

# THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS: COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MOTHER- AND FATHERHOOD IN SWEDEN, FINLAND AND ESTONIA

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the attitudes of the parents of three different countries—Sweden, Finland, and Estonia—towards the balance between work and family life in a particular environment of the welfare state through their evaluation of the social context. The aim of this analysis is to determine the extent to which family policies have successfully met the expectations of parents. We have found differences in the expectations of parents towards supportive measures offered by the state that would help combine work and family life in the countries studied, and in the respondents' evaluations of the social environment they live in. On the basis of this analysis it is possible to argue that the participating Swedish and Finnish parents are highly satisfied with their position in the context of their respective countries, while Estonian parents feel insecure.

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**Keywords:** Attitude, Identity Structure Analysis (ISA), family policy, parenthood (motherhood and fatherhood), welfare state, work-family life

## Introduction and topics

The European social model is based on the welfare state model, where emphasis is put on equality and redistribution, including the provision of public goods and collective insurance against risk for individuals (COM, 2005, p. 3). However, as Esping-Andersen (1999) has stated, welfare types may change in time. These changes have multiple causes: ageing societies, changing economies and family types. In the context of the aforementioned changes new social risks have arisen (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2006; Bonoli, 2005). These new social risks partly depend on factors that differ from the drivers of traditional social risks and individuals face

risks in their attempts to enter the labour market and reconcile work and family life (WDR, 2003; 2002; Bonoli, 2005). As a well-known saying confirms, a good policy is a context-specific policy. Following the aforementioned, it is important to point out that family policy is closely connected with the other policies of any particular welfare state (e.g., labour market policy, social protection policy, gender equality policy) and with the quality and availability of public services. However, close connections between the above-listed policies are a relatively new trend in the policy making processes of welfare states. Up to the 1970s, European policies mention only participation in the labour market, whereas from the 1970s onward, legislation in Europe already highlights both fathers and mothers as employees (Leira, 2010, pp. 11–12).

Literature on policy and the welfare state has revealed that the welfare state is studied firstly through its policy-making process, problem-facing practices, the position of the state in providing social protection and the level of the interventions at the individual level (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999; Björnberg, 2002; Parvikko, 2003; Schoon, Hansson & Salmela-Aro, 2005; Duvander, 2008; Leira, 2010; Ebbinghaus, 2012; Himmelstrand, 2013); and secondly through domestic equality and the distribution of housework/paid work and child care responsibilities (e.g., Bittman, 1999; Van Dongen, 2009; Orloff, 2009; Leira, 2010; OECD, 2007; OECD, 2011a; OECD, 2011b). The current paper reports findings from a study that employed Peter Weinreich's Identity Structure Analysis (hereafter ISA) as a research tool. It was customized to provide a method of measuring the attitudes of parents towards family policies in the context of balance between work and family life through their evaluation of a particular social context (significant others).

The selected approach is justified by De Lange, Agneessens and Waeye (2004, p. 352) who pointed out that social relations, formal as well as informal, and their influence on people's life decisions have become an important explanatory attribute in social science research. As stated by several authors, gender is a social relationship (e.g., Scott, 1988; Connell, 2002; Orloff, 2009), and family is socially constructed (Newman, 2009) – they are a matter of collective definition and human agreement, they are historically varying and cross individual subjectivities, institutions, culture and language. According to Strack and Schwarz (2007, pp. 225–226), the use of specially designed instruments has an important role in social sciences because some characteristics of persons (e.g., their attitudes or motives) cannot be directly perceived and studied (as opposed to those that can be directly assessed – e.g., gender or age).

The attitudinal aspects concerning family policies are compared in three cultural settings: Sweden, Finland, and Estonia. Many authors (e.g.,

Ferrarini & Duvander 2009; Himmelstrand 2013) suggest that Sweden is a central example for comparative gender and family policy analysts, being greatly admired for its work on equality (including gender equality), and since aspects of Sweden's policies have become a point of reference for policy makers in other advanced welfare states. Therefore, being an example of success in the field of family policy, Sweden was chosen as one of the welfare state models for comparison. Finland was chosen for its family policy that differs from Sweden, accentuating a flexible mix of childcare which allows families to decide their level of defamilisation; Finland is also a model with its feminist attitudes towards equality, having accepted these attitudes on the level of welfare state social policy measures (Parvikko 2003) it. The third comparison case - Estonia, a state of young democracy, has chosen the Nordic way of progression, and by doing so, is also providing social security for its citizens (Lauristin, Vihalemm, Norkus, Terk, Reid 2011; Roots, Ainsaar, Aidukaite, Eamets, Realo, Dobewall 2011). The systems of reference for Estonia are the EU Member States, mainly the wealthy neighbours (Scandinavian countries) (Lauristin 2011, 10; Puur, Sakkeus, Tammaru 2013, 24). However, even though at first glance our three case countries, due to the post-communist outlier Estonia, seem to follow neither principle of difference nor similarity, we wish to indicate that policy diffusion and learning especially in areas of education and family policies gives comparative study more ground. Estonia is an interesting case where many path-dependent institutional choices have ensured the dual-earner and state (instead of market) provided childcare model without explicit emphasis on gender aspects in family policies. Thus, we consider the welfare regimes of the three studied countries similar in many aspects; however, the rhetoric behind the institutional choices is different.

The main questions in this article are: 1) through evaluating themselves in their particular social environment, how do individuals see themselves as parents, 2) how do they evaluate the state-offered supportive measures that help combine work and family life, and 3) based on the respondents' reported core values and conflicted themes in the context of family matters, to evaluate - how successful have the family policies been in meeting the expectations of parents? Based on literature, including previous empirical studies, we expect that Swedish and Finnish parents are quite satisfied with their position as parents in their particular social environment, including state-offered supportive measures that help combine work and family life. On the other hand, we expect the Estonian parents not to be satisfied with their position as parents in their particular social environment.

Our research agenda, in which actual empirical strategy is based on microdata concerning parents' attitudes and values, is framed by literature on the welfare state. There are many factors that affect women's ability and

willingness to work, such as parental leave, tax/child benefits, childcare availability and costs, flexible employment opportunities, preferences regarding separation from the child, societal attitudes, labour market opportunities, and gender discrimination. All these political dimensions vary between our case countries, so we are trying to open up a “black box” of family life without making any causal statements or investigating the origin of the attitudes and values.

We continue as follows: the first section of the literature review is aimed at providing a framework for the attitudes of parents on a certain systematic level and gives an overview of the policy context in the three countries. The second section is dedicated to the method of ISA used in the study for data collection. In the third section, the empirical results are presented and, finally, the results are discussed within the frames of social policies.

### **From welfare state to attitudes**

As pointed out by the OECD report (2007), countries with policies that facilitate female employment with more family-friendly approaches are those with the highest fertility rates (Employment rate, 2013; Eurostat, 2012). However, women participating in paid work have brought to light several issues, both on the individual and the societal level. Firstly, changes in the labour market cause changes in the roles of women and men not only as workers, but also as parents. Secondly, there is a question concerning gender equality in having double roles for parents. Whilst since the mid-1990s the model of a caring father has been developed in the Western world in addition to the model of the father as a breadwinner, the new model of fatherhood has not been very successful in reducing the workload of mothers at home (Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijck & Myles, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Leira, 2010). Esping-Andersen (1990; 1999; 2009) tightly connected the future of a welfare state with the altered position of women in its society. According to several authors (e.g. Esping-Andersen et al., 2002; Esping-Andersen, 2009), in Europe “women have experienced a ‘masculinisation’ of their life course preferences”. However, according to Esping-Andersen (2009), the women’s revolution has not yet been met with an adequate policy response (e.g. job security of mothers, ways to “feminise” the male life course, and the adjustment of institutions that support the balancing of work and family life), and this is the reason for low fertility, not the citizens’ unwillingness to have children. The postponement of first births is a logical response to a lack of change in social policy in the context of parenthood (De Graaf & Sprangers, 1999; Olah, Bernardt & Goldscheider, 2002; Gustafsson & Kenjoh, 2004; OECD, 2011a).

Subsequently, it is important to discuss new problems that appear alongside women's changing position in society, both on the micro and macro levels. Firstly, on the micro level, trends such as women's tendency to have fewer children and/or postpone family formation affects macro indicators such as long-term population stability and growth, and also brings along increased marital instability and the proliferation of "atypical" families. The latter, without institutional change, contributes to the increasing material vulnerability of women and children. Secondly, macro effects, such as the new division of labour caused by large numbers of women working outside the home, redistribute labour by creating more social and elderly care jobs. Thus the central question for society to address when developing new policy measures is how such measures would help balance work and family life, as has been pointed out by several authors (De Graaf & Sprangers, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Ainsaar & Maripuu, 2008).

Two possible models have been proposed for solving the problems caused by changes in the labour market and in parents' roles in EU Member States: full employment and a combination of work and family life (Leira, 2010), accompanied by changing gender stereotypes (EC, 2006; Consolidated versions, 2008, Art. 8; EC, 2011a, b). It is worth highlighting that current welfare states face difficulties in providing equality for men and women as fathers and mothers because of "intra-family inequalities which pose a major roadblock towards a superior equilibrium" (Esping-Andersen & Myles, 2008; Leira, 2010).

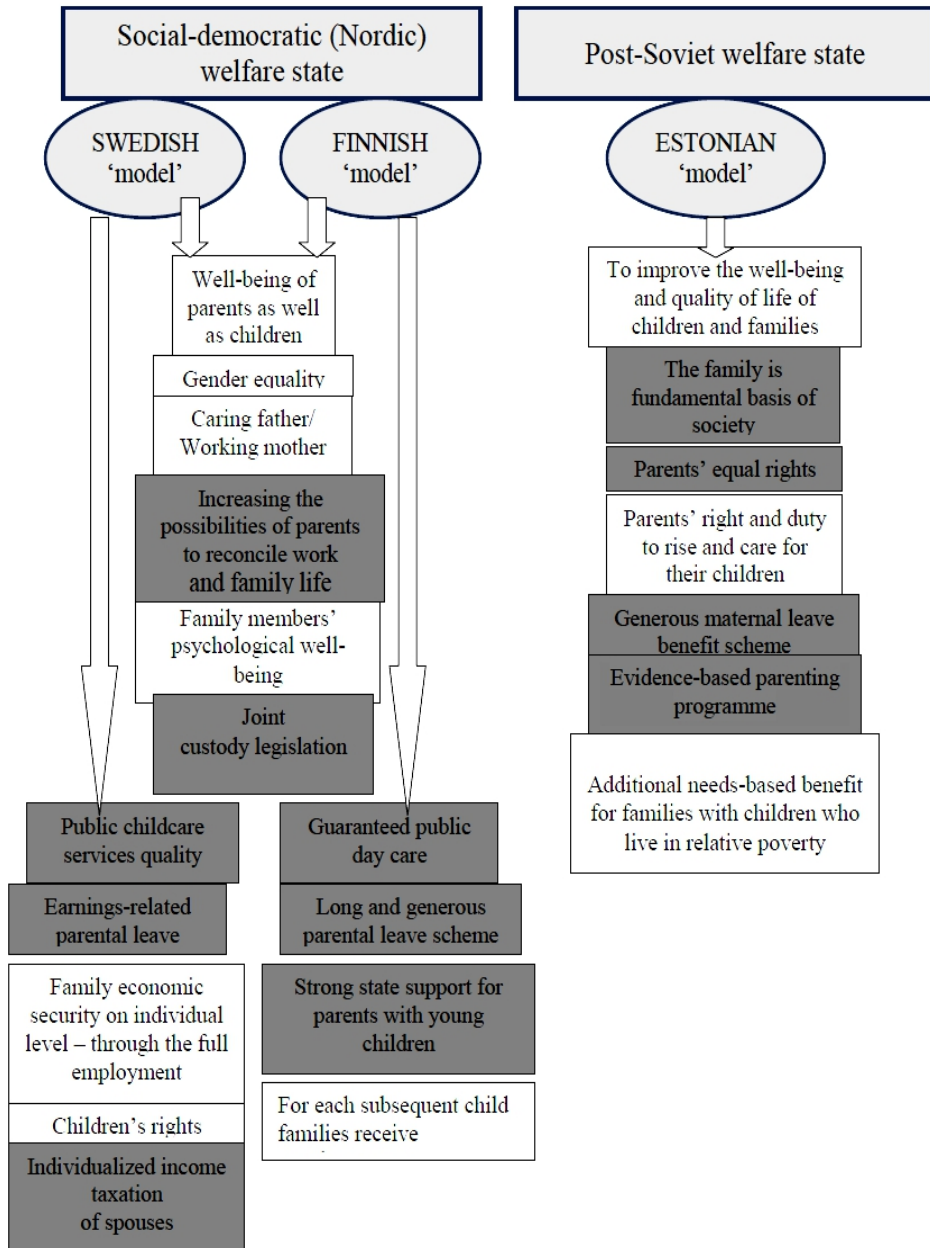
As Newman (2009) and Seccombe (2012) have argued, family in the modern world continues to change and EU Member States face a choice as to which models of work and family to support. Families are changing in accordance with the changes in the structure of the labour force, but the change also presupposes parents' adapting to new roles inside and outside of the family. Many researchers have focused on the changes that have led from traditional segregated roles towards more joint forms of relationships, housework/domestic responsibilities, and paid work balance in a partnership (e.g., Young & Wilmott, 1973; Oakley, 1974; Aldous, 1982; Giddens, 1992; Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; Hobson, 2002; Lammi-Taskula, 2006; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Thevenon, 2008; Forsberg, 2009; Jordan, 2009). All the aforementioned authors have found that individuals are not very eager to adopt new roles, which means that the imbalance between work and family life still exists, and that it is important to find new flexible measures to support families within the framework of social policy measures. From the empirical perspective in commemorative studies (Maron & Meulders, 2007; Ainsaar & Paajanen, 2009; Rønsen & Skrede, 2010) and single case studies (Ainsaar & Oras, 2000; Hoem, 2000), the main finding was that the most

problematic topic is the double burden of women. Duncombe and Marsden (1995) have even argued about the women's 'triple shift' of obligations: paid work, housework, and emotional work.

According to Goffmann (1977, p. 301), in the context of work and family time balance, the term *arrangement between the sexes*, i.e. the need to find new forms of family, labour market and the welfare state, was taken into use. Based on the reconceptualising of parenthood in Scandinavian policies in the 1970s, the 'shared roles model', according to which women and men do not meet obligations by gender, was formulated by Liljeström (1978). In this context Van Dongen's (2009) 'Complete Combination model', which gives both men and women more freedom to decide the level of equality on the individual level as a necessary aspect in a democratic society, is one of the possible solutions in balancing work and family life.

Gough (2008, p. 39) has argued that comparing the social policies of different welfare states can offer two types of lessons: models of social policy action to follow or avoid, and forms of social policy analysis that help address emerging social problems. Thus our comparative illustration (Figure 1) based on the authors' synthesis of the secondary literature indicates policy dimensions vital for developing a better understanding of individual perceptions of family life. White and grey boxes together indicate the ingredients in the family policy, whereas dark grey boxes indicate the pillars (pointed out as pillars in the referred literature) of family policy in each country. All three countries and their family policies support the dual or one-and-a-half-earner model, but they implement their support in slightly different ways.

Figure 1. Swedish, Finnish and Estonian family policy ‘models’. Constructed by the authors.



Sources: Esping-Andersen (2007); Ferrarini & Duvander (2009); Leira (2010); Rønseth & Skrede (2010); Finland: Towards a healthy balance between work and family life (2012); CM—Finland 2012 (2012); Child and Family Policy in Finland (2013); CFB-Estonia (2012); Vanemahüvitise seadus, RT I, 16.05.2013, 43.

The Swedish family policy model may be called an individual-centred model, while the Finnish family policy model may be called a family-centred model in which the policy measures are based on the mother and father as the common basis for the family. Latterd differ by the defamilisation aspects of policies. Estonian family policy model may be called an effect-based model, which has targeted mostly fertility without much consideration on gender aspects related to (female) caregivers' undervalued contributions.

It could be concluded that the family policies of the three welfare states under study share both similarities and differences. All in all, each of the states has formed their own unique package of measures to support families and the combining of work and family life on the basis of the specific needs of the country, parents and cultural background.

## **Empirical strategy and results**

### **Methodology and sample**

The investigation method used in this study was Peter Weinreich's ISA, the conceptual framework of which was developed by Weinreich in 1989 (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). While ISA has been used in several studies, it has not been used before as an investigative method in the context of parenthood in aging European societies. ISA is an open-ended conceptual framework, in which theoretical underpinnings are a series of self and identity conceptualisations, aspects of which are integrated within ISA: the psychodynamic approaches (mainly Erikson's), symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, personal construct psychology, appraisal theory, and cognitive–affective consistency principles (mainly Kelly's Personal Construct Theory) (Weinreich, 2003, Part I). ISA sees identity as a continuous process (based on a modification of Erikson's basic concepts) arising from partial identifications with others in the socio-biographical context, deriving from one's life experiences and relations with other social entities. ISA enables to explore an individual's identity structure within the value system of that particular individual and can be used to observe individual or group identities within particular socio-cultural and historical contexts.

Each respondent rates a series of entities (i.e. facets of self, significant others/institutions) against a set of bipolar constructs (i.e. opposing beliefs/values/statements), selected to reflect the socio-cultural context in which identity construal takes place. Then specialised computer software computes individual/group identity indices on the basis of specific parameters (e.g., self-evaluation/evaluation of others). Identity indices are rooted in the individual's own value-system, derived from ratings of the ego-ideal and of a disliked person within particular socio-cultural and historical



contexts. The individual uses significant others as either positive examples of qualities she or he wishes to emulate (i.e. idealistic identification) or as negative representations of those examples/qualities from which the individual wishes to dissociate (i.e. contra-identification) (Weinreich, 2003, Part II).

An ISA-s attribute structural pressure (SP) allows dealing with a person's 'core evaluative dimension' of the identity and 'conflicted evaluative dimension' of a person's identity—through the pressures that arise from the structures of cognitive–affective consonances and dissonances associated with the use of the construct (Weinreich, 2003, p. 103). High SP indicates discourses that represent core evaluative dimensions of identity. Low or negative SP indicates ambivalent or conflicted dimensions, when vacillation or distress is implicated through the undermining of positive – stabilising, pressures by negative – destabilising, ones (Weinreich, 2003, 126). The numerical values of SP in respondent groups are given in Table 2 (on figure 2 and in tables 1 and 2 with Swedish women marked as SW, Swedish men marked as SM; Finnish women marked as FW, Finnish men marked as FM; Estonian women marked as EW, Estonian men marked as EM).

The ISA identity instrument used in this study was specifically designed for research on the attitudes of the inhabitants of the three welfare states towards the work and family life balance in the environment of a particular welfare state. The attitudinal aspects concerning family policies were studied in the context of three cultural settings—Sweden, Finland, and Estonia—following Esping-Andersen's (1990; 1999) classification of three distinct regimes of the modern welfare state. The core values and conflicted themes in the context of family matters are revealed as a result, and based on these it is possible to evaluate how successful the family policies of the three studied welfare states have been in meeting the expectations of parents.

The ISA instrument consists of entities: self-image, other people, and social institutions by means of bipolar constructs (Weinreich, 2003, Part I and II) (for bipolar constructs see Appendix 1). In the ISA instrument developed for this study, the targets of appraisal were customised to include a wide range of entities (see Table 1).

The fieldwork was carried out in three countries: Estonia, Sweden, and Finland. From each country 15 women and 15 men (a total of 90 respondents) were questioned. The age of the female respondents varied from 23 to 50, the age of the male respondents varied from 28 to 52; the number of children the respondents had varied from 1 to 5. Fieldwork was carried out from February 2012 to June 2013. Each participant had to respond to 396 queries.

The sampling criteria were as follows:

- Must be in custody of at least one child under the age of 16.
- Must be in a two-way relationship/partnership.
- Must be currently living in the area (resident of Estonia, Sweden or Finland).
- Must be participating on the labour market.

## **Results**

We discuss four subthemes of the respondents' attitudes: combining work and family life; the roles of parents; experiences of the respondents with employers' attitudes towards combining work and family life; and respondents' expectations towards the state to offer supportive measures that would help combine work and family life. As a fifth subtheme, the respondents' evaluations of the social world they live in will be analysed as a key point to determine the factors that might influence their attitudes towards family matters. The numerical values of SP, on which the analysis of the current four subthemes is based, in respondents' groups are given in Table 2 (Appendix 1).

The first subset was the attitudes of mothers and fathers towards combining work and family life. Study results revealed that all Swedish and Finnish respondents highly valued financial independence and found that both parents have to work. Estonian mothers are highly positively oriented towards participating in the labour market, even though Estonian fathers are not so highly positively oriented in this issue. At the same time, all respondents believe that women's active participation in the job market affects the birth rate negatively. All respondent groups believe that women of working age should not necessarily work, at least not full time, and it is more important for women to focus on raising children. The highest belief in that was seen in the groups of Swedish men and women, and Finnish men. At the same time, Finnish and Estonian women were not so convinced on this point. For Estonian men, it is a conflicted theme—they agree that it is more important for women to focus on raising children, but this belief may veil a concern about the family's financial subsistence.

All female respondents were more concerned than men about coping with combining work and family life, which could be the evidence of men's more traditional views towards working in non-paid work (i.e. at home), independently from the social context. Swedish and Estonian women found combining family and children with a career problematic and believed that combining work and family life is not possible because of the considerable workload at a paid job. At the same time, Finnish women had a more positive and optimistic attitude towards the possibility of integrating work and family life—they believed that it could be better combined through more efficient division of time and chores in the family. Most of the respondents

treasure their social network but only Finnish women saw it as a helping factor in combining work and family life. The current study shows, however, that, independent from their cultural and social background, all men are oriented towards managing family matters only within the nuclear family itself without social support from outside the family.

Estonian men reported a conflict in the impossibility of equality between men and women in the integration of work and family life. They also considered women to be responsible for the functional combining of work and family life, while at the same time showing conflict about the issue.

The second subset was the respondents' ideas about responsibilities of a parent. The results of the study show that Estonian women do not see that their role as a parent is valued, while other groups of respondents are satisfied with their position as a parent as seen by society.

For the majority of the respondents the argument that women have greater responsibility at home holds true, whilst Swedish women reported a conflict in this argument and seem to wish that men would take more responsibility at home. While male respondents believe that staying home with children is a woman's responsibility, female respondents are not so convinced. Swedish men saw mothers as the primary caretakers of children (other groups of respondents found that both parents are equally responsible for raising children and it is one of the core values), but at the same time it was the highest source of conflict for them. Swedish women believed that raising children is the responsibility of both parents.

Finnish respondents and Estonian women reported to be worried about re-entering into the labour market after periods of childcare. This is further emphasised by the aforementioned conflict regarding the gender-based attitudes that employers hold towards employees. Finnish men "agree" with Finnish women in that it is hard for women to take breaks from their careers, and their most conflicted view was that a person who cannot combine work and family life is not a good parent/partner. It can be assumed that Finnish men are eager to support the mothers of their children, but at the same time they believe that staying home with children is a woman's responsibility. This is also the second conflicted theme for this group. Women in Finland are very clear about their notions about gender equality as they traditionally have been and continue to be forerunners in women's rights, and through this the Finnish men's conflict about their traditional standpoint about childcare responsibilities is understandable. Also, the responses suggest that Finnish women and men do not really care about sharing responsibilities because of social expectations.

The third subset was the respondents' experiences with employers' attitudes towards combining work and family life. The study revealed that

Swedish men were strongly convinced, and Finnish men and Swedish women were convinced that employers do not consider gender important. However, Estonian and Finnish women and Estonian men believed that employers are affected by gender stereotypes. For Estonian women it was the most conflicted theme. A woman's return to the labour market after a career break was seen as a problematic situation for the Finnish respondents and Estonian women. For groups of Finnish and Estonian women, gender stereotypes imposed by employers proved to be a problem. Employers' gender-based attitudes concerned Estonian women with two or more children more than others, which makes sense since more children demand more attention and devotion at home, but so do employers in paid work.

The group of Swedish men held the most negative view towards working overtime, while Swedish women regarded working overtime positively, but it is at the same time a conflicted value. Finnish women and men found that working overtime is not a normal part of modern working culture. Estonian respondents saw working overtime as a normal part of modern working culture; at the same time, for Estonian men, women's working overtime was a slightly conflicted issue. It could be, once again, proof that the group of Estonian men valued their role as a provider, being positively minded about working overtime, but are worried about managing the family's financial budget on their own.

The fourth subset discussed the respondents' expectations towards the state to offer supportive measures that would help combine work and family life. While Estonian men do not feel that solving the problem of population aging is very important (despite that fact that it has the highest conflict for them), Estonian and Swedish women and Finnish men feel strongly that it is important. Swedish men and Finnish women find that population ageing is a problem in society.

All respondent groups find that the government should first and foremost support motherhood. Swedish and Finnish respondents believed that having children is not compulsory, therefore taking care of children should not be equalled with paid work, but obviously they really wanted to have children and be parents—they found it to be a decision on an individual level, not depending on the state's financial support. Finnish respondents thought that more supportive measures from the state are welcome, but in the light of previously presented data it is possible to assume that they expect more non-financial supportive measures in helping combine work and family life, especially after women's breaks from participating in the labour market. Swedish respondents were satisfied with the current supportive family policy measures, but not very highly, which can be seen from their worries about combining work and family life. While Estonian respondents had high expectations towards government support both financially and through

shaping family values, they were not waiting for only support from the state. They believed that taking care of children should be equalled with paid work because women cannot participate in the paid labour market during certain life periods, which could be instrumental in economic survival. An interesting feature occurs—Estonian men have a more “modern” attitude in the context of the labour market than in that of non-paid work. Arguably, the stances of Estonian respondents are understandable because the ‘European model’ is relatively new in Estonia; more traditional attitudes towards women’s and men’s gender-based roles prevail on a societal level and there is less social and financial security.

The fifth subset was the respondents’ appraisal of the social world. In compliance with the results of the evaluation of the society and significant others inside the particular society, it is possible to conclude which agents have strong influence on the respondents’ attitudes towards family matters. On the other hand, the mentioned evaluation demonstrates the respondents’ satisfaction with the work and family life situation through the context of the particular society. Social contexts construed by respondents (society and significant others inside a particular society) are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation of the socio-biographical and the wider socio-cultural domain context for groups of respondents.

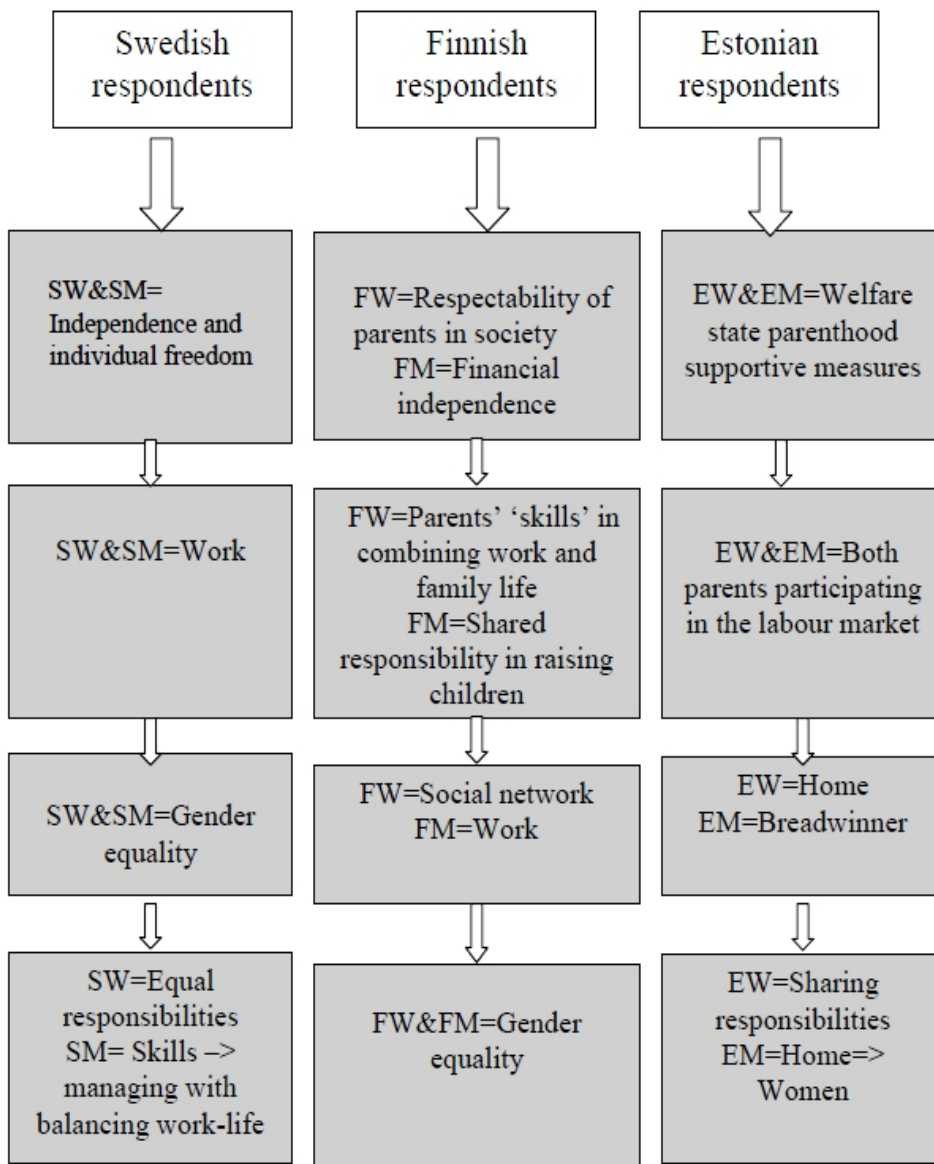
Entity(socio-biographical context)	Groups of respondents					
	EW	SW	FW	EM	SM	FM
<b>Partner</b>	4.04	3.38	3.19	4.45	3.15	3.15
<b>Mother</b>	3.42	3.77	3.37	3.90	3.88	3.24
<b>Father</b>	2.36	4.69	4.02	3.43	4.19	4.28
<b>Friends</b>	3.58	3.02	2.62	3.66	3.27	3.00
<b>Colleagues at work</b>	3.08	3.00	2.42	3.58	3.47	3.10
<b>Partner’s mother</b>	3.06	2.16	2.21	3.58	2.89	2.84
<b>Partner’s father</b>	2.29	2.67	3.10	2.98	3.40	3.44
<b>Neighbours</b>	2.60	3.24	3.43	3.17	3.38	2.87
Entity(wider socio-cultural domain)	Groups of respondents					
	EW	SW	FW	EM	SM	FM
<b>Government</b>	2.98	4.30	4.23	3.00	4.82	4.94
<b>Employer</b>	2.51	2.98	1.83	2.65	3.53	2.66
<b>Opposition</b>	1.88	2.45	2.67	2.08	2.64	2.62
<b>Other women</b>	3.62	2.39	2.82	4.16	2.89	2.70
<b>Other men</b>	3.09	1.90	2.00	3.82	3.20	2.24
<b>Neighbours</b>	2.60	3.24	3.43	3.17	3.38	2.87
<b>Media</b>	2.50	2.48	2.47	2.48	3.14	2.78

*Note:* The range of values for a person’s evaluation of self in wider socio-cultural context is from zero (0.00) to maximum (5.00) ego-involvement with the entities included in the identity instrument.

Based on the data, it was possible to construct the models of core values of the interviewed mothers and fathers (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Swedish, Finnish and Estonian respondents’ core values models.

Figure constructed as core value levels for respondents where the first is most important and the following are less important.



Comparing the results based on the data of the respondents’ self-evaluations in different contexts, it can be assumed that Estonian respondents show their similar unfulfilled expectations of the welfare state and their

similar understanding of the roles of parents in society. Inside the family Estonian respondents demonstrate a strong commitment to the family and support for the partner. It can be presumed that through relying on a partner, Estonian parents compensate for their insecurity towards the welfare state. Swedish and Finnish respondents, on the other hand, strongly demonstrate their satisfaction with the measures taken by the welfare state. However, it can be assumed that Swedish respondents are not satisfied with their roles as parents at home. It was revealed that Finnish respondents are quite satisfied with the situation inside the family.

Comparing the Estonian family policy model (Figure 1) and the attitudes of Estonian respondents towards family matters, it can be argued that, for example, two of the pillars of the Estonian family policy—a generous parental leave benefit scheme and additional needs-based benefits for families with children who live in relative poverty—are not as important as general financial aid to families.

In a comparison of the Swedish family policy model (Figure 1) and the attitudes of the Swedish respondents towards family matters, gender equality is not one of the pillars, but it seems to be an important issue for Swedish parents, and therefore additional measures may be needed to address this.

Comparing the Finnish family policy model (Figure 1) and the attitudes of the Finnish respondents' towards family matters, it can be said that gender equality is not one of the pillars, but it is still an important issue in family policy, as in the Swedish model. However, in both Sweden and Finland, gender equality is reflected in one of the pillars of the family policies: increasing the possibilities of parents to reconcile work and family life. The results of the study show that the aims of the Finnish welfare state and the attitudes of the interviewed respondents are similar in terms of gender balance and financial independence (Figure 2).

## **Conclusion**

Esping-Andersen (1999; 2009) sees the welfare state as an important institution for parents who are temporarily unable to participate in the labour market because of care responsibilities and/or market failure and/or family “failure”. In light of the current study we bring up three main arguments.

Firstly, Estonian respondents have high hopes towards supportive measures by the government; they are supporters of paid work, despite trying to manage with parenthood by themselves, similarly to one-and-half breadwinner ideal type. It is possible to say that through the hopes for supportive measures from the state they rather demonstrate their uncertainty about coping financially. It stands out clearly that Estonian men feel strong pressure from their traditional understanding of gender roles. While Swedish

and Finnish respondents feel the pressure of acting as “newcoming” fathers and are concerned about successfully balancing family and work time, they seem to feel secure in the knowledge that they are supported in parenthood by the welfare state and their employers. Latter indicates that so called “Nordic utopia” or ideal type of family policy recognised as “universal caregiver”, is not achieved. It can be argued that the reason why equalling childcare with paid work is important for men in Estonia is the “unbalanced” state which reproduces traditional gender roles (Estonian men feel financially insecure when women are paid little during childcare). On the other hand, the strongly entrenched traditional gender roles inside the family and in the labour market accompanied by poverty produce a traditional family model. However, the more traditional attitudes towards family matters can be one of the causes of Estonia’s similar fertility indicators to Sweden and Finland.

Secondly, a comparison between the family policy models, the core values of the respondents, and the main conflicted themes for them, makes it possible to construct the respondents’ value systems towards family matters. The constructed value systems allow to trace the issues that are viewed as “solved” by the respondents and the issues that still need to be solved. It is revealed that for Swedish respondents, the solved issues are independence, individual freedom, and respectability of parents in society, work life, and the welfare state’s role as a security provider, indicating to defamilisation. For Finnish respondents, the solved issues are respectability of parents in society, financial independence, both parents’ responsibility in raising children by skilful combining of work and family life, and the welfare state’s role as a security provider in family matters, indicating more to defamilisation. For Estonian respondents, the solved issues are both parents’ participating in the labour market. Estonian respondents were observed to be following a traditional division of gender roles within the family when combining work and family life. Latter indicates that care is neither valued (offered by cheap (state or market) labour) nor gender balanced.

Thirdly, following Esping-Andersen’s (1990; 1999) classification of three distinct regimes of the modern welfare state, it is possible to conclude that for the specific Swedish and Finnish respondents the “social-democratic” welfare state has “worked out”, with the exception of gender equality inside the family. On the other hand, in the case of Estonia it is possible to argue (in the context of the results of the current study) that Estonia is still a ‘post-Soviet welfare state’ with its transitional values and low living standards. Based on the data presented in this study, it is possible to argue that Swedish and Finnish welfare states have responded in accordance with the expectations of the residents. However, each analysed country has its own clear problems within the population, which they



continue to face. Surprisingly, the data shows that even though Estonian respondents feel insecure, the Estonian fertility rate is nearly similar to the fertility rates of Sweden and Finland. Based on the current study, it is possible to argue that the similar fertility rate is influenced by a more traditional understanding of gender roles and by its close correlation with the socio-biographical context.

The current study revealed the parents' points of concern and satisfaction in the context of family policies. The current analysis does not allow drawing conclusions about whether certain elements of the system create attitudes, or whether attitudes effect policy choices; however, welfare regimes have differences even inside a single type. The study was based on a small sample, which remains insufficient for policy recommendations, but is adequate enough to point out the problems that parents face in combining work and family life. Further studies of these issues with a larger sample and alternative studies with other methods could provide a basis for recommendations in planning specific social measures.

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**Appendix 1**  
**Table 2**

Table 2. Respondents rated the ‘ideal self’ against bipolar constructs (structural pressure in numerical values - SP).

No	Bipolar constructs (Left)	Structural Pressure (SP)						Bipolar constructs (Right)
		SW	SM	FW	FM	EW	EM	
1	...believes that the normal situation is for women to stay at home and men to have the role of a breadwinner	74. 89	77. 94	35. 69	46. 29	25. 92	11.12	...believes that both parents have to be in paid work
2	...believes that women and men are equal in both instances of fulfilling responsibilities at home and having paid work	71. 48	57. 72	11. 17	57. 84	- 9.6 1	- 18.15	...believes that in family life women are responsible for functional combining of work and family life
3	...believes that staying home in the case of need (young children, child sickness, etc.) can't depend on parent's gender	84. 46	67. 68	6.2 6	- 39. 81	- 2.3 2	21.38	...believes that staying home in the case of need (young children, child sickness, etc.) is a biological responsibility of women
4	...believes that both parents are responsible for raising a child	88. 11	- 64. 79	39. 92	62. 86	15. 26	24 .0 0	...believes that when raising a child most of the responsibility is with the mother
5	...knows that for each adult, regardless of	81. 29	84. 46	34. 93	67. 70	16. 07	13 .3 3	...recognises that it is natural for women to be economically

No	Bipolar constructs (Left)	Structural Pressure (SP)						Bipolar constructs (Right)
		SW	SM	FW	FM	EW	EM	
	gender, economic independence is important							dependent on their partner
6	...believes that the equality of women and men in combining work and family life is possible	65.40	75.75	34.42	60.53	12.12	-9.52	...believes that the equality of women and men in combining work and family life is impossible
7	...views women as having greater responsibility at home	-8.41	26.51	22.10	7.54	23.42	15.17	...views men as having greater responsibility at home
8	...believes that in Estonia/Sweden/Finland women and men are respected as parents	47.03	68.87	46.53	57.09	22.03	28.21	...believes that in Estonia/Sweden/Finland women and men are not respected as parents
9	...believes that a good partner and parent can manage with combining work and family life	25.57	72.34	42.03	-52.82	-22.83	28.88	...believes that a person who can't combine work and family life is not a good partner/parent
10	...believes that for Estonian/Swedish/Finnish society it is important to find a solution to the problem of population ageing	39.40	55.40	34.72	52.67	7.32	-18.59	...believes that for Estonian/Swedish/Finnish society it is not important to find a solution to the problem of population ageing
11	...believes that it is important for Estonia/Sweden/Finland that as many people of working age as possible are working, regardless of their gender	60.87	95.54	27.21	61.59	11.08	-12.33	...believes that women of working age shouldn't necessarily work, at least not full time. It is more important for women to focus on raising children
12	...believes that the birth rate is positively affected by women actively participating in the job market	-22.94	-13.27	-6.15	4.40	5.16	20.65	...believes that the birth rate is negatively affected by women actively participating in the job market
13	...thinks that the birth rate is higher in countries where fatherhood is benefited by the State (by way of	-7.38	36.59	-2.25	5.71	-4.00	29.75	...thinks that for raising the birth rate it is not important to pay attention to fathers, but it is important to make sure that mothers are



N o	Bipolar constructs (Left)	Structural Pressure (SP)						Bipolar constructs (Right)
		SW	SM	FW	FM	EW	EM	
	fathers' quota and other measures that support the participation of fathers in raising children)							insured by the state (by way of maternity leave, help when returning to the job market and so on)
14	...believes that Estonian/Swedish/Finnish employers are strongly affected by gender stereotypes (e.g., they are more understanding when female employees are at home with sick children)	9.14	73.64	-12.30	27.51	-26.02	-4.73	...believes that Estonian/Swedish/Finnish employers do not consider gender important (e.g., they are also understanding when male employees stay at home with sick children)
15	...believes that when it doesn't interfere with the role of being a mother, it is normal that women take the role of a breadwinner along with men	58.89	64.43	-19.70	-31.37	-6.89	19.71	...believes that it is hard for women to stay on parental leave because after the period of leave it is difficult for them to re-enter the labour market – thus they have to work constantly
16	...thinks that working overtime is not a normal part of the modern working culture	-7.23	42.48	4.66	10.28	10.54	-1.87	...thinks that women working overtime is a normal part of the modern working culture
17	...thinks that working overtime is not a normal part of the modern working culture	-25.56	56.14	18.52	21.86	9.49	19.33	...thinks that men working overtime is a normal part of the modern working culture
18	...thinks that the state should take more supportive measures (financial support + different services) towards families with children	16.44	29.58	15.81	24.36	29.07	29.53	...thinks that the state is already taking enough supportive measures towards families with children
19	...believes that families with children should not expect help from the state, they should manage on their	68.15	19.12	22.03	27.13	19.71	38.81	...believes that the state should support parenthood through shaping values and legislation, providing different services and financial means

No	Bipolar constructs (Left)	Structural Pressure (SP)						Bipolar constructs (Right)
		SW	SM	FW	FM	EW	EM	
	own							
20	...believes that it is normal that an extended circle of friends and family also takes part in combining work and family life	-33.36	-16.12	40.07	-26.66	-22.46	-16.87	...believes that different chores in work and family life should be managed only by the nuclear family itself
21	...believes that taking care of children should be equalled with paid work because women can't participate in paid work at every life period (the birth of a child, taking care of the infant)	-25.81	1.21	-19.15	-12.86	21.87	35.74	...believes that having children is not compulsory, therefore taking care of children shouldn't be equalled with paid work
22	...believes that work and family life could be better combined by a more efficient division of time and chores in the family	-26.13	-38.88	25.47	-25.07	-13.19	5.54	...believes that combining work and family life isn't possible because of the big workload in paid job

*Notes: Structural pressure is a measure of the compelling and constraining influence of a particular construct. SP ranges from -100 to 100.*

*Numerical value for a particular bipolar construct is presented in the left or right column for both groups of respondents according to their placement in the Table (on the left if the respondents chose the left construct and on the right if they chose the construct on the right).*