

## Family and child wellbeing: a puzzle in policies and practice

SESSION 1D: The relationship between child well-being and family well-being

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Child indicators in research, policy and practice."**

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## Estonia and University of Tartu

### Estonia

Declared its independence on  
24.02.1918  
45 227 square km  
Population: 1.3.million  
incl 233 thousands children under 18  
(17%)  
Total fertility rate 1.52  
Life expectancy: males 71, females 81  
years  
Member of EU since 2004  
Capital: Tallinn (401 000 inhab.)  
Tartu city (104 000 inhab.)



### The University of Tartu

- Founded in 1632 by the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus
- 9 faculties and 4 colleges
- 16,000 students
- among 3% top-ranked universities





#### FROM THE CONFERENCE ABSTRACT:

My presentation is about  
family and child as different launching points of wellbeing,  
their meanings in terms of reproduction of the social structure,  
the importance of understanding children agency,  
and policy actors' puzzling choices to address policies



## Family and child – different launching points of understanding wellbeing

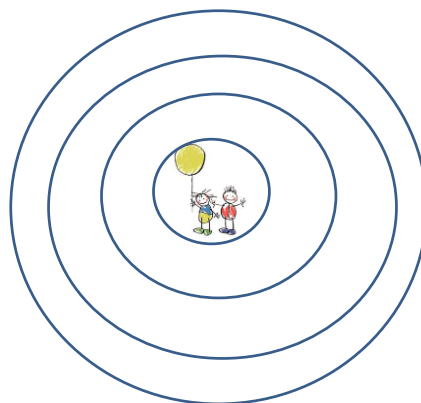
### Child wellbeing

*„A happy child feels happy“ „A happy child has good friends“ „A happy child has goals in life“ „A happy child grows with happy parents“ ...*

#### *Individual and structural determinants*

Individual characteristics  
Interactions  
Relationships  
Social capital  
...

Health of family  
Health of society  
Political choices



The idea from Urie Bronfenbrenner and the followers

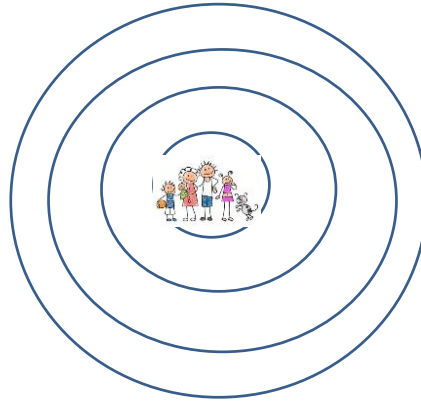
## Family wellbeing

*„Family is doing well when meeting the needs of its members and being valued in the society“*

### *Individual and structural determinants*

Health, education  
Skills of doing the family  
Socio-economic performance  
Social capital, neighbourhood  
...

Health of society  
Political choices



The idea from Urie Bronfenbrenner and the followers

- Wellbeing of children and families is *here and now*
  - Can be measured by indicators
- Wellbeing of children and families is *a process*
  - Can be measured by trends of indicators

## Families and children have positions on the value-normative force-field of a society

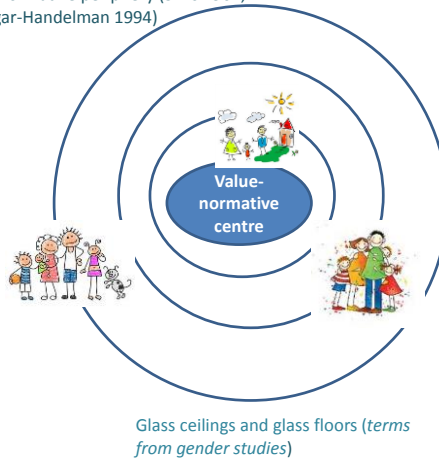
Glass-ceiling and glass-floor (structural factors) determine the position, the life chances and wellbeing of families and children (*social determinist approach*)

Harro (2015): „The highest risk that goes along with success is the incapacity to cope without it“ (the glass floor can break)

A carousel of change  
pushing and pulling forces  
create inequalities

Do agency and policies matter?

Value-normative periphery (Shils 1961; Shamgar-Handelman 1994)

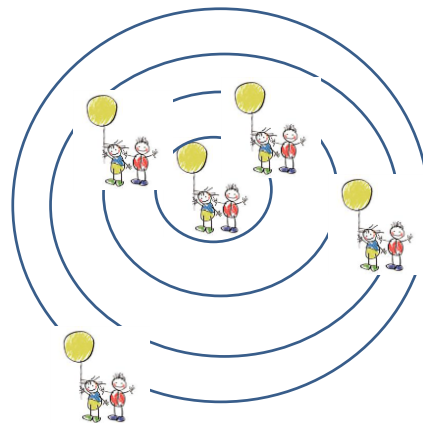


## Children speak about success (*child agency matters*)

A child 6 yrs, Estonia (Aug 2015):  
„You should start moving from below to go up because the rich already own everything“  
„I like working“

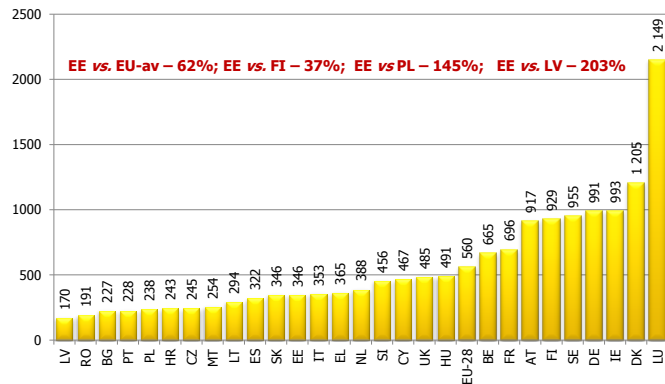
A child 10 yrs, Estonia (Aug 2015):  
„You should not try to be the best in everything but should work to be the best in some things“  
„I can become successful if I study and work hard“

A child 8 yrs, Estonia (Aug 2015):  
„Some people need help to gain success“



Can policies help?

## The family policy chances



Family policy expenditures per capita (PPS, 2011), EUROSTAT

## Policy actors' puzzling choices to address policies

- Try to lift the whole family and avoid the social structure to be self-reproducing
- Try to lift the child making use of the child agency
- Follow the needs of an ageing society (more children!)

## Policy actors' puzzling choices to address policies

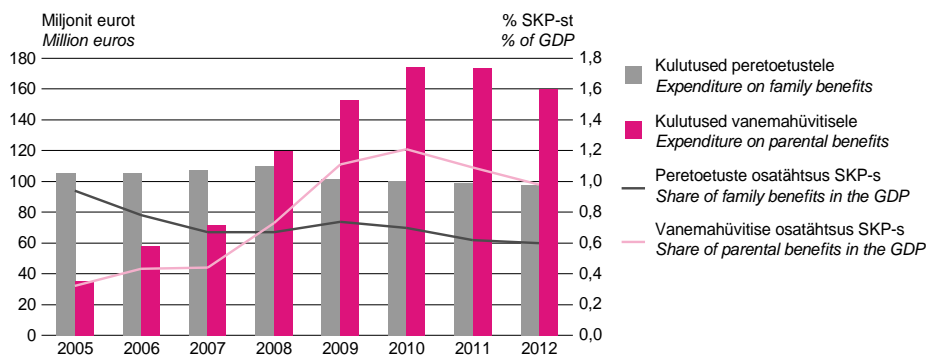
*Common sense and political discourses:* children are next generation of adults thus effective instrument against poverty and social exclusion (investment in human and social capital)

### A PUZZLE: Pronatalist politics in ageing societies vs child wellbeing vs efficiency of economics

- Activating welfare state invests first of all to those who promise returns (a child as a “citizen-becoming”) – Olk & Wintersberger, 2007
- G.Esping-Andersen, et al (2002): the welfare state should invest into good childhood (not as a family as such) , i.e. *the child here and now*
- Child position in age structure limits the agency (Närvänen & Näsman, 2007)
  - Understanding of the children’s agency
  - Distributive justice and solidarity in policymaking
  - National aims

## How the family policy plays out? Expenditures on family and parental benefits and their share in the GDP in Estonia, 2005–2012

(Kutsar (ed), 2013)



At the times of economic decline children also lose; during the growth they do not win (Innocenti Monitor 2009)

- Interests of parents and children should be treated in a mutually beneficial way (Henricson ja Bainham,2005)

*→ Interests of parents, children and the society should be treated in a mutually beneficial way*