

Population Review

Volume 60, Number 2, 2021

Type: Article, pp. 1-22

The Perspective of Estonian Children and Adults on Children's Right to Participate in Society

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the perception of participation right of children in Estonian society from the perspective of adults and children by taking into consideration their sociodemographic background. The study draws on data from Estonia's Second Children's Rights and Parenting Survey (2018; a sample of 1,063 children at age 10-17, and 1,083 adults in the age range of 18-74). The study focused on children's and adults' attitudes, knowledge and experiences concerning children's involvement in decision-making in matters related to children's lives, as expressions of the right of participation. The findings demonstrate the generational and gender differences between children and adults in their perceptions. The study confirms the association between the awareness of children's rights and support to children's possibilities to participate in decision-making in different aspects of life. Furthermore, the analysis shows the importance of the children's own experiences of involvement: children who have more experiences with having a say in issues related to their everyday matters tend to be supportive of the involvement of children.

Keywords

Estonia, participation right of children, children's rights, involvement of children, children's and adults' perspectives

Acknowledgments: The author is grateful to the reviewers and the journal's editors as well to her PhD supervisors Prof. Dagmar Kutsar and Prof. Kairi Kasearu for their helpful comments.

Note: The article is a part of research programme PRG700, "Vulnerability in childhood and vulnerable subjectivity: interdisciplinary comparative perspective."

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1. Introduction

In the past, research into the situation of children consisted of adults assessing the situation and describing the future outlook for children. Today, however, children's positions are looked at more in terms of 'here and now' rather than from the future perspective, as exemplified by the discourse on *well-being* and *well-becoming* (Ben-Arieh, Khoury-Kassabri 2008). Under the modern paradigm for research on children, they are viewed like any other social group that merits research specifically dedicated to them.

The sociology of childhood views children as a social category in society that has to be analysed separately from other social groups in order to study the social condition of children and take into account children's own perspectives and voices (e.g. Alanen, Mayall 2001; Mayall 2000 and 2002; Vandenhoe, Vranken, De Boyer 2010). 'Sociologists of childhood' designate children as active agents and participants in constructing their own reality (Alanen, Mayall 2001). For instance, Fattore, Fegter and Hunner-Kreisel (2019) look at children as social actors, who have their own subjective perceptions and experiences, which should be taken into account in research in which children are the research subjects.

In order to elicit children's opinions, one has to ask children. In advocating for a stronger voice for children in research, Mason and Dunby (2011) noted that the focus of the research today is pointed towards understanding how children live their lives on a daily basis and what is important to them as they go about their everyday lives at home, school and in the community. When we look at children's opportunities to participate at different levels of society, we gain a clearer view of the levels on which children's participation right is better guaranteed and where more support for it is needed.

UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) is built on four core principles that contribute to a general attitude towards children: 1) non-discrimination; 2) best interests of the child; 3) survival and development; 4) participation of the child. Article 3, paragraph 1, of the CRC gives the child the right to have his or her best interests assessed and taken into account as a primary consideration in all actions or decisions that concern him or her, both in the public and private sphere (United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Children, 2013). Child participation ties in unequivocally with the second core principle of the CRC – the concept of the child's best interests. Here we can find a parallel with quality-of-life surveys. Writing about asking children's opinions from the perspective of quality of life, Casas (2011) argues that the concept of quality of life needs to include the perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations of everyone involved, and that those of children and adolescents are therefore essential. In other words, child well-being is not to be confused with adult opinions about child well-being. Both are important, but they are not the same (Casas, 2011: 564-565). It is an important principle to keep in mind when we speak about children's rights and the participation right of children.

It is also important to stress for the purpose of the present research that children are in interaction with the adults around them, and thus it is relevant also to study adults' perspectives. The aim of the present study is to explore the perception of participation right of children in Estonian society in terms of involvement in decision-making process from the perspective of adults and children by taking into consideration their sociodemographic background, awareness of children's rights and children's own experiences of involvement.

2. Theoretical framework of the study

2.1 Why to study children and adults in the same framework?

Children as active social actors affirm their own rights and autonomous decision-making, as Helwig and Turiel (2002) demonstrate. According to Ben-Arieh and Khoury-Kassabri (2008), from the child rights perspective, the understanding of children as individuals within a family, community and society is critical to children's meaningful participation in a civil society.

The participation right of children is a right enjoyed by all children. As CRC article 12 states, States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. It means that children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them. As the Committee on the Rights of the Child points in the General comment No 12, the right of all children to be heard and taken seriously highlights the fact that article 12 should be considered in the interpretation and implementation of all other rights, including the right to the primary consideration of the child's best interests. It is considered important for adults to understand this and enable children to take part in making decisions pertaining to them. By doing so, children learn new things, are participants in common endeavors, and have an opportunity to gain life experience and grow as individuals. Experience contributes to the development of children's competences and awareness to make decisions in their interests. Ursin and Haanpää (2018) suggest that children's ability to influence their own lives begins with awareness and knowledge of their rights, which is fundamental to the exercise of individual participation and to the promotion of democratic values in society. Knowledge about children's rights as human rights is, therefore, essential. According to Ursin and Haanpää (2018), the foundation of knowledge, skills and values that sets the preconditions for living in a democracy is built in childhood. As caregivers for children, adults shape children's childhoods. Thus, it can be said that adults play an important role in shaping children's knowledge, skills, values and experience.

Through their values, attitudes and behavior, adults form the environment surrounding the child and influence the effectuation of the child's rights and everyday practices, thereby shaping the children's own views and attitudes toward the rights of the child. For example, Alanen notes, "in everyday discourse as well as in social science, generational relations tend to refer to relationships between individuals who are located in different stages within their life courses – such as adults and children" (Alanen 2014, p.139). Discussing generational distinctions, Alanen (2014, p.145) notes: "in case of children, their lives, experiences, and knowledge are not only gendered, classed, and 'raced' (and so on) but also – and most importantly for the sociological study of childhood – generationed." This makes it important to also study the adults surrounding children and their attitudes toward the rights of the child. If children and adults occupy different positions in generational order in society, then, is this reflected in their attitudes pertaining to right of participation?

2.2 The environment surrounding, the child and child participation

When it comes to children's experiences, knowledge and attitudes, it is important to consider the children's surroundings and different levels of society. Qvortrup (2014), in discussing relations and relationships between generations, points out that these need to be dealt with on different levels of society – the micro (for example family) and the macro (society) level. As a representative of the

structural approach, Qvortrup (2014) strongly argues for structural context, which largely determines children's actions and voices.

A child's connections with their surrounding environment and the links between its different societal levels and the child are described by several sociological models. The idea of interdependency and reciprocity of generations harmonizes with the concepts of the socio-ecological system theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Minkkinen's (2013) structural model of child well-being, where environmental surroundings at different societal levels – the micro, meso and macro level – influence and interact directly or indirectly with the child. The principle of participation right also corresponds with Corsaro's Orb Web Model (2011), where he states that upon reaching maturity or individual development, children's experiences remain part of their life histories as active members of a given culture. According to Corsaro (2011, p.29), individual development is embedded in the collective production of a series of peer cultures that in turn contribute to reproduction and change in the wider adult society or culture. Brockevelt et al (2019) have demonstrated that the child, his or her formal and informal activity, participation, and the child's social, physical, cultural and socio-economic contexts are not distinct from one another – their transformative relationships create the child's experience of well-being.

With regard to context, it is important to bring out the influence of children and adults on each other. According to Alanen (2014), the interdependency – positional performance as well as identity – works in a reciprocal way, and determinations of generational structures and positions within them are dynamic and complex, but not always symmetric (Alanen 2014, p.146). Thompson (2014) describes children living in an environment of relationships: the quality of home, school and neighborhood, institutional influences, and cultural values are all important, because they are mediated by children's relationships with those who matter to them. The same has been important in adults' childhood as well.

Based on social experiences in general and relational experiences in particular, children develop an understanding of other people, the self, and how to interact satisfactorily with others who affect how they function as social partners and how they are affected by relationships (Thompson 2014, 1938). An important point of Thompson's argument is that children's representations affect how children behave in relationships by mediating their interpretation and response to relational partners. He points out that children's representations influence their understanding of relational experience and, as a consequence, these representations alter how children act in relationships. The same is true with adults. Kutsar et al (2019) state that experiences, capacities and behavior in everyday experiences of children and adults carry different social beliefs about childhood. Thus, both adults and children are interrelated in their everyday practices and behavior. It is important to keep this in mind when we discuss the opportunities for the realization of principles of children's rights.

Adults, being role models for children, are an important part of the analysis of factors impacting the involvement of children and, therefore, children's participation opportunities. Qvortrup (2014) asks what kind of category *childhood* is, and what kind of collectivity children represent, and suggests that they are a *minority group*. Hunner-Kreisel and März (2019) point out that children's particular vulnerability arises from generational inequality and say that the reason that it is so difficult to achieve the principles of participation right of children is the performative effects of established discourses on childhood. In the case of adults, their formative childhood experiences should also be factored in, as these, too, reflect the relationships and attitudes that surrounded them. Thus, it can be said that when we look at what kinds of attitudes are prevalent in society with regard to the child's right to participate, it is important to also examine the child's own attitudes in regard to their situation and rights and to compare them to today's adults' attitudes in order to understand children's position and possibilities in society.

Involvement in decision-making processes, being a basis for realization of the participation right, is therefore an important cornerstone in children's everyday life and depends greatly on adults' perceptions and practices.

Recently published analyses from Turk and Sarv (2019) about Estonian children's perceptions of their participation right experiences reveal that children's experiences of having a say on different topics related to their lives vary widely: the majority of children agree that concerning issues such as their hobbies, clothes, friends and free time, they do have a say, either usually or always. The same is also true for family related issues, but here some differences start to appear. Turk and Sarv (2019) point out, for example, that with regard to questions concerning vacation and establishment of rules at home, there are more children who indicate that sometimes they have a say on those topics and sometimes they do not, and nearly 10 percent of children state that (in general) they do not have a say about these topics. Concerning leisure time, playgrounds, medical treatment or school-related topics, the share of children who have a say in these questions is smaller and the share of those children who indicate that they never have a say is remarkably high, as appears from Turk and Sarv's paper (2019). The large proportion of children who suggest they do not want to have a say in those questions is alarming and definitely needs further analysis. How does the sociodemographic and rights-related background determine attitudes toward children's participation right? How do the positions of children manifest in everyday decision-making processes in the generational order in society? These are the core questions that the present paper addresses.

3. Data and method

In the current analysis, the main focus from the 'participation right perspective' lies on children's involvement, measured by the perceptions towards children's involvement among children and adult population in Estonia. Perceptions towards participation right are measured through nine statements that describe involvement of children at different levels of social action (micro, meso, macro). The statements describe children's actions in different situations: the child him or herself and involvement in family related issues (micro level); involvement at school and the local municipality level, medical treatment and community issues (meso level), and the wider societal level, such as the policymaking process (macro level).

The assessments of children and adults concerning children's right to participate are analyzed through sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, on the presumption that gender, age, level of education, number of minor children being raised as adults, ethnicity and knowledge of children's rights could all influence perceptions toward child participation in a different way. This makes it possible to say how differently or similarly children and adults in Estonia view children's participation right, in order to analyze the children's positions with respect to the adults' positions.

3.1 Data

The data discussed and analyzed in this article were drawn from the second wave of the Children's Rights and Parenting Survey (2018) in Estonia. The method was developed by a wide range of social scientists and experts from the ministries, NGOs and Office of the Chancellor of Justice. And the data collection was coordinated by the Praxis Center for Policy Studies.

Two similar questionnaires about children's rights, perceptions of children, parenting styles, etc., were developed – one for adults and one for children. A difference in the children's questionnaire was that a simplified wording was used for some questions. It is important to stress that children were involved as

experts in the preparation phase of the children's questionnaires. The thoughts expressed and experiences described in the course of the interviews with children were used to construct the survey questionnaire and select the appropriate wording. In the testing phase of the questionnaire, children in their capacity as experts were asked to respond to the test questionnaires and to give feedback during the personal cognitive interviews and group interviews about the questionnaire wording, length and filling issues. According to children's opinions, some words were difficult to understand – for example, what is the *law* and what does *participating in the process of making law* mean. The improvements to the questionnaires were made before the final studies. In general, though, the children found that they managed the process of answering very well. More information about children's involvement in the preparation and testing phases can be found in the methodology reports of the surveys from 2012 (Karu et al. 2012) and 2018 (Koppel et al. 2018).

Data collection in 2018 was organized using the CAWI (mainly older children and adults) or CAPI (in the case of 4th- 6th grades) method or a combination of both. The questionnaire was in Estonian and Russian. The statements used in this article were originally not in English and were translated by Turk and Sarv (2019).

3.2 Sample

The data used in the present article are from 1,063 children attending school at 4th-11th grade level, and 1,083 adults ranging in age from 18-74 (Table A1¹). It is important to note that the children and adults were not related (see also the discussion part of the current article about the future possibilities for improving the survey).

All parents whose children participated in the sample were sent an introductory letter explaining the purpose and conditions of the survey and outlining all questions considering anonymity and data protection. Children and parents were free to decline participation by letting the child's homeroom class teacher know. The final number of participating schools was 52, since four schools declined to participate and 24 withdrew later (due to other social surveys taking place at school in the same time period or due to a 'too busy' springtime – the survey took place in April and May when schools are in a busy testing and examination period. The sample of children was representative by gender (boys and girls), district (northern, central, southern, north-eastern and western part of Estonia) and stage of study (second stage: 4th-6th grade; third stage: 7th-9th grade; fourth stage 10th-11th grade). Children in the 4th-6th grades are generally aged 10-12, 7th-9th graders are 13-15 and 10th-11th graders are typically 16-17 years old. The sample of children covered 1% of the entire population of children in those school grades (except children in closed institutions like detention centers, special schools, etc.). Data were weighted using gender, district and stage of study categories (Koppel et al. 2018). It is also necessary to note that some of the 11th graders were 18 years or older, and in the present analysis they were left out, so the final sample of children in the present analysis is 1,063 children, ranging in age from 10-17.

In the case of adults, 3,927 invitations to participate in the survey were sent out, 1,862 questionnaires were opened, and 67% of these (1,248) were answered. This yielded a response rate of 32% of all invitations originally sent out (Koppel et al. 2018). The representative sample of adults covered 0.1% of the entire population between the ages of 18-74 and was weighted by age, gender, district, ethnicity, educational level and having a child or children under 18 years of age according to population profile

¹ All tables are in the Appendix to the present document.

data from Statistics Estonia (Koppel et al. 2018). Due to the missing values, the subsequent analyses are based on 1,083 adult respondents.

3.3. Measures and methods of analysis

Participation right of children was measured with nine attitudinal statements (Table A2, Table A3) concerning involvement in decision-making in different topics of children's lives: the child her/himself; family; healthcare; school life; community and political issues. Different wording of the statements in the children's and adults' questionnaire was applied as follows. The statement in the children's questionnaire was *Politicians should ask children's opinion before they make decisions concerning children*, whereas in adults' questionnaire it was *Children should have a say about laws concerning them*.

Another important distinction concerns the scales used to rate the nine statements. In the children's questionnaire the nine statements were measured on a four-point-scale: *4- totally agree; 1- not agree at all*. In the adults' questionnaire, the same statements were measured on a five-point-scale: *4- totally agree; 1- not agree at all; 99- do not know (by default)*. To keep the scales and statements comparable over both questionnaires, all of the adults' 'do-not-know' answers were recoded as missing values and a four-point-scale was used in factor analysis.

Following these modifications, factor analysis was used to refine the children's and adults' answers into more specific characteristics describing children's participation right (Tables A2 and A3, respectively). The factors thus arrived at were used as dependent variables in regression analysis (GLM univariate analysis of variance).

Regression analysis (GLM) was used to find connections between the compressed perceptions and the sociodemographic backgrounds of respondents. In the case of the children, it was examined how children's attitude toward exercise of a child's participation right is influenced by their sociodemographic background (gender, ethnicity and stage of study), and whether they had heard of the rights of the child. (Tables A1 and A4). It was also desired to incorporate into the GLM analysis the child's own experience in participating in decision-making. To this end, a set of 16 statements was used where the children rated to what extent they had had the opportunity to have a say in different topics. For example, children were asked to assess to what extent they could make decisions on topics pertaining to themselves (e. g. what kind of clothes to wear; with whom to socialize and meet; what to do with own free time; which sport or hobby club to participate in; designing and furnishing own room). They also assessed to what extent they could have a say in aspects pertaining to family life (e.g. what to eat at home; discussions about family holiday plans; establishment of rules at home). In the school-related questions as well, children were asked to assess their experience in participating in decision-making (e.g. what kind of educational tools are used at school, such as smart devices, among others; organizing school events; establishment of rules at school; choice of school meals; on which school day tests are scheduled; determining homework given at school). A question considering medical treatment was also added (making decisions about medical treatment and medications), as was a question about the opportunity to have a say at the community level (establishing and designing places to spend free time, such as playgrounds and youth centers). In this analysis, children's participation experience was indexed across 16 statements. Positive participation experience was considered to be the *I always have a say* and *I usually have a say* answers (coded as 1), and the other four answers (*sometimes I have a say, sometimes not; mainly I don't have a say; I never have a say; I don't want to have a say*) are considered a lack of

positive experience (coded as 0). Thus, the maximum score for positive experiences equals 16 and the minimum is 0.

In case of adults, gender, age range, ethnicity, level of education, having children under 18 and age group of the youngest child, number of minor children, and whether the adult had heard of the rights of the child (Tables A1 and A5) were selected as explanatory characteristics in GLM analysis. The age groups of adults reflect different generational backgrounds, where the 18-26 age group represented young adults, the 27-50 age group represented the active parental age, and the 51-70 age group represented the older generation of adults.

Data management and analysis were performed using SPSS 26.0 and Excel.

4. Findings

The central issue of this study revolved around the fourth of the core principles of the rights of children: the participation right. It was measured with a bloc of nine attitudinal statements about children's participation in decision-making and various background factors influencing the perceptions of children and adults toward attitudinal statements.

4.1 Attitudes of children and adults toward children's participation right: the factor analysis

Two strong factors considering perceptions towards participation of children were drawn out for the children (Table A2) as well as for the adults (Table A3).

In the case of the children, the first factor included statements that covered the possibilities of the child participating in decision-making on matters related to the child themselves, the general principle of the importance of listening to and considering the child's opinion and including the child in issues related to the family, such as deciding where the child would live after their parents' divorce, and other family matters (e.g. place to live, holiday plans, living arrangements, rules at home). As such, these statements tend to describe a child's possibilities to participate on the micro level. The second factor of participation incorporates topics at the meso (school, healthcare, community issues) and macro (policymaking process) levels (Table A2).

In the case of adults, the factors considering perceptions towards children's participation were different compared with children's responses. The first factor based on adults' responses considering involvement in decision-making contains participation of children in the macro and meso levels (Table A3). Statements such as *Children should be able to have a say about laws concerning them; Children should be able to have a say in issues concerning their surroundings/local municipality (e.g. building of public playgrounds, bus schedules, recreational activities)* and the statement considering participation in school refer more to the meso level of participation. Statements about health matters and the principle that the child's opinion always has to be considered also belong to this factor. It is interesting that whereas for adults the last of these statements falls in with the meso and macro level statements, this statement in the case of the child respondents was more of a micro level factor (Table A2), which included participation of children in questions related to the child themselves, the general principle of the importance of listening to and considering the child's opinion and including the child in issues related to the family matters.

The second factor (Table A3) related to adults' perceptions of participation of children contained statements concerning micro-level issues: child- and family related questions, issues of parental separation and the principle *Listening to a child is as important as listening to an adult* belong to the second perception-oriented factor. The factor can thus be described as micro level perceptions that characterize children's participation right on matters related to their own lives and their family and parents and the importance of listening to the child's opinion. Perceptions in this factor are similar to child respondents micro-level factor, except the principle that the child's opinion always should be taken into account, which in case of adult respondents belongs to the meso-level and macro-level factor.

4.2. Background variables determining perceptions regarding children's participation right

In the case of children's assessments, all incorporated background variables in the models of the regression analysis (GLM) (Table A4) turned out to have a statistically significant impact on perceptions regarding participation of children. The first type of perception group (Model 1, Table A4) related to participation, considering the child itself, family related issues and general principles of participation, are more supported among girls than boys, more among those in the 7th-9th grade compared with the 10th-11th grade. Children who have heard about children's rights tend also to support the first type of perception about participation of children more than children who have not heard about children's rights or could not say whether they had heard of them. The more a child was able to participate in different matters (experienced the right of participation), the more he/she supported child's participation right in matters pertaining to the children themselves, their family and home.

The last two variables – having heard of the rights of the child, and the child's assessment of the number of different forms of participation experiences they have had – are also important in the case of the second model (Model 2, Table A4), considering perceptions towards participation of children at the meso and macro level: school, community, healthcare and policymaking. Children who have heard about children's rights tend to support the participation of children at the meso and macro level more than children who had not heard about children's rights. Children's own assessment regarding the number of different forms of participation experiences on matters concerning them proves a statistically significant factor – the more opportunity children had to participate in different topics related to themselves, the more they would support children's participation right in matters related to school, healthcare, local community and policymaking. Compared to boys, girls are not as likely to support children's participation in matters related to school, healthcare, community and policymaking at the macro level. So compared to the boys, girls tend to support child participation right more at the micro level and less at the meso and macro levels. In the case of meso and macro level topics, perceptions related to children's participation right cannot be differentiated by stage of study and ethnicity.

It is, however, important to notice that despite the statistically relevant variables the explanatory power of models turns to be relatively low.

In the case of adults, both sets of perceptions toward the involvement of children in decision-making formed in the course of factor analysis were included in the regression analysis as dependent variables. It turns out that all of the predictive background variables proved to be statistically significant characteristics determining perceptions concerning children's participation in decision-making (Table A5). The first model (Model 1, Table A5) comprises perceptions related to children's participation in the case of topics related to the meso and macro level. At these levels, women tend to support the child's participation right compared to men. A significant factor influencing the prevalent attitudes in regard to the child's participation right is also whether the respondent has children of their own under 18 years of age and the age of the youngest child. It can be said that the child's involvement in matters pertaining

to legislation, local way of life, school life and healthcare, as well as in terms of considering the child's opinion (Model 1, Table A5), is supported more by those whose children are between the age of 7-17 than by those who do not have children under the age of 18. Compared to people with higher education, children's involvement is supported more at the meso and macro levels by people with primary education. Looking at the respondents' age groups, compared to the older generation (age 51-74), the younger adults (18-26 years of age) tend to support involvement of children more on issues related to school, community, policymaking and health, and likewise the importance of considering the child's opinion. This shows the differences between generations in the case of attitudes related to the child's participation right. It also is bearing on the attitudes prevalent in relation to child's participation right whether the respondent has heard of rights of the child. Those who have heard of them are more likely to support involvement of the child at the meso and macro level than those who have not heard of the rights of the child or could not say whether they had or had not.

The second type of perception (Model 2, Table A5) related to the participation of children considers micro level involvement of children with statements about the child (disaggregated by gender), home and family related issues as well as the principle of *listening to a child is as important as listening to an adult*. In regard to Model 2 (Table A5), differences between male and female respondents become evident when it comes to the children's right to decide on matters closer to their lives. Compared to women, men tend not to be among the supporters of children's involvement on these matters, however, it also depends on the adult's ethnicity. It turns out that compared to other ethnicities, children's participation right is supported more likely by Estonians in the case of matters related to the child's own life, parents and family as well as the importance of considering the child's opinion. In the case of the micro level, attitudes related to children's involvement are also influenced by whether the respondent has minor children. Compared to adults with no minor children, parents whose youngest child is between 0-6 years of age and those with a child of school age (7-17) tend to support the children's participation in decision-making and admit the importance of listening to the child's opinion. At the same time, it is also evident that the greater the number of children the respondents have, the fewer they support children's participation right at the micro level decision-making. The educational attainment of the adults also influences perceptions regarding micro level related topics: people with lower educational attainment are less supportive than people with higher education in supporting children's involvement on matters related to their own lives and that of their family, and also less supporting the importance of listening to the child's opinion.

Similar to the children's sample, and despite the statistically relevant variables in the adult models, the explanatory power of models turns to be relatively low.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this paper is to illustrate children's position in Estonian society through the participation right perspective by describing perceptions towards involvement of children in decision-making among children and adults. The main research questions were: (1) how do the sociodemographic and rights-related background factors determine attitudes toward children's participation right; and (2) how do the children's positions manifest in generational order in the society, considering attitudes towards everyday decision-making processes?

Children are seen as active creators of their childhood through the negotiations with adults (Corsaro, 2011), thus it is important to investigate children's own perceptions towards their participation. Besides this, it is also important to analyze the perceptions prevailing among adults with respect to involving children, since the generational relationships between individuals within different stages of their life

course are reciprocal, as Alanen (2014) points out. The experiences of children and adults carry different social connotations (Kutsar et al. 2019), therefore, it is important to understand what types of perceptions are prevalent among adults and children in terms of the participation of children and what different sociodemographic and rights-related characteristics influence the perceptions related to children's right to participate.

Child and adult respondents' attitudes toward children's participation right: intergenerational comparison. The findings demonstrate that the opinions about children's possibilities to participate in decision-making in different aspects of life were quite similar in the case of both adults and children. At the same time, opinions about children's participation right that relate to listening to children and considering their opinion differed between children and adults. For the children, both of these statements fell into the same factor as perceptions dealing with the child themselves, family and home, but for the adults the statement "*Listening to a child is as important as listening to an adult*" fell into the group of perceptions that dealt with child participation right at the meso and macro level. One possible explanation for this could be the fact that children make sense of listening to children through direct experience and among family members, while adults might view this principle as a core principle of children's rights communicated society-wide, and as a result, the adults relate the statement with the meso and macro level topics.

Perceptions related to child participation right indicate intergenerational differences within the adult contingent. The 18-74 age group naturally consists of different generations whose own childhoods were years apart, including eras in which children were considered to have a different position from the one they enjoy today in relation to adults. Considering that the CRC has been in force for the last 30 years, it can be presumed that older generations are likely to have experienced different attitudes regarding the role of children, which are at odds with today's values. It is thus understandable that the 18-26 age group clearly distinguished from the other adults in this study. Compared to the oldest age group in the survey (51-74), they support child participation at the meso and macro levels. This can be attributed to the younger age group's more recent childhood experience, due to which they support the participation of children in matters related to society, community, school and health, and the principle of generally considering the child's opinion. Also, while earlier study results (Reinomägi, 2019) indicate that children feel they have much less opportunity to have a say in matters related to school, healthcare, community and policymaking, it is also clear that upon reaching adulthood, the young adults support child participation right at the meso and macro level in the aforementioned aspects.

In the case of children of the new millennium, it is important to keep in mind that they constitute a new generation who have rising awareness of their rights (Kutsar and Kasearu, 2017). As the present study reveals, children's previous experience in participating and having a say on different topics related to them is an important aspect influencing the effectuation of perceptions related to participation right. The analysis thus reveals that the more the child has been able to participate in dialogue on various matters concerning her or him, the more likely she or he is to support children's participation right. This is a key finding, which confirms what Thompson (2014) has theorized: based on social experiences, children develop an understanding of other people and of the self and this influences their representations of their relational partners. Ursin and Haanpää (2018) likewise underline the importance of awareness of rights to effectuate participation, and the result of the present research affirms the importance of the exercise of involvement in decision-making as an important cornerstone for supportive perceptions towards child participation right.

Previous studies have shown that child's position in the family has become more important to the adults. Kutsar, Kasearu and Kurrikoff (2012) found that the period from the 1970s to the 2000s saw a transition from parental dominance towards democratic negotiations with the child, which gives reason to believe that parents also put value on listening to children, equally to listening to adults. The results of this analysis confirm that the support expressed by children in the third stage of study (7th-9th grade) for the child themselves, home and family and listening to and considering the child's opinion shows development of decision-making confidence and competence related to age. Thus, it is logical that perceptions of children of this age support greater children's participation right in matters related to their own life and their family. It is very important that the growth of competence related to age will be taken into consideration both at home and in the education system. As Kutsar, Kasearu and Kurrikoff (2012) noted, the child-oriented approach in parenting practices has a good influence on family relations and this can strengthen not only the family relations but also intergenerational bonds over the life course. Positive perceptions towards child participation right in family-related issues and in questions considering child could be considered as a good platform on which to build supportive perceptions towards children's participation and involvement in meso and macro level issues across different generations.

Ethnic background and the participation right of children. Since Estonian society has undergone a number of turbulent changes since World War II that have changed demographics, this analysis also took into account the ethnic background of the children and adults. The results confirm that significant differences between Estonians and other ethnicities are most evident in terms of micro-level attitudes. Specifically, compared to children and adults of Russian and other ethnicities, Estonian children and adults show more support for child participation right on matters related to the child, family and home, and also with regard to listening to and considering children's opinions. Similar to an earlier study by Reinomägi (2020), this is significant evidence that 'cultural context' has a significant influence on how children are perceived. Ethnic differences are certainly an aspect that should be studied in greater detail in the future, especially when it comes to perceptions of people from different generations in relation to the rights of the child.

Awareness in children's rights and giving support to children's participation right. A remarkable finding of this analysis was that awareness of children's rights is a key factor influencing perceptions toward involvement of children in decision-making processes. Children's awareness of children's rights is associated with the support to children's right to participate. In the case of adults, this was an important factor too in terms of whether they have heard of children's rights. On this point, those who have heard of children's rights are more likely to support children's participation in matters related to school, health, community and policymaking than those who have not heard of children's rights or could not say whether they had heard of them. Thus, it can be said that education in the field of children's rights and communication of children's rights at all levels of society is extremely important in increasing support for allowing children to have a say on topics pertaining to them. As earlier study results signal, there is a large number of children who feel that they have not been able to or wanted to have a say at the school, community and society level in matters related to children (Reinomägi, 2019). Therefore, it is important to note that this non-participation is considered in everyday interactions with children in different social spheres.

Gender and giving support to children's participation right. The findings show clear gender differences in the perceptions related to child involvement in decision-making. While among adults, women were more likely than men to support child participation in all aspects of life, the gender differences among child respondents were related to the exercise of the child participation right. While girls compared to

boys tend to be more supportive in micro-level issues, they also tend to be less supportive towards involvement of children in meso-level and macro-level topics. These results point to differences in gender roles in Estonian society, which impact perceptions in regard to the child participation right from an early age – that is, among children themselves. As women are still the primary caregivers in Estonia, and data from an earlier study (e.g., by Koppel et al, 2018) suggest that children have more open relationships with their mothers, this could explain girls' support for child involvement in matters concerning the child and family, as well as women's greater support for child participation in general as revealed in the present study. The findings of this research may also point to different child-rearing principles applied to boys and girls, where girls' participation in home and family matters is more encouraged compared to boys (see, for example, Jöers-Törn, Kasearu, 2013). The latter evidence should be further examined in future research.

Educational level of the adult respondents. Educational level of the adult respondents in shaping the perceptions related to children's participation right led to an interesting finding. Compared to people with higher education, adults with lower educational attainment are less likely to support children's involvement in matters considering the child, home, family and the principle of listening to the child. However, they show a surprising amount of support for encouraging participation of the child in school, health, community and policymaking, along with the principle of taking the child's opinion into consideration. This is in some respects a contradictory and unexpected result that deserves additional analysis.

Number of children below 18 years of age in the adult respondent's family. The analysis revealed that parents in families with many children may find it hard to give attention to their offspring. This may explain the correlation finding that the more children the respondent has, the less likely she or he is to support child involvement in decision-making, even in matters related to the child, home, family and support for the principle of listening to the child. The parent's capacity to cope with an abundance of opinions and desires in a large family can be a challenge, and thus it may be easier to opt for a more autocratic decision-making approach rather than negotiations. Another possible explanation could be associated with traditional role models and traditional family values in large families. More support for improving parenting skills, including communication with children of different ages, would also support intra-family relationships. This need has been corroborated by earlier studies in Estonia (see Koppel et al., 2018).

Compared to adults with no minor children, parents raising children are more likely to support child involvement in micro-level decision-making (related to the child and family matters) and are in agreement with the principle of listening to the child. This confirms the findings by Kutsar, Kasearu and Kurrikoff (2012), which signal a rise of democratic values in family relations and increased position of the child in the family. Adults whose youngest children are between 7-17 years of age, however, are more likely than those with no minor children to support child participation in matters connected to school, health, community, policymaking and considering children's opinions. This is an interesting as seen from the perspective of parents being a 'policy interest group': the meso-level agreement with children's participation reflects their perceived integration of children into wider society.

Limitations of the study. Besides providing several insights into children's and adults' views on children participation right, this study has several limitations. First, the sample of children did not include children below the age of 10, which sets limitations on the analytical framework and leaves early childhood out of the present scope, although it is clear that experiences in the early years of childhood have an important impact on molding values and perceptions. A significant characteristic that was

missing from the data set was whether adult respondents had children over age 18, which could add further analytical possibilities for comparing and contrasting different generations to one another. In the case of children and adults, the patterns of effects are different, while there are minor differences in the factors of perceptions on children's participation right. It is also important to note the low explanatory power of the GLM models despite the fact that all variables of the models were statistically relevant. It could point to the complexity of social phenomenon such as perceptions – where it is complicated to include all relevant predictors in the models. Another limitation of this analysis relates to the fact that the children and adults who responded to the survey were not related to each other. In future studies, analytical possibilities could be broadened by including children and parents from the same family in the sample – this would facilitate better study of the connections between children's and adults' attitudes and lead to the discovery of associations between the research question and the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents. To ensure better comparability of the data sets, a common standard for the rating scales in the adult and children's questionnaires should be used.

Concluding the value of the study and ideas for further research. Despite the limitations brought out above, this article does reveal the differences between adults and children in perceptions concerning the participation right of children. As Casas (2011) suggests, it is important not to confuse adults' assumptions with children's own opinions. More should be done by parents, in schools and at the societal level, to promote children's involvement in micro-level, meso-level and macro-level decision-making in order to offer different participation opportunities for children, and let children exercise and enjoy the right of participation. The latter would increase supportive perceptions towards the children's participation right and even the generational differences in its perceptions. As Ursin and Haanpää (2018) pointed out, promoting qualified education is crucial to implementing children's rights in practice.

The findings of the present research signal significant differences within generations that should be examined closely in subsequent studies, based on gender, ethnicity, awareness of children's rights and the respondent's personal experience in exercising their own rights. Alanen (2014), too, referring to the structural approach in the sociology of childhood, suggests that alongside different statistical methods qualitative methods or mixed methods could additionally be useful to explain the 'big picture'.

Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics of variables (weighted) used in the analyses

Group	Variable	Description	N	%, M (StD)
Children			1063	
	Gender	Girls		52
		Boys		48
	Stage of study	4 th -6 th grade		43
		7 th -9 th grade		40
		10 th -11 th grade		17
	Ethnicity	Estonians		76
		Others		24
	Have heard about children's rights	Yes		70
		No; do not know		30
	Number of experiences of the child being involved in different societal levels (answers <i>I always have a say, I usually have a say</i>)	Min=0, Max=16		8.2 (3.3)
Adults			1083	
	Gender	Male		47
		Female		53
	Age range	18-26 years		15
		27-50 years		51
		51-74 years		34
	Ethnicity	Estonian		70
		Other		30
	Does have children under 18 and age group of the youngest child	Youngest child under 7 years		30
		Youngest child in age of 7-17		21
		No children under 18 years		49
	Number of children under 18 years	Min=1, Max=5		1.6 (0.8)
	Level of education	Primary education		9
		Secondary and vocational education		51
		Higher education		40
	Have heard about children's rights	Yes		79
		No; do not know		21

Table A2. Factor analysis of children's perceptions concerning participation of children

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
In matters concerning a child (e.g. child's room, school, clothing, free time) a child's opinion should always be asked	0.70	0.11
Listening to a child is as important as listening to an adult	0.69	0.05
The child's opinion should always be taken into account	0.66	0.26
When parents are separating, the child should always be asked whom she or he wants to live with	0.63	0.11
In matters concerning the whole family (e.g. choice of place to live, holiday plans, living arrangements, rules at home) the child's opinion should always be asked	0.46	0.42
Children should be able to have a say in issues concerning their surroundings/local municipality (e.g. building of public playgrounds, bus schedules, recreational activities)	0.06	0.83
Children should be able to have a say in questions concerning school life (e.g. establishing rules or procedures at school, using smart devices in studies)	0.15	0.73
Politicians should ask children's opinion before they make decisions concerning children	0.17	0.72
Doctors and other medical personnel should always explain matters concerning illness and treatment to the child	0.42	0.46

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
^aRotation converged in 3 iterations
 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=0.84
 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square=1868, df=36, Sig.<=0.001
 Total Variance Explained, Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings, Cumulative %=50

Table A3. Factor analysis of perceptions related to participation of children reported by adults

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
Children should be able to have a say about laws concerning them (adults questionnaire)	0.85	0.09
Children should be able to have a say in issues concerning their surroundings/local municipality (e.g. building of public playgrounds, bus schedules, recreational activities)	0.79	0.22
Children should be able to have a say in questions concerning school life (e.g. establishing rules or procedures at school, using smart devices in studies)	0.66	0.32
Doctors and other medical personnel should always explain to the child questions concerning illness and treatment	0.66	0.15
The child's opinion should always be taken into account	0.53	0.37
Listening to a child is as important as listening to an adult	0.04	0.82
In matters concerning a child (e.g. child's room, school, clothing, free time) child's opinion should always be asked	0.33	0.75
When parents are separating, the child should always be asked whom she or he wants to live with	0.25	0.68
In matters concerning the whole family (e.g. choice of place to live, holiday plans, living arrangements, rules at home) a child's opinion should always be asked	0.52	0.56

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

^a Rotation converged in 3 iterations

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=0.9

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square=3108 df=36, Sig.<=0.001

Total Variance Explained, Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings, Cumulative %=59

Table A4. Association between background variables and the perceptions of participation of children – Regression analysis (GLM) among children

Variable	Model 1 (child, home, family)		Model 2 (school, healthcare, municipal life and policy making)		
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	
Gender					
	Girls	0.32***	0.06	-0.11†	0.06
	Boys	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Stage of study					
	4 th -6 th grade	-0.04	0.09	0.11	0.09
	7 th -9 th grade	0.20*	0.09	0.08	0.09
	10 th -11 th grade	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Ethnicity					
	Estonians	0.15*	0.07	-0.10	0.07
	Others	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Have heard about children's rights					
	Yes	0.14*	0.07	0.14*	0.07
	No, do not know	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Experience of the child of being involved		0.05***	0.01	0.07***	0.01
N=1063		$R^2=0.076$ $=0.071$	$(R^2_{adj}$	$R^2=0.059$ $=0.054)$	$(R^2_{adj}$

Notes ^aThis parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.1

Table A5. Association between background variables and factors related to the perceptions towards participation of children – regression analysis (GLM) among adults

Variable	Values	Model 1 (law; community; school; taking child's opinion into account)		Model 2 (child; home and family; importance of listening to the child)	
		B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Gender					
	Male	-0.17**	0.06	-0.19**	0.06
	Female	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Ethnicity					
	Estonian	-0.04	0.07	0.17*	0.07
	Other	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Does have children under 18 and children's age group					
	Youngest child under 7 years	-0.13	0.12	0.32**	0.12
	Youngest child in age 7-17 years	0.31**	0.11	0.30**	0.12
	No children under 18	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Number of children		0.01	0.06	-0.11†	0.06
Level of education					
	Primary education	0.25*	0.12	-0.63***	0.12
	Secondary and vocational education	0.01	0.06	-0.01	0.06
	Higher education	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Age range					
	18-26 years	0.40***	0.10	-0.01	0.10
	27-50 years	0.03	0.07	-0.07	0.07
	51-74 years	0 ^a		0 ^a	
Have heard about children's rights					
	Yes	0.23**	0.08	-0.07	0.07
	No; do not know	0 ^a		0 ^a	
N=1083		R ² =0.058 (=0.049)	R ² _{adj}	R ² =0.052 (=0.043)	(R ² _{adj})

Notes ^aThis parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.1

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