Foreword

The issues raised in this book are relatively new, but important. Children and young people’s use of media and their presence on the Internet are also issues I have prioritised as Minister for Culture. We have provided additional resources to the Swedish Media Council and we have also organised an ‘experience and understanding’ conference which we have called Digital Tourist. The conference has travelled round the country the way tourists do and has attracted a great deal of attention. Researchers and experts have shared their knowledge. But more importantly, the natural-born experts on the subject – groups of upper secondary school pupils from each location – have acted as digital guides and used a workshop to walk the adult conference participants through aspects of their everyday use of media. At a number of stations they have generously responded to questions from interested visitors and shared their expertise and knowledge. This model of knowledge transfer is simple, but it has worked extremely well. We should realise that it takes a certain amount of courage on the part of us adults to admit that we are novices and young people are the experts.

In organising the Digital Tourist conference, we wanted to inspire people and get more people involved in the issue of media skills. The background is that many adults have far too little knowledge of children and young people’s digital activities. This has become clear to the Swedish Media Council, which has noticed increased interest in the past few years. Many people are turning to them for information about children and young people’s media reality. Therefore, this book is a welcome contribution.

We are currently facing a situation where young people’s knowledge of digital media and the Internet – in terms of both opportunities and risks – is much greater than parents’ and other adults’ knowledge. I believe we need a greater level of knowledge transfer between the generations. A knowledge transfer that goes in both directions. Adults need to understand children’s reality, and children would benefit greatly from the life experience and judgement of an adult. The Internet is like life in general – it harbours both opportunities and dangers.

There is a tangible difference in how different generations use and relate to new technical opportunities. The difference can be expressed by saying that adults use new technology – whereas young people live it, it is an integrated part of their lives. Adults are, and will remain, tourists – thirsty for knowledge, but tourists nonetheless. This difference is often called a digital generation gap – one that can cause alienation and create obstacles.

In order to be supportive and beneficial to our children and young people – in this area, too – we adults need more knowledge about their digital lives and media reality. At the same time, we must continue to draw attention to their vulnerability and exposure in this new media landscape.
I believe that this development carries with it something that is fundamentally positive. These media offer unprecedented opportunities for the children and young people of today to be creative and express themselves, and to participate in society. This development is beneficial, both for creativity and ingenuity, and for the democratic process. As Minister for Culture, I am pleased to note that the children and young people of today have many more opportunities to be creative and to participate than young people had just ten years ago. Digital media are becoming new tools for information, for the free expression of opinions and for participating in society on one’s own terms. They have created a culture that provides greater scope for creativity, social contact across national borders and new ways of creating or seeking out an identity.

If the adult world is able to meet young people in the arena where they spend their time and, to a certain extent, speak their language, with similar knowledge and concepts, we lay the foundation for better decisions concerning children and young people, and their situation.

This is why I welcome this book, which provides greater understanding and enables the transfer of knowledge between experts. I hope that the conclusions can also benefit a broader public.

Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth
Minister for Culture