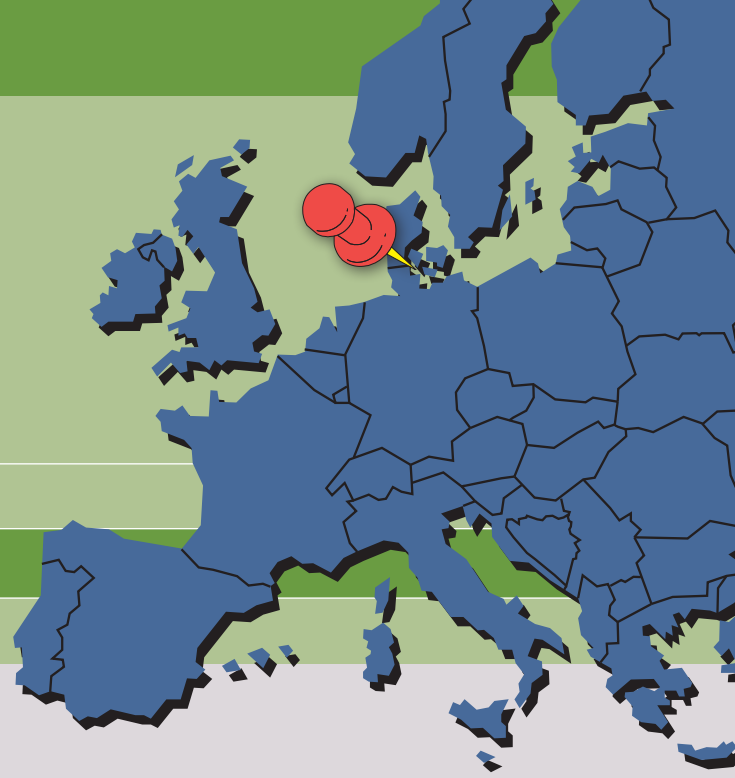


Ergonomic map of Denmark

By Danielle Vossebeld

Interview with Jeanette Fich Jespersen



Who is Jeanette Fich Jespersen?

I'm a proud mother of three children who are now teenagers and young adults and I spend as much of my leisure time as possible either outdoors or with my family and friends. If alone, I'm to be found reading, cooking or playing music, often at the same time. I've worked with the KOMPAN Play Institute for 13 years and still hugely enjoy looking into children's play (outdoors) and its impact on learning, health and social inclusion (social inclusion at KOMPAN means including everyone and unite children in play [ed.]).

I really like studying the mega-trends and their impact on children's culture and family behaviour. I also like to advocate children's right to play, through the work in the KOMPAN Play Institute and the board of the European Child Friendly Cities Network. My background is in Scandinavian and English Language, Literature and Culture and I taught at universities in Germany before joining KOMPAN.

What does the Kompan Play institute research?

The KOMPAN Play Institute initiates, gathers and shares research, which sometimes results in new insights based on new findings. Primarily how-



ever, the research field of the playground and its impact on children's health, learning and social inclusion is our main focus. And this area is not characterized by a huge amount of evidence and documentation. It is a bit of a pioneering field that takes a cross-disciplinary effort to make it truly relevant. Many disciplines of research are relevant when we look at the playground. We would, for instance, cooperate with researchers from the fields of pedagogy, physiology, anthropology and psychology.

How do you involve human factors and ergonomics in your research institute?

The KOMPAN Play Institute is involved in the innovation of new play designs.

When participating in these innovations, we follow the ergonomic scales of the age group we are targeting the new design for. However, we always do tests with children and closely observe them to see if the designs fit the target group. Human factors are important, but we also have to deal with the expansion potential and growth, literally. Therefore, we not only consider a target age group, but also the challenges it takes to grow to the next stage of physical, social and cognitive development.

What is your source of inspiration concerning human factors and ergonomics?

At the risk of sounding banal, the biggest source of inspiration is always the children and their play behaviour: they constantly surprise in the things they can and cannot achieve when playing. Lately, we had some observations on a new piece to be launched in 2014. Girls were playing, some of them really physically active football players, others just 'normal' girls doing a bit of gym and cycling occasionally. The flexibility in these girls was really interesting to observe as their 'normal' activity level was excelled time after time in little competitions they made up. This reaffirmed the observation that



“The biggest threat for play is adults having forgotten what it was like being a child”

playgrounds are really good at making children who are not that physically active, also experience success in physical activity. This is just what we need in a world in which the majority of above 13-year olds do not meet the recommendations for physical activity.

Playgrounds aren't new. Are there still new research findings? If so, what are they?

As long as the world keeps changing rapidly, so will the environment of the children and thus the children themselves. Children today, in the Western world, face a totally different childhood than their parents and grandparents.

Imagine that you are 4 years old. You have to maintain yourself outside your home with no mum and dad to help you out all day at school and in after school care. You are not physically, cognitively or socially ripe for managing yourself at all and there is little adult contact due to the number of children each teacher/carer needs to take care of. This is a huge challenge for our children, parents and societies today. It impacts the way children act socially and cognitively, and it will impact our future societies.

In Nieuwegein a small tunnel is closed because of teenagers who hang out

there and cause disturbance. Does your institute have a solution for these teenagers?

Some five years back the KOMPAN Play Institute did a survey on teenagers and their preferences outdoors: 'Nowhere to Go'. You can find the actual survey on our website at www.kompan.com. The biggest finding here was, in my mind, that teenagers, like all other children, primarily want to cooperate. They are dead-aware that they are seen as a nuisance by many adults and they try their best not to be in the way. In many cities an honest communication with the teenagers has solved many issues.

KOMPAN focuses itself not only on children, but also on adults and elderly. Not the target groups that spring to mind thinking of playground equipment. Why this interest?

We welcome all ages to play in the playground and do believe that leisure time is the only time left when we have a chance of meeting all generations together. Thus the intergenerational playground can only be a good choice.

What is the biggest threat for play (at any age)?

The biggest threat for play is adults having forgotten what it was like being

a child. On the other hand, the second biggest threat is adults who haven't forgotten and think that the activities that made them happy are going to do the best job for the new generations, growing up in an entirely different world.

The statement of the last interviewee of the Ergonomic map of the Netherlands was: 'The different ergonomic areas (physical, cognitive, sensorial and organizational ergonomics) should be better integrated in the implementation. Now they are assessed as separate risks.' What is your response to this statement?

I can only agree. If you want to study children and make children play merrily, you need to be interdisciplinary in your approach. These developmental areas are interdependent.

What will your statement be for the next candidate of the Ergonomic map of ...?

In a world that has changed the total framework for children's play we need to stand up as advocates for the things that truly make children take joy in play. This means including the children in developing solutions for them.