, J. (1984). *Toimitustyö*. Gaudeamus, 107.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Franks, S. and Howell, L. (2019). Seeking women's expertise in the UK broadcast news media. In C. Carter, L. Steiner, and S. Allan (eds.), *Journalism, gender and power*. Routledge, 49–62.

<sup>44</sup> (January 3, 1979). *Yliponnistuksen Lapsen Vuosi*. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Danielsson, E. (November 12, 1979). Aikuiset keskustelleet lasten päiden yli heistä. *Uusi Suomi*, 9.

## CHILDREN AS EXPERT INTERVIEWEES

In November 1979, *Hepskukkuu*, an entertainment television show that satirized current phenomena, presented a sketch, which is depicted as follows in the preserved metadata:

A sketch: ‘The Child’s Year’. Lauri Kenttä (...) reports from the skating field in Kallio and asks the opinions of children of the children’s year, children shout childish comments. Kenttä reports from the same field in the autumn, he asks about the children’s year from the children, they respond in a serious manner like adults would do.<sup>46</sup>

To some extent, the description of the sketch indicates the ways in which children’s voices were presented in the media when journalists turned to their expertise during the IYC. The child-like banter and child-specific way of viewing the world were replaced by a societal framing that corresponded to the zeitgeist. This was not unique to YLE, but their children’s programs can be used as indicative of the broader phenomenon. As Mikko Sihvonen has argued, 1970s “children’s programming began to be seen as merely an extension of the child welfare services provided by other public institutions.” The programs relied on the pedagogical understanding of 1970s early childhood education, but they were also framed by the company’s so-called informative programming policy. Based on this, the tradition of storytelling and fairytales was replaced with more realistic and factual content: Education and information became the primary functions for children’s programs, discussing themes such as taxation or the Vietnam war.<sup>47</sup> Also children’s news and current affairs programs were experimented with on television.<sup>48</sup> However, similarly to adult news, they emphasized fact-based knowledge, as can be seen in the following quote:

The Programming Council demands in its verdict that the ‘button news’ [a nickname for children’s news] pays more attention to delivering fact-based

<sup>46</sup> Metadata for Hepskukkuu (November 1, 1979).

<sup>47</sup> Sihvonen, M. (2015). “We are more serious”: Children’s television in Finland and paradigmatic shifts in Yleisradio’s children’s programming. *Journal of Children and Media* 9(2), 181.

<sup>48</sup> Suoninen, A. (2007). Mitä me katsottiin ennen kuin oli Pikku Kakkosta? Lastentelevision ensimmäiset vuosikymmenet. In J. Wiio (ed.), *Television viisi vuosikymmentä*. SKS, 490–491; Sihvonen (2015), 181–182.

information. Also news that is targeted at children must fulfil the demands that the Broadcasting Company has placed on its news service.<sup>49</sup>

The basic concept behind the children's news can be viewed as an indication of the pragmatic ethos of the Nordic welfare states of the 1970s and the ideal of active citizenship in particular. In journalism, this meant that rational tones overshadowed the emotional talk of the 1960s.<sup>50</sup> The informative tendencies of the media were also prevalent in other countries,<sup>51</sup> but the Finnish manner of producing children's programs seems to have been more pragmatic. For instance, the BBC's children's news program titled *Newsround* (launched in 1972) also consisted of so-called adult news, but the selection process of the content of each program included an estimation of children's viewpoints of the newsworthiness of the topics. Additionally, children's voices were included in the stories. The understanding of childhood thus framed the ways in which children's news was produced.<sup>52</sup> This kind of understanding seems to have been lacking in Finland, where the societal framing pervaded the coverage of the IYC both in the broadcast media and in newspapers. It was particularly eminent in *Helsingin Sanomat's* article series on the IYC that exclusively covered serious themes such as poverty, violence in media programs, and schooling.<sup>53</sup>

The manner of using the social reform framing when discussing the IYC was not typical only of the media. In February 1979, *Länsi-Savo*—a

<sup>49</sup> (May 16, 1971). Lasten uutiset tv:ssä uutistoimitukselle. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Enli et al. (2018); Saarenmaa, L. (2010). *Intiimin äänet: Julkisuuskulttuurin muutos suomalaisissa ajanviitelehdissä 1961–1975*. Tampere University Press; Kurvinen (2013).

<sup>51</sup> Children's news programs were launched in the United Kingdom (*Newsround*), Sweden (*Barnjournalen*), and the United States (*In the News*, CBS) during the 1970s. Matthews, J. (2009). Negotiating news childhoods: News producers, visualized audiences and the production of the children's news agenda. *Journal of Children and Media* 3(1), 2–18; Rönnerberg, M. (2008). 1970-talets barnjournalen och dagens Lilla Aktuellt: Barnnyheter som public service respektive infotainment. In *Svensk television: en mediehistoria*. Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 190–222; McSorley, J. G. (1975). A study of the significance of a commercial network television news program for children. MA thesis. Drake University. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://escholarshare.drake.edu/bitstream/handle/2092/878/dt1975jgm.pdf?sequence=1>.

<sup>52</sup> Matthews (2009), 2–18.

<sup>53</sup> (January 14, 1979). Lasten näkemyksiä koulusta: Onnekkain osa ja työpaikan tae. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18; (January 21, 1979). Köyhyys ja kodittomuus pakottaa itsenäiseen elämään: Katu kieltää lapsuuden. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22; (February 4, 1979). Elintasojahti vie vanhempien ajan: Lasten viihteenä tv, alkoholi ja väkivalta. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24.

local newspaper—published short extracts of essays written by 11-year-old 5th graders in Mikkeli. Even though the texts included child-specific concerns, such as disappointment with their parents, who did not play with them, most of the texts referred to social problems either in Finland or in developing countries.<sup>54</sup> What was typical for the media was, however, the manner of changing the child-specific manner of expression. More specifically, the articles and programs placed children in an expert role, mirroring adult behavior. Correspondingly, the children’s world was viewed from the perspective of an adult journalist.<sup>55</sup> However, there were a few exceptions, one of which was the children’s page of the radical left newspaper *Kansan Uutiset*. The texts written by members of the local youth organizations of the Finnish People’s Democratic Party included a clear societal ethos, but occasionally they also offered glimpses of the child-specific viewpoint. One example is Tuomo’s wish for the children’s year in January: “A world full of ice cream.”<sup>56</sup> Also, the paper launched a writing competition, encouraging children to talk about what the IYC had meant for them.<sup>57</sup>

Another prominent example was an interview with 8-year-old Anu Vellamo Linkiö, published in *Uusi Suomi* in January 1979. The one-page article on Anu was written by Maarit Niiniluoto, a young female journalist, and it included the interviewee’s responses to thematic questions accompanied by six pictures of Anu in her daily activities. The child’s viewpoint is clearly present in the text, as Anu’s sentences seem to have been printed as they were said. However, the selection of the discussion topics, such as the Finnish president, current affairs, and war, indicates that the child-specific innocence needed to be accompanied by a societal framing. The 1970s socio-political ethos that was intertwined with the construction of society is evident when Anu declares, for instance: “I protect the environment so that it will not become polluted. I am an environmentalist.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, Anu’s interview maintained an image of a socially aware child who was in the process of learning the values of the Finnish welfare state.

<sup>54</sup> (February 11, 1979). Meidän jengi. *Länsi-Savo*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> For example, Viisi tuntia musiikkimaassa. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17; Kero, E. (May 27, 1979). Lintsillä on tänään lastenjuhlat. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Joukko Jyskän pioneereja. (January 2, 1979). Lapsen vuoden toivomuksia. *Kansan Uutiset*, back cover.

<sup>57</sup> (November 20, 1979). Kirjoituskisa. *Kansan Uutiset*, back cover.

<sup>58</sup> Niiniluoto, M (January 14, 1979). ”Aikuiset ei ole niin kivoja kuin lapset...” *Uusi Suomi*, 11.

Child-specific expressions were also used by Ulla-Maija Paavilainen, who contemplated the differences in viewpoints between adults and children when describing her interview with the 9-year-old Ismo, in *Uusi Suomi* in June 1979:

I introduce myself: I am Ismo and I am a human. [...] In our [adult] language, Ismo should introduce himself as follows: – I am Ismo Pylväinen, a 9-year-old schoolboy. I have come to follow the children’s culture seminar of Jyväskylän summer festival with great interest as a child myself. I hope that the results of these days are meaningful. – But Ismo prefers to speak as a human, as a child.<sup>59</sup>

The entire article is an attempt to follow the child-specific view of the world. However, the result is slightly chaotic, as Ismo’s somewhat sporadic observations of the event are complemented by adults’ voices summarizing the content of the seminar from their point of view. The example clearly illustrates the problem of the IYC’s media coverage: The mediated message was mostly spread by using objective language.<sup>60</sup> Arguably, this—along with other journalism practices—introduced the need to diminish the child-specific framing of the year.

The clearest example of the children’s adult-modeled performance appeared in the YLE’s program titled *Lapsen vuoden tervehdys*.<sup>61</sup> After a few introductory words from a journalist, the program granted a voice to the children. A young, presumably elementary, schoolboy, Petri Ålander, opens the program by saying, “[t]oday we are celebrating a worldwide birthday. It is exactly 20 years since the approval of the International Declaration of the Rights of the Child in the UN, i.e., United Nations.” A closeup shot of Ålander moves on to an archival image of children, after which it returns to Ålander, who is seen sitting behind a desk. The positioning of Ålander reminds one of a news anchor, and his expert status is strengthened by his calm and sober voice. A paper that he occasionally glances at reveals that the introductory speech has been written in advance. It becomes clear that Ålander is the one hosting this program.

Ålander’s anchor position may have been an attempt to humor the audience by emphasizing the reversed roles between adults and children.

<sup>59</sup> Paavilainen, U-M. (June 30, 1979). Lapsen kanssa Jyväskylän Kesässä: ”Pienikin ihminen voi olla viisas.” *Uusi Suomi*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Baár (2018), 185.

<sup>61</sup> See television programs (November 20, 1979). *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 15.

The implicit similarity to adult news seems to have been used to satirize the celebration of the year similarly to the previously mentioned sketch in *Hepskukkuu*. However, the rest of the program supports the interpretation that children's adult-modeled performance was not a joke but a reflection of the 1970s societal emphasis in journalism. In total, five children from different parts of Finland discuss their lives on the program. Additionally, Ålander gives informative introductory speeches between their stories. The viewer learns, for example, that half of the grain used in Finland to bake bread is imported, Saimaa canal is the busiest in Finland, and 3000 Finnish children live in children's homes. The informative tone continues when the camera moves on to follow the interviewed children's everyday lives. Only a few glimpses of a child-specific way of looking at the world are captured in the program, which mostly focuses on presenting the children's schools, friends, hobbies, and families. Even if most of this information is narrated by the children—Mikko, Pasi, Ulla, Mika, and Jari—the manner of approaching the children reminds one of a script that follows the interests of adults. Furthermore, the children are heard to present their concerns about their surroundings, such as a wish to have traffic lights at a certain intersection. The IYC is, thus, intertwined with the narrative of the Finnish welfare state and its shortcomings.

A similar kind of framing was used in another program series in which ordinary children were the focus. The metadata of one of the episodes includes the following information: "Jukka Heino is a 12-year-old school-boy from Tampere. Music is his favorite hobby. Additionally, Jukka likes to ponder things close to life, such as the status of the child during the International Year of the Child."<sup>62</sup> Even if the program included aspects of child-specific interest, such as hobbies, the way of including the IYC as an example of the things that Jukka liked to ponder reveals the strength of the societal framing. It is most visible when the media texts discuss the status of children in less developed countries, as will be shown next.

### THE GLOBAL SOUTH AS A COMPARATIVE ELEMENT

The UN's international years had their peak during the period from the late 1960s until the early 1980s, and during this time, they were consciously framed within the human rights context as well as the decolonization that shaped world politics during those years. In the context of the

<sup>62</sup> Metadata for Kasvo: Jukka Heino (November 27, 1979).

IYC, similarly to the 1975 International Women's Year, this meant that the status of people living in the Global South raised particular interest in the wealthier parts of the world.<sup>63</sup> Traces of this are also visible in the media discussion of the IYC: The texts maintained and reproduced the North–South dichotomy prevailing in the UN activities. More specifically, countries of the Global South were viewed to be on the receiving end of this dynamic: The international years detected “the “problems” in the Global South related to human rights, in particular, but the solutions offered for these problems were based on the experience of the Global North.<sup>64</sup>

In practice, this meant that in many Global North countries, the focus on children's rights in their own countries was complemented by the discussion of the status of children in less developed countries. This was also the case in Finland, where youth in the 1970s had comparatively good living conditions relative to children in less developed countries. In January 1979, the head of the Finnish organizing committee defined the main goals of the IYC celebration in Finland as follows:

Based on the General Meeting of the UN, the attention in Finland will be on the child in less developed countries and in one's own country, his/her surroundings and needs, and those issues requiring correction. Internationally, the year will be celebrated by emphasizing the status of children in developing countries.<sup>65</sup>

An illustrative example is the earlier mentioned article series in *Helsingin Sanomat*, in which the interest in the status of children in the Global South is almost always present.<sup>66</sup> Refugee children in particular were a focus of the local organizing committee in Finland. Additionally, all Nordic countries had a special interest in educating the children of their counterparts in other areas of the world. The mass media in particular was

<sup>63</sup> Baár (2018), 185–186.

<sup>64</sup> Baár (2018), 186.

<sup>65</sup> Vihavainen, R. (January 6, 1979). Suomen pääsihteeri lupaa: Suunnitelmat valmiina lapsen vuosi voi alkaa. *Uusi Suomi*, 13.

<sup>66</sup> For example (January 14, 1979). Lasten näkemyksiä koulusta: Onnekkaan osa ja työpäikän ta. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18; (January 21, 1979). Köyhyys ja kodittomuus pakottaa itsenäiseen elämään: Katu kieltää lapsuuden. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22; (February 18, 1979). Kehitysmaiden lasten mietteitä jälkikasvusta. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20; (February 25, 1979). Lasten kuvitelmat uudesta vuosisadasta. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22.

viewed as the source of a skewed representation of children in less developed countries. To improve the situation, the Nordic UNICEF committees—UNICEF was the main partner of the UN during the IYC—prepared a teacher’s kit and other educational material that could be used in schools. In Finland, a multi-media kit was distributed to 8000 schools through the Ministry of Education, and a group of teachers had the opportunity to participate in a UNICEF trip to Sri Lanka, where they followed the development work in action.<sup>67</sup> The framing of Global North countries as the leaders of children’s rights in the world was also repeated in the media. However, a subtle critique of capitalism can be sensed in some of the texts: Less developed countries could offer their children something that industrialized countries had lost. In *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, the IYC was introduced to readers as follows:

In our current world, there are lot of inequalities in the status of children. Children’s status in industrialized countries is generally speaking very different from those who live in developing countries, where there is a lack of everyday food, not to mention health care and education. [...] But the status of the child in Finland is not without concerns either. Many parents do not have time and perhaps skills either to give that care and validation to the child that children in poorer countries receive from adults.<sup>68</sup>

It was not only journalists who referred to countries of the Global South; the theme was also presented through children’s voices. Arguably, the differences between the children’s status in Finland and other countries had been dealt with in schools, an indication of which are the earlier-mentioned school children’s essays that *Länsi-Savo* published in February 1979. Juha concluded his essay as follows:

In Finland, children have good living conditions after all. Here we have lots of food and a good standard of living. In Africa, children do not have water and houses are fragile and they do not stand heavy storms. It is good for a child to live and be in Finland.<sup>69</sup>

The manner of contrasting Finland with developing countries was also present in the interviews, even though children such as 13-year-old Pasi

<sup>67</sup> Black (1986), 356, 358, 360, 362–363.

<sup>68</sup> (January 2, 1979). Alkanut vuosi on lapsen vuosi. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 8.

<sup>69</sup> (February 11, 1979). Meidän jengi. *Länsi-Savo*, 9.

Luumi and 9-year-old Satu Viita-aho mentioned the problems that existed in Finland. Satu's interview, in particular, hints that it was the journalist who pushed Satu's experience a little bit further:

I was born in Finland and it is good to live here. People do not have anything wrong here. After thinking a little bit more, Satu remembers that not all people have employment, even though they would like to have it. Then they will receive a pension.<sup>70</sup>

However, a little bit later she returns to the extraordinariness of Finland by using contrasts with less developed countries: "Not all children in the world are as lucky as I am. In Africa, many children suffer from hunger and they cannot go to school."<sup>71</sup> Pasi Luumi's experience is formulated in a more coherent way, implying his more mature way of experiencing the world:

There are things that need to be corrected in children's status also in our country, but the problems are very different from those in developing countries. [...] Quite often there are no indoor activity spaces. And the child has been forgotten also in many other ways.<sup>72</sup>

A more developed societal understanding is particularly clear in the interview of 13-year-old Jukka Karo. His response to the journalist combines awareness of racial inequalities with concern about nature—both central aspects of the 1970s societal ethos:

All people are equal. I do not understand why there is hate towards black native tribes. [...] In Finland, I would like to fix racism, it exists also here. I would replace the buses with electric ones because other cars cause noise and pollution.<sup>73</sup>

The interviews indicate that children's experiences were embedded with social concerns that had been issued as a result of the improvements in citizens' welfare. As welfare reforms had improved the daily lives of

<sup>70</sup> Paavilainen, U-M. (November 13, 1979). Sadun ja Jukan lapsuuden maisemat. *Uusi Suomi*, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Paavilainen (November 13, 1979), 12.

<sup>72</sup> MA. (December 30, 1979). Teemavuodet hyviä keksintöjä. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Paavilainen (November 13, 1979), 12.

ordinary citizens, space for a more active citizenship had been created. It also included space for the children of the 1970s, who learnt a societal ethos toward the world both at school and through the media.

## CONCLUSION

Previous studies have convincingly demonstrated the entanglements between the media systems and the welfare state in Nordic countries. While the state has used considerable power in financial terms, media and communication systems have contributed to the evolution of the welfare state by supporting “stateness.” It has also been pointed out that the ideals of the welfare state have had an effect on professional journalism.<sup>74</sup> However, less is known about how these influences have been actualized in media texts, which were the focus of this chapter. More specifically, the chapter has analyzed the ways in which children’s experiences of society were mediated in the Finnish media coverage of the International Year of the Child.

As the chapter has shown, the reporting did not give much room for child-specific experiences of living in late 1970s Finland. When children were interviewed, they were placed in the adult-defined position of expert and their experiences were framed by focusing on questions that were at the heart of the newly built welfare society, such as the environment. More specifically, the children’s lived experiences of society were filtered through the 1970s informative ethos. This can be explained by journalism practices that emphasized citizens’ societal interests, offering a blueprint for children’s experiences. By portraying children who voiced their concerns over serious issues such as racism or traffic safety, they placed child-specific ways of experiencing the IYC on the margins. Simultaneously, the mediated experience of the child was entangled with the ideal of the socially active citizen: The child in the media was interested in striving for a better world and was concerned with those less fortunate in life, both within and beyond the nation state. Thus, the chapter shows how children’s lived experiences of the society—similarly to adults’ experiences—are always embedded within the wider societal discussion. Simultaneously, their experiences are defined by adults’ understandings of what makes a good childhood, which makes their experiences particularly sensitive to external influences, such as the questions of a journalist, obfuscating the child-specific viewpoint in the news media.

<sup>74</sup> Enli et al. (2018); Syvertsen et al. (2014).

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