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## **FROM POVERTY TO WELLBEING: CHILDREN AS SUBJECTS OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND EMERGING AGENTS ON THE POLICY ARENA IN ESTONIA**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to present a retrospective of child poverty research in Estonia: how it has developed from the social and political acknowledgement of poverty as a social issue in the early 1990s onwards, and how child poverty research has contributed to the development of political thought. The paper follows the use of a new paradigm of childhood research, and revisits the methodological approaches and main research findings that have enhanced the understanding of children as a new policy interest group in politics.

**Key words:** child poverty research, relative deprivation, exclusion, children in policies, children's perspective, Estonia.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The perspective on children – as active agents, social actors, and units of observation – crystallised as a new field of sociological research – the sociology of childhood – in Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see: Qvortrup, 1991; James and Prout, 1990). This new approach to researching children and childhood emerged when researchers focused on one hand on minority, and on the other developed social constructivism and interpretative theoretical approaches. The perspective did not problematize traditional views on children but was seen as

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complementary to it, thus enriching academic understanding of social practices related to children.

Today the ideas underlying the new paradigm of childhood studies have spread worldwide and have developed in several directions. Most importantly, besides child welfare issues, the conceptualization of a child's wellbeing and the development of child social indicators have attained an acknowledged position in R&D projects and in the academic literature on children. Moreover, the research output received from studies with children and children's perspectives in their own right are gaining trust in both national and international studies by informing policies. To name just a few one may mention the Health Behaviour of Schoolchildren (HBSC-Study), Children's Worlds (ISCWeB), and the PISA-Study.

This paper makes an historical excursion back to the 1990s and then forward to demonstrate how the new theoretical perspective on children reached Estonia, first undertaken in research and then commencing to serve policymaking. Like elsewhere, the research *with* children grew out of the research *about* children, and in the case of Estonia was very much related to poverty studies in the early 1990s, which was also the start of a new field of research that time. Poverty studies served as engines for making children visible in the policy arena, thus paving the way to trust children's perspectives and helping to follow the principles of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, according to which every child has a right to be heard and to be taken seriously.

The aim of this paper is to present a retrospective of child poverty research and show how it has developed from the social and political acknowledgement of poverty as a social issue in Estonia, a country which re-established its independence and started reconstructions from scratch in the early 1990s. The paper also considers how learning about child poverty has contributed to bringing children into the policy arena as a separate policy interest group, by following the emergence of a new paradigm of childhood research and examining its impact on the development of political thought with respect to children's wellbeing. The paper also revisits the methodological approaches applied to measure child poverty, relative deprivation, and social exclusion and presents the main research findings arising from these approaches. By means of a historical excursion the article makes an attempt to link the research output with the development of political thought.

## 2. FROM “NO-POVERTY” TO POVERTY IN CHILDREN’S LIVES

The definitions of poverty vary and cognitive research models can be constructed using several related terms – subjectively perceived relative deprivation (economic, social and psychological); social exclusion from different social arena (peers, family, school, activities, shelter, services, etc), or by using related but more distant constructs like abuse, violence, school bullying, children in court hearings, etc. In order to measure a social phenomenon several preconditions must be met: (1) the existence of an observable phenomenon; (2) official recognition of this phenomenon; (3) the availability of a measuring tool; and (4) society’s readiness to address the issue.

Between 1940 and 1991, Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union as one of the Soviet Socialist Republics. During the Soviet occupation, social sciences were subject to strong ideological pressure – academic social research was strictly censored by government agencies. The statistical data collected by the Estonian Statistical Office were carefully controlled by the Central Statistical Office in Moscow, to ensure that the totalitarian system was portrayed in a favourable light. Poverty as a term was applied only to the Western World and not discussed in the Soviet framework. Because poverty did not officially exist, poverty research could not be developed or related topics considered.

### 2.1. First steps of poverty research

The first scientific article dealing with poverty of households (and introducing poverty as a scientific and political term in Estonia) was published by Kutsar and Trumm in the *Scandinavian Journal of Social Welfare* (currently known as *International Journal of Social Welfare*) in 1993 (see: Kutsar and Trumm, 1993). This publication opened the way towards official recognition of poverty as a political term as well as the development of its measurement tools. During the Copenhagen Social Summit in 1995 the Estonian Government took responsibility for developing a strategy of poverty eradication in the country. The first analysis of poverty patterns and trends, as well as the method for setting the poverty line, was published in 1999 (Kutsar and Trumm, 1999). The team of researchers working on poverty structures and using empirical data from the *Estonian Household Income and Expenditure Survey* came to the conclusion that (1) poverty in Estonia is structural; (2) poor children tend to come from households with unfavourable shares of breadwinners and dependants (households with unemployed adults, especially long-term unemployed, single-parent families, large families with three or more children), and (3) a child is the most vulnerable subject exposed

to poverty in Estonia. These conclusions are no longer new because they go in parallel with many other international studies on poverty and, more specifically, child poverty (see for instance the publications by Jonathan Bradshaw) but at the time they were released they were a novelty in research and politics.

It was also argued that the child him/herself can be a crucial risk factor in determining the health of a household economy. With every additional child, the economic situation of the family is more likely to worsen. Compared to other social groups, children are at a higher risk of living in a household with a small income, which means that due to a shortage of money their needs are more likely to remain unmet. It was understood that a child in a household setting is dependent on the social and economic coping capacities and the available resources of the child's parent(s); children can do very little themselves to improve their situation. The latter conclusion resonated strongly with the general public, which caused policy makers recognise child poverty as a social problem in Estonia.

## **2.2. Children – emerging agents in the policy arena**

Estonia has been a member of the United Nations since 1991. By joining the UN and the European Council, Estonia also joined the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the 21st November 1991. Following this move, both state and private social welfare institutions, courts, and executive and legislative powers have to take into account the provisions of the Convention, which states that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all cases involving children, and that every child has a right to be heard and taken seriously. The Republic of Estonia Child Protection Law Act was passed by the Estonian Supreme Council on 8 June 1992, and contained similar principles as the UN CRC. The purpose of the law was to protect the rights of all children by considering the special nature and needs of a child.

According to the Child Protection Law Act (1992), all children in Estonia are equal, having the same social status. Children should not be treated differently because of the status of their parents. Every child has the right to protection and wellbeing, as well as the right to develop and the right to privacy. Indeed, the fundamental rights of a child to eat nutritious food, to acquire an education according to his/her abilities, or to receive needed medical treatment no longer depend on his/her legal status, but on several other factors.

Awareness of a child as a subject with his or her own specific needs and interests has grown considerably since the early 1990s. The Child Protection Law Act was revised accordingly and the new version will come to power on

the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2016. The new Law makes attempts to more fully apply the new understanding of children and childhood. However, it has been subject to criticism from the political opposition, researchers, and the public. The Family Law Act was also completely revised and introduced in 2009. It now pays special attention to protection of the rights of a child in the family framework. It establishes a new legal bond between the child and his/her parent/s by regulating the care responsibilities and fiscal matters.

Following Estonia's restoration of independent statehood in 1991, state subsidies for children's goods were ended, which had a detrimental impact on households with children and put them at risk of falling into economic hardship (without reference to *poverty* as the term was non-existent during that time). Following the recommendations of researchers, a universal child benefit was introduced as policy response in 1992 to compensate for increasing prices of children's goods and to provide support to households with children. This was the first time when policy makers had, following consultations with researchers, considered children as a minority group and adopted a principle to value all children despite of the socio-economic status of their parents.

Later on, and impacted by poverty research, the position of children on the policy agenda strengthened step by step. However, the situation did not improve in real terms, but rather tended to be part of political rhetoric during political rallies. The universal child benefit provides the best example of this trend. In 1992 when the universal child benefit was introduced it consisted of 18 per cent of the average salary in Estonia, while it was only 2.8 per cent in 2001, while at the same time old age pensions increased in accordance with inflation. Following recent hot debates, today it is 45 euros per month paid to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> child and 100 euros from the 3<sup>rd</sup> child on (4% and 10% respectively of the average salary, both before individual income tax).

To conclude this section, it may be said that consideration of a child agency was influenced by three developments. First, changing social practices (e.g. the reconstruction of the national economy, which led to a big part of the population, including households with children, who had to cope with serious economic hardship) required policy interventions; second, Estonia's joining the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which paid attention to a child as a subject with his/her own needs and social competence; and third – the emerging new academic understanding of children as a minority group in a society, together with the potential to trust children's own perspectives in understanding the effects of poverty in children's lives.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Structural approach

As explained by Qvortrup (1991), understanding children as active social actors starts from counting children. According to this theoretical framework, the family, school and other settings can be dealt as the background variables. In Estonia, the main data source for calculating the number of children exposed to poverty was the *Estonian Household Income and Expenditure Survey*, first undertaken by the Estonian Statistical Office (until 2006) and subsequently continued by the EU SILC. The structural approach includes research on risk factors of households with different household structures, the numbers of children exposed to high risks of poverty, and the poverty trends (Kutsar, 2010; Kutsar and Trumm, 1999; Tiit, 2006a; 2006b, and others).

The main methodological problem revealed in the analysis was related to equivalence scales applied to the income and expenditure data. The OECD equivalence scale (1:0.5:0.7) was not optimal, and calculations were made using the officially accepted scale (1:0.8:0.8) as a more accurate measure of child poverty (for more on the method of elaboration, see Kutsar and Trumm, 1999). In recent years, the EU modified equivalence scale (1:0.5:0.3) is applied with the aim of following the harmonised approach in international social reporting. However, the modified scale tends to underestimate the share of individual consumption of the household members. In case of Estonia (and the rest of the new EU members of East and Central Europe) it under-represents child poverty (Malier et al., 2007; Tiit, 2006b) and needs to be treated with caution when political decisions are being made concerning the poor, especially when children are concerned.

#### 3.2. From welfare to wellbeing approach

In order to study poverty experienced by children, the researchers began to follow the concepts of subjectively perceived relative deprivation and social exclusion. Besides the former welfare approach, the child wellbeing approach began to develop in the late 1990s as a new field of knowledge, also inspired by the new paradigm of sociology of childhood (e.g., Corsaro, 1997) and the principles of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. A similar trend emerged in other countries as well and is currently acknowledged worldwide – mostly spreading among academics, and step-by-step gaining influence in policymaking. The best example of the child wellbeing study is an outstanding international study “Children’s Worlds” (ISCWb) that was deeply piloted in 2010–2011 in 14 countries,

with the main study carried out in 2013–2014 among 15 countries worldwide. The study aims to collect solid and representative data on children's lives and daily activities, including economic matters and in particular on their own perceptions and evaluations of their wellbeing. The purpose is to improve children's wellbeing by creating awareness among children, their parents and their communities, but also among opinion leaders, decision-makers, professionals and the general public (see: <http://www.isciweb.org/>).

Beginning in the late 1990s, in Estonia the children's perspectives were applied in relative deprivation and social exclusion studies with children. The perception of relative deprivation was understood by researchers as a process of social comparison with peers. The researchers were inspired by Augoustinos and Walker (1996), according to whom an individual who feels deprived believes that he/she deserves more than he/she has. This recognition may lead to an increasing group cohesion and protest, or conversely – to distress and psychosomatic symptoms. In both cases the feeling of deprivation has a negative impact on children's participation in peer culture routines – the processes of mutual communication, interpersonal comparisons, and influence.

A three-dimensional welfare approach developed by Erik Allardt (1975) was adapted by Kutsar (1997) in order to understand poverty in people's lives through its related constructs of subjectively perceived relative deprivation and social exclusion. She constructed an integrated measure for adult respondents and further applied it by analysing data collected from children (Kutsar, 2000; Kutsar et al., 2004).

According to Kutsar, the three welfare dimensions developed by Allardt – “Having” (*what I have*), “Loving” (*where I belong*) and “Being” (*what I am*) are considered as dimensions of relative deprivation cases of scarce resources – economic, social and psychological respectively. Through deficits in the economic dimension (economic deprivation), a child is exposed to negative social comparisons – namely what the child has and what he/she feels they deserve when compared to important others – his or her peers. Deficits of resources in the social dimension (social deprivation) leaves a child devoid of his/her participatory rights of belonging to peer groups and taking joint actions with them. Deficits in the psychological dimension (psychological deprivation) lowers the self-esteem of the child and puts him/her at the risk of negative self identity. Deficits of welfare resources cumulate into risks of social exclusion from peers.

The *Living Conditions Survey among Children*, carried out in 1997 (1568 respondents from the 8th forms of ordinary schools – 14–15 years of age; representative sample of students of this age group) became a first source of data to understand child poverty from the child's own perspective. The questionnaire

was constructed around the rights of a child following the principles of the UN Convention. Among many other items, the survey contained questions about children's perceptions and estimations of their household economic performance and it also tested the child's perceived relative deprivation and social exclusion. The data analysis applied the welfare deficits' approach by Kutsar (1997) and the new paradigm of childhood.

The same analytical framework was used in two additional small-scale quantitative surveys among children, which focused on social exclusion from peers: the study carried out by Vetemäe in 2004 (330 respondents 12–13 years of age) and the study of children's self-exclusion from peer activities carried out by Viira in 2005 (291 respondents of the same age). Later on, issues of children's wellbeing and the children's perspectives' methodological framework was applied to new topics, including those where children were asked to comment on policies involving political issues that directly or indirectly impacted their everyday lives. Examples include a study on how children perceive family borders in a situation of diversification of family structures in the society, carried out by Roots (2010); assessing the wellbeing of children of separated parents (Peterson, 2010); exploring children's opinions and experiences of being left behind by parents engaged in labour migration (Kutsar et al, 2014); and studying children's opinions about adoption rights if given to same-sex couples (Heinma, 2014).

#### **4. A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT THE FINDINGS**

Let's return at this point to the initial stage of new childhood research in Estonia that firstly focused on poverty and the related constructs – deprivation and exclusion, then revisit the findings that are still meaningful in child wellbeing research. First, household expenditures as a source of perceived relative deprivation of children are highlighted from the structural perspective, followed by a presentation of children's own perspectives of perceived relative deprivation and exclusion, and self-exclusion from peer activities.

##### **4.1. The “cost” of a child – a source of relative deprivation?**

The research on household incomes and expenditures revealed the structural character of poverty in Estonia, as was highlighted earlier in this paper. Proceeding from this finding, Tiit (2004) set a research question: how much does a child “cost”, or – how much do parent/s spend from the household budget to meet the child's needs in households with different consumption levels. The household budget

method is itself somewhat problematic because of relatively large role of joint consumption in households (e.g., expenditures on the use of a family car, joint meals, shared accommodation, etc). However, the comparisons of expenditures on children among different income groups helps both understand the roots of social and economic inequalities between children in the household framework and experiences of relative deprivation compared to peers, from the children's perspectives.

Tiit's (2004) analysis utilised data from the *Household Income and Expenditure Survey* (10,460 households, data from 2002). She compared expenditures on a child among households with children in five lower income deciles (*the "poorer half"*) with those in the upper five deciles (*the "wealthier half"*). The study showed that the difference in expenditures on children between these two groups of households is nearly double. The wealthier households spend on average 1.55 times more on food, 1.86 times more on eating out, 2.13 times more on transportation, 3.12 times more on clothing and footwear and 3.25 times more on leisure activities of the child. It is important to note that expenditures on clothes and footwear in case of a preschool child form up to 80% of that of the average adult, and reach 1.5 times by 18 years of age.

The needs of a child vary and tend to change as the child grows older. The study demonstrated that during the teenage years the consumption needs are driven by specific different items (wardrobe items, educational and leisure activities) than those of an average adult. In addition to their basic needs of food, shelter, self development, etc, they have a need to belong to peer groups as equals. Children's participation in peer culture routines is a mutually impacting process. It is obvious that children regard what items their friends have as important. Sometimes it appears to be of enormous importance to own specific things, e.g., computer games, toys, the 'right' clothes, a computer or a 'right' mobile phone. A lack of these things may result in exclusion from the peer group society, like missing a ticket to attend a social event. Through external prerequisites a child can express his or her acceptance of norms and values of the peer group.

We can presume that children from less wealthy households experience relative deprivation and are exposed to higher risks of social exclusion and a higher probability than their peers living with wealthier parent/s. This assumption was tested based on data collected by several studies among children, discussed in the following section.

#### 4.2. Perception of relative deprivation and social exclusion

A survey of 1568 schoolchildren in Estonia (1997) confirmed a statistically significant impact of poor economic conditions of the family as estimated by children on their perceived relative deprivation – economic, social as well as psychological. Those respondents who estimated the economic performance of the family as poor were more likely to experience subjective economic deprivation when compared to the economic situation of their friends. As they perceived it, they had less pocket money, could not afford necessary things, and were not able to attend school events and hobby and recreational groups compared to those from wealthier families. Being aware of the resource level of the household and taking the views of their parents into consideration, children from poorer families learned to cope with fewer material resources. They learned to be silent and not speak about their needs to their parents (Kutsar et al., 2004).

The low economic performance of a household puts a child at a risk of perceived social deprivation and isolation, e.g. by having fewer friends than their classmates they also felt or believed they were less favoured by the teachers and that they received less support from them. Children who estimated the economic performance of their family as poor were more likely to experience relative psychological deprivation. They could not accept themselves as they are – they tended to be less satisfied with their own body and capacities. In addition, compared to children who estimated the economic performance of their family as good or very good, they regarded themselves as being less successful and less happy.

A study by Vetemäe (2004) focused on teenage friendships – who is liked as a friend, who is excluded from friendships, and how this is related to the perceived economic performance of the family the child comes from. The study showed that 52% of the 12–13 year old respondents had experienced withdrawal by peers, including 12% who estimated this occurred often, and 5% who felt it occurred very often, while 17% also had felt excluded.

This study confirmed the results of the 1997 study, i.e. that the lack of resources in one welfare dimension is related to the lack of resources in another welfare dimension and cumulates in experiences of social exclusion from peers. The multinomial logistic regression model processed by Vetemäe (2004) revealed that feeling excluded from peers was not determined by gender, family structure (nuclear, single-parent, or a large family) and the location of residence (town or village), but by economic (less pocket money and the related perception of low popularity among classmates), social (less acceptance among classmates, fewer friends or even no friends) and psychological (less satisfied with one's

appearance, not appreciated for personal features, feeling of being unsuccessful deprivations of a child.

However, the model showed that having less pocket money does not determine one's belonging to the group of excluded children, because other material values also lose importance. This is confirmed by the fact that feeling excluded from peers is determined by the lack of resources in the "belonging" and "being" dimensions of welfare. The poor economic situation of the household as the launching factor takes secondary place in the child's perceptions, which leads us to the idea of children's agency where participation in peer groups and self-value are really important factors in children's everyday life. Indeed, the material values (including having a decent amount of pocket money) determine the belonging to the group of non-excluded as does self-acceptance, having more friends and the perceived acceptance by the classmates.

The study by Vetemäe (2004) also showed that the feeling of exclusion has the risk of escalation and being perceived also in other social interactions of the child beyond peer group relationships. The children who perceived exclusion from peers also felt excluded from their family members. More often than the 'not-excluded' they stated that they were not heard and accepted by family members; no interest towards their activities nor successes was expressed at home; they claimed they had more arguments with their parents and they had less wish to spend time with them, especially with their father.

To conclude, feelings of exclusion are not determined by gender, family structure, or location of residence, but are determined by fewer perceived opportunities and lack of choices (different types of deprivation).

### **4.3. Self-exclusion as a coping strategy of a child with poor welfare resources**

The experience of negative social comparisons with peers (relative deprivation) creates a situation of cognitive dissonance between personal standards and low available resources to meet one's needs. This psychological situation cannot last long and can end either with attempts to increase one's resources or, conversely – by lowering one's personal standards when making more favourable social comparisons. The latter, characterised by Zapf as a satisfaction paradox (Zapf, 1984) paves the way towards resigned adaptation: one's personal standards are adapted to the undesired situation, which helps to cope with it and produces a state of mental satisfaction. This also explains a child's strategy of not speaking

out about his or her consumption needs to their parents after receiving several negative responses from them (see Kutsar et al., 2004).

For the purpose of better understanding how a child copes with feelings of deprivation or being excluded from peers, a small additional survey among 6<sup>th</sup> form students was carried out by Viira in 2004. The study showed that more than organised leisure time, the time organised by the child him/herself is meaningful. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents feel deprived from self-organised activities due to a lack of opportunities – more so for children from families with unemployed parent/s and from families with poor economic resources, as estimated by the child. The study also confirmed that children from poorer households set lower standards for their needs: they expressed less interest in leisure activities and exposed less activation in looking for strategies to cope with the unfavourable situation – 30% of children from poor families compared to 10% of children from ‘average’ families and only 3% of children from well-off families were not active owing to a lack of interest. It was thus concluded that the perceived lack of financial resources (economic deprivation) not only leads to a decrease of personal standards for social comparisons with peers, which helps to avoid feelings of deprivation, but also to a loss of interest towards opportunities of organised leisure time as a coping strategy of a child.

This conclusion is supported by a study carried out among 910 parents from big families (with more than three children) in 1996. Three quarters of the parents agreed that their children should not feel poorer in comparing themselves with the other children. At the same time, less than a half of the respondent parents stated that their children should have equal opportunities with the other children. In situations of economic stress, being a good parent is put under strain. Many parents found a way out from the situation by changing their own views of parenting. More and more often they found themselves saying ‘no’ to their children’s needs, justifying the decision with a new view of parenting – ‘nowadays children get too much’, or ‘the child is not aware what his/her real needs are and sometimes wants too much’ (Kutsar et al., 2004). Putting these two research findings together we can conclude that self-exclusion and resigned adaptation of a child are defence mechanisms that help a child to deal with parents who say ‘no’ – instead the child him/herself says ‘no’ to the emerging needs or wishes.

## **5. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION**

Poverty research using a structural approach gained much political resonance in the late 1990s. The benchmark of child poverty reduction is found in the guidelines of poverty eradication in Estonia presented to the government in 1999 (see: Kutsar

and Trumm 1999). The measures aimed at reducing poverty among children were grouped into four targets.

1. Supporting families with children through financial assistance and services (measures aimed at the development of a universal and supplementary system of assistance and services, with an emphasis on ensuring a level of coping for families with children who are living below the poverty line);
2. Minimising the risk of underdevelopment of children in poverty (activities which aim to satisfy their basic needs and protect the development potential and health of children from poor families);
3. Developing professional networks to protect the physical and mental wellbeing of children living below the poverty line (activities connected with monitoring and improving the living and developmental environment of children from poor families and children who are lacking parental care);
4. Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child, the needs of children should be considered equally with the needs of adults. Measures aimed at children must directly reach them (Kutsar and Trumm, 1999).

A direct impact of the guidelines was the introduction of a number of child-friendly family support measures, and the relative child poverty rate fell from 25% in 1997 to 22% in 2002. Võrk and Paulus (2007) examined the cost-effectiveness of different family support measures (family benefits, parental allowances and individual tax relief) in reducing child poverty in the years 2000–2007. By applying micro-simulation models, their main conclusion was that the family support measures in total have lifted about one third of the children from poor families (about 20,000 children) above the poverty line. The greatest effect was noted in cases of large families (with three or more children), and a less visible effect was noted in the case of single parent families.

The methodological approach of children's relative deprivation and social exclusion/inclusion, supported by the principles of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Estonian Child Protection Law Act, has gained much attention among the NGOs (political pressure groups like the Estonian Union For Child Welfare; Child Support Centres, etc) who deal with child wellbeing issues. It has also had an indirect impact on the revision of laws. Understanding children as a structural part of society and as active social agents has helped to understand that they are poor, deprived, and excluded 'here and now'. Children at risk of poverty are at risk of losing choices. They are exposed to the risk of social exclusion from peers and the risk of losing interest in taking joint actions with peers, i.e. socially withdrawing or excluding themselves. Socially excluded

children ‘here and now’ lead to risks of social exclusion for the next generation of children. Children stand as mediators between two generations of adults by transferring intergenerational inequalities from one generation to another. Keeping children as subjects, with their own perspectives on policy agendas, may have an unexpectedly powerful impact on the reduction of child poverty and the process of children’s social inclusion in the whole society in a long run.

Today, policy actors in Estonia are facing dilemmas in formulating welfare policies for families and children, since adults and children belong to different parts of the social structure, with the result that the interest groups representing them may often be in opposition to one another. However, individually and collectively, the studies demonstrate that policy makers have much to learn from poverty research which approaches issues of child wellbeing from a child’s own perspective.

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**OD UBÓSTWA DO JAKOŚCI ŻYCIA: DZIECI JAKO PODMIOT  
W BADANIACH SOCJOLOGICZNYCH I NA ARENIE POLITYCZNEJ ESTONII**

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest prezentacja badań nad biedą dzieci prowadzonych w Estonii od wczesnych lat 1990, gdy biedę uznano za kwestię społeczną, aż do dzisiaj, oraz wskazanie wkładu badań nad biedą dzieci w rozwój myślenia politycznego. Autorka ukazuje zastosowanie nowego paradygmatu w badaniach nad dzieciństwem, dokonuje także przeglądu strategii metodologicznych i rezultatów badawczych, które przyczyniły się do konceptualizacji dzieci jako nowej grupy interesów w polityce społecznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** badania biedy dzieci, relatywna deprivacja, wykluczenie, dzieci w politykach, perspektywa dzieci, Estonia