



DigiPippi — the coolest girls' club in Denmark

Denmark 2015 – ongoing

Supporting work–life balance and addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market: approaches and good practices in the ICT sector

Summary

DigiPippi's aim is to engage girls in the world of technology. The different activities organised by *DigiPippi*, including tech workshops and mother and daughter tech brunches, are aimed primarily at girls aged between 7 and 13 years. Young women of this age group are already digital consumers, but often lack a fundamental grounding in technology and the competencies they need to take control of their digital life.

By staging tech workshops in a safe environment like libraries, schools and museums, *DigiPippi* provides young girls with an enhanced understanding of technology and the opportunities it offers, while helping to develop the girls' specific competences and, consequently, their tech self-esteem. *DigiPippi* also offers longer courses, such as a five-week programme, for schools, and arranges educational events to help teachers and parents to become better tech role models for girls.

The overall aim of *DigiPippi* is to change the discourse and structures around girls in tech and IT. By ensuring that girls do have a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities in technology, and by enhancing their tech self-esteem, *DigiPippi* seeks to increase the number of women in ICT in the long term.

1. Country information — policy in context

In Denmark, young people's educational choices are quite gender-segregated: in 2016, women comprised only 27% of IT students, and just 11% of the new software development students at the IT University Copenhagen. These numbers are cited in the Danish Ministry for Gender Equality's 2017 annual status report, where they are recognised as reflecting a long-term problem for Danish society. Other problems include the skewed use of parental leave, the overrepresentation of men in leadership positions and throughout the private sector, and the corresponding overrepresentation of women in public companies. The Ministry has also shown that male-dominated working environments (typically private companies) tend to offer shorter periods of parental leave, especially for fathers, distorting any existing gender balance (Action plan, Ministry for Gender Equality 2017: 15-17).

As recently as 2016, the Danish Business Authority (2016) described Denmark's need for some 19,000 specialised IT professionals by 2030. In response, Aarhus University has undertaken to host IT camps for high-school girls, aiming to spark their interest in a career in computer sciences (*Action Plan*, Ministry for Gender Equality 2017: 18).

According to Sune Løvsø from Denmark's Engineering Trades Union, some tech companies are inhibited by an entrenched and tenacious male-dominated culture, especially in small and medium-sized companies, where women tend to be more exposed to gender-specific harassment. Meanwhile, on the other hand, opposing tendencies are contributing to a more work–life balanced culture among



ICT companies — the best way to attract and keep highly qualified workers. Indeed, the organisation Great Place to Work Denmark created a special list for IT companies that maintain a focus on personal as well as professional wellbeing.

The Ministry for Gender Equality recently launched a campaign, Action Daddy's Leave (www.aktionfarsorlov.dk), to promote the uptake of parental leave among fathers, including in the ICT sector. The campaign will run from November 2017 to 2020.

2. Boosting the number of women in ICT: good practice

DigiPippi was founded in 2015 by Eva Fog, an IT pedagogue with a love for children and technology. In her work, she saw the need to improve and support technological education and self-esteem among girls in Denmark. So, she established DigiPippi in an effort to change the discourse and the structures around girls in IT.

Many other initiatives concerning girls and IT aim at high-school students or young women, but Eva Fog sees the need to ignite interest even earlier. Her experience is that when girls reach puberty, they have often already settled on a self-image without 'tech self-esteem', so she aims her activities at the 7- to 13-year-olds.

The overarching purpose of DigiPippi is empowerment. Its name references Pippi Longstocking, the famous Nordic girl's heroine from Astrid Lindgren's books, whose motto was 'I have never tried that before, so I should definitely be able to do it.' DigiPippi aims to make young girls aware of their ability to make use of technology. According to Eva Fog, girls need a basic grounding in technological knowledge and reasons why they should care. They are already digital consumers but need good-quality education in technology and the necessary skills to take control of their digital life.

Another of the organisation's key directions is system changing. DigiPippi works to reach the broadest possible audience in terms of raising awareness, sharing its knowledge with the public, in schools and households.

The arm of DigiPippi aimed at young girls works as follows. Eva Fog and other adult female role models arrange workshops with a group of girls in a safe environment such as a library, school or museum. There, they ask the girls about their interests; the girls' interests always come first — the technology second. Using these interests as a starting point, the organisers display the wide-ranging potential of technology to pursue those interests. For instance, a popular workshop describes how to become a 'youtuber' — how to edit, create and present a good-quality video within the context of the Internet, including legally and morally. Its objective is to expand the girls' knowledge through play, so that learning feels less like schooling and more like having fun.

In this way, while the girls develop an enhanced understanding of technology and its potential opportunities for them, they also improve specific competences and, as a consequence, their overall tech self-esteem.

An extended version of the DigiPippi format was offered as a course at a school in Ringsted. Role models led a longer version of the 3D design workshop over a five-week period. Here too they reported extraordinary positive differences in levels of confidence among the girls after compared with before the programme.



The numbers indicate that this playful didactic approach is quite successful at improving the girls' IT knowledge and skills *and* their technical confidence. Many of them initially doubted their own ability to learn, but during the workshops their self-esteem grew. Another branch of the DigiPippi concept is to provide education for teachers and parents. Many of the problems relating to lack of IT skills among girls can be reoriented with the help of the role models, if they are only aware of their own signals; for instance, encouraging women to attempt to solve tech problems rather than handing them to a male worker.

Mother and Daughter Tech Brunches are another event being hosted by DigiPippi, where women and their daughters can explore gadgets and tech trends for a few hours after a brunch together.

The results of the workshops have been uplifting. When representatives from DigiPippi initially asked young participants at one workshop whether they knew how to handle technology, around 62% said they did not — a view held by many girls throughout the workshops. But after the workshop, 92% were able to teach others how create and design in 3D. DigiPippi has since staged sessions where these girls taught technology to grown men.

DigiPippi also offers education and a support network for the adult female role models. Not all of them have had female role models themselves, for instance, so it can be rewarding for them to develop and understand their own roles and competences. In the future, DigiPippi will try to engage some of the young women participants as role models.

The geographical starting point of the initiative was Copenhagen, but DigiPippi now works across Denmark. In the near future, DigiPippi will set up new organisation branches in two other parts of Denmark, Funen and Jutland. Fifty role models are currently involved with DigiPippi, a working board is in place and a professional advisory board was established in November 2017. As of 1 January 2018, the six people on this new advisory board will assist DigiPippi in subjects such as business development, PR, HR and law.



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Further information:

DigiPippi: <http://digipippi.dk/>

<http://www.affventures.dk/digipippi/en/> (translated into English)

Infographic:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0sZk5s_YPj9ZGNqRzdUT3dKM2M/view (in English)

Presentation: https://www.vhto.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Inspiratiereis/DP_VHTO_Eng.pdf (In English).

Action plan, Minister for Gender Equality (2017):

<https://www.regeringen.dk/media/2980/redegoerelse-perspektiv-og-handlingsplan-2017.pdf>

Danish Business Authority (2016): Redegørelse om Danmarks Digitale Vækst. *Presentation of the digital growth in Denmark:*

<http://em.dk/~media/files/2016/16-05-31-redegorelse-f-danmarks-digitale-vaekst.ashx>

DigiPippi was mentioned as a case example in a publication from the Nordic Council of Ministers 2016:

<http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:968893/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (p. 11)