

# Children and Childhood in a Welfare State: The Case of Finland

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## **The material, social and economic landscape**

This report aims to give an analytic overview of selected aspects of children's welfare and well-being in contemporary Finland. The period particularly focused on is the 1990s and, if data allows, beyond the turn of the century. A major reason for such a time focus is the fact that the 1990s were years of rapid advance of economic (capitalist) globalisation and, linked to it, of social and cultural internationalisation. These large-scale, multiplex processes arrived with far-reaching effects on the social conditions of the world's people, thereby also on children's living conditions and their lived childhoods in any country. The economic transformations that took place in the 1990s, especially the recession of the years 1991-1994, were particularly dramatic in Finland and are generally known to have made a great impact on many other areas of social life. The causes of the recession, the course of events as well as their consequences for the country, the economy, the social structure and community life, and the population at large became the subject of multidisciplinary study.<sup>1</sup> However, the impact that these shifts and transformations had on children and their living conditions were not nearly as central to the agenda of scientific study, in stark contrast to the extent of worried concern expressed in public discussion on the state of children's post-recession welfare.<sup>2</sup> The scantness of knowledge about how children have fared in this turbulent decade provides a good basis for the investigation of children's daily lives and well-being in contemporary Finland, both in terms of the social conditions that frame their daily lives and their welfare, and the actual welfare outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> A particularly large and coordinated effort was the research programme, 'Depression of the 1990s in Finland', carried out in 1998-2000 and funded by the Academy of Finland (see: [www.aka.fi](http://www.aka.fi)).

<sup>2</sup> The impact of the recession on some of the central social services that provide for children (day care, schooling, child welfare services) was the subject of a study carried out near the end of the recession (Salmi et al., 1996).

As Renate Kränzl-Nagl et al. (2003) note, and convincingly demonstrate, children and childhood have been, and largely remain, neglected issues in welfare (state) research, both in its theorisation and in the actual subjects researched. When rarely the focus has been on children, it has tended to be on a single issue (a recent example being child poverty) or, more deplorably, children have been framed instrumentally, typically through the assumption that childhood is basically a preparatory stage for adulthood, and that because of this feature, children are a reasonable object of economic, social and cultural investments, in the firm expectation that in the future gains will be reaped from these investments. Despite the frequently evinced consensus that the Nordic countries (and Finland among them) are 'child-friendly' societies, not much scientific comparative evidence exists on the *outcomes at the level of children's daily welfare*, beyond rather crude indicators of infant mortality and child health.<sup>3</sup>

*How has the situation of children been affected by large-scale economic, social and ideological changes?* This question defines the focus of the report: we will specifically focus on changes that during the last ten years or so seem to have taken place in the social status and positioning of children, materially, socially and culturally. Special interest will be directed towards detecting the development in the possibilities and limitations that in these changes have generated for children's exercise and development of their agency in their progress towards citizenship.

The accounts presented in this report are based on available secondary material (scientific studies, statistical data, government reports, administrative documents etc.). Deplorably, the amount of empirical investigations and systematic information-gathering made in the 1990s, on changes in children's living circumstances and their social conditions and experiences, remains scant. In addition, the information provided is typically indirect, that is system-based, and not directly child-based. This is in fact in remarkable contrast to the amount of worry and concern expressed in public over the numerous risks and threats that the events of the 1990s are assumed to have brought to children.

The rest of the first section, The material, social and economic landscape (written by Leena Alanen) aims to provide some of the background data for a better understanding of the shifts in economic and social welfare as they affected children's experience of well-being in Finland since the end of the 1980s. First, children's position as a demographic group is described (a more detailed presentation on selected aspects is presented in the section on Diversifying families), and then the social infrastructure of the welfare state as it has been institutionalized for childhood in Finland. The background section

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<sup>3</sup> The type of information that tends to be used in cross-national comparisons is, instead, about the public system of welfare services and (family) benefits.

ends with a few observations on shifts in public child policy and in the dominant themes of discussion and debate in the public sphere.

The second section (by Hannele Sauli) focuses on children's social and economic welfare, and addresses two issues in particular: first, recent trends concerning children's families, and second, changes in the economics of family life, focusing on the changing labour market conditions of children's parents and on poverty in different generations. The subject of the third section (by Harriet Strandell) is children's time and spatial relations, and the spatial and time regimes set for children within the institutionalised childhood spaces of home, day care and school. The analysis then progresses to consider the challenges of 'new' childhood spaces (working life, consumption and virtual space), as well as movement in public space, seen from the viewpoint of possibilities and limitations in the regulation of time and space relations set up for children in their daily confrontations with the adult world. In all three sections, a constant focus is on the ways in which children, childhood and children's well-being appear in public discourse.

### **The country and its children**

Finland is a small country in respect to population (5.2 million). This population lives, in an international comparison, in a relatively large area, which is actually the sixth largest in Europe; the population density is as low as 17 persons per square kilometre. Since the wave of 'great migration' in the 1960s, from the rural to urban areas and even beyond Finnish borders (primarily to Sweden), most of the population (67%) now are urban dwellers and only one third live in rural areas. The child population follows this pattern and lives predominantly in urban areas, and the younger they are, the more often this is the case (e.g. Kartovaara and Sauli, 2000: 14). Internal migration has continued since the 1960s, and increasingly moves people from the northern and eastern parts of the country towards the southern and south-western areas. The result is that the metropolitan region of Helsinki (the country's capital) has grown quickly and is now home to roughly a sixth of the country's total population, and also the child population (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2000). Moreover, after having been for two centuries a country of emigration, Finland has more recently begun to receive immigrants from other countries, both former emigrants from Finland and 'new Finns', from various regions of the world. The changes are slow, however, and even at present the number of 'new Finns' is far smaller than the immigrant population e.g. in neighbouring Sweden and Denmark. Therefore in any comparison to other Western nations, and even to its Nordic neighbours, Finland's population remains today culturally, ethnically and linguistically remarkably homogeneous.

Finland is a small national economy in the North European periphery. After the Second World War the country experienced over forty years of rapid growth, and was slowly transformed from a mainly agrarian country into an industrial, and more recently into a post-industrial society.<sup>4</sup> This late economic, social and cultural 'modernisation' of the country was made possible by the unprecedented growth of economic prosperity of the post-war decades which lasted until the beginning of the 1990s. A 'welfare state' apparatus was established, first in a very rudimentary form during the 1960s, but continuously expanding, and reaching its 'golden era' in the 1980s, along with Finland's neighbouring Nordic countries (e.g. Kautto et al., 1999). Moreover, this progress towards a welfare state worthy of the name started in Finland later than in its Nordic neighbours, but the Finnish model shared with them the same main principles and also increasingly the same structures, and is therefore justly associated with the institutional, universalist and 'social democratic'<sup>5</sup> Nordic 'welfare state regime' (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kosonen, 1993).

This type of welfare state seeks to bring to all its citizens social security and equality as well as individual autonomy. The scope of public policy in the 'regime' is broad and therefore the state, in comparison to other spheres of welfare societies, the 'market', the voluntary sector (civil society) and the private sector (families and informal networks), has a particularly large role in generating and distributing welfare among its citizens – clearly larger than is the case in countries following other welfare models.<sup>6</sup> The significance of provision by the state becomes manifest, firstly, in policies committed to contributing to full employment and preventing unemployment. Secondly, citizens' rights to basic social security benefits in both cash and kind exist in a wide range of social contingencies and life situations (e.g. sickness, old age, unemployment, care obligations), and services are generally of high quality. Thirdly, there is a shared commitment in the Nordic countries to actively promote and maintain

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<sup>4</sup> In 2001, 33% of the labour force worked within public services, 22% within industry and 14% within commerce. Only 8% of the national labour force worked within agriculture and forestry whereas fifty years earlier half of the population was engaged in agriculture and forestry.

<sup>5</sup> Although by its origin, the Nordic welfare state model is not anymore purely a 'social democratic' creation; in Finland it resulted right from its very beginning from a number of compromises between the political parties represented in the Parliament. Even now it continues to enjoy the support of all parties.

<sup>6</sup> The other two welfare state models in Esping-Andersen's (1990) original typology are (1) the liberal and marginal welfare state (of e.g. USA and Great Britain) and (2) the conservative and corporatist welfare state (of e.g. Germany). This typology has received its fair share of criticism; modifications have been suggested, further types to this model have been added, and completely alternative ways of typifying welfare states have been proposed.

equality between groups based on gender, class, family situation, region or religion, and explicit public policies and programmes are developed to contribute to this (see e.g. Kvist, 1999). In cross-national comparison, the Nordic welfare states are known to have been particularly successful in levelling income differences and preventing or reducing poverty among their citizens (e.g. Salavuo, 1992). This, too, has produced more equity within each country, and has gained a large support for the welfare state model among the populations.

Soon after the Finnish welfare state matured and reached its high point in the 1980s, however, the national economy fell into the deepest recession in the country's post-war history, and one that is considered to be without equal in the rest of the industrialised world. Unemployment increased rapidly and was in 1994 close to 20%. State tax revenues shrank while expenditure grew, and the state debt increased sharply. As the financing of welfare services, benefits and other entitlements that the state apparatus was committed to providing is based on high taxation, the governments of the recession period decided to implement in some cases very dramatic cuts in a broad range of services and entitlements, and welfare policies now were turned towards improving the national economy, especially employment. Towards the end of the 1990s and beyond, unemployment rates did decrease,<sup>7</sup> and a new economic recovery slowly began. Nevertheless, criticism raised during the recession continued: doubts were expressed in many quarters, primarily from economic actors, over the feasibility of the adopted welfare state model in the new era of rapid internationalisation of both capital and the labour force, of diminishing cohorts of children (providing the labour force in the future), and an aging labour force soon to be in demand of extensive health and other social services. During the recession, a 'crisis of the welfare state' became a repeated diagnosis in economic discourse, and although later concern over the crisis has been alleviated, the strengthening of neo-liberal ideologies in the economic discourse has continued to challenge the welfare state model.

During the recession years, retrenchment measures, in some cases quite strong, were implemented by both state and local government. How did the welfare apparatus emerge from the recession? According to some commentators and a few studies (e.g. Heikkilä and Uusitalo, 1997), the changes after all have been more quantitative than qualitative: the basic structures remained intact and no radical reforms were undertaken to 'dismantle the welfare state'. Why this is so is explained by referring, first of all, to the increase of financial resources generated by strong economic growth in the country since 1995 but, importantly, also the broad support and legitimacy given by the population at large. There is however no consensus on the significance of the changes that did occur. As already indicated, in both public discourse and in subsequent welfare

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<sup>7</sup> In October 2003 it was reported to be still as high as 8.3%.

policy-making, the emphasis was shifted quite strongly to economic factors in the management of the model, such as efficiency and profitability. The cutbacks that had been implemented in many welfare policy areas did leave many services and provision in general permanently downsized. And despite the upward trend in the economy in the late 1990s, the unemployment rate also has continued to remain as high as around 10%. Based on such facts, more recent assessments speak of 'restructuring': the changes to the Finnish welfare state may have been quite essential after all and the welfare state no longer is what it used to be before the recession (e.g. Lehtonen and Aho, 2000).

In conclusion, the result of these transformations in the welfare apparatus has been that several social groups are now worse off than before, both economically and in relation to available social services and other provision. The neo-liberalist economic discourse has not died out, and most likely will not die out in the future. Some scholars of the welfare state (e.g. Julkunen, 2001) present analyses to the effect that in fact a redirection in state welfare policy has taken place: the ethos has definitely changed, and Finns are now more prepared than earlier to tolerate a permanently high rate of unemployment and increasing economic and social inequality. These changes within the country are undoubtedly linked to technological, economic and cultural transformations on the global level.

As is the demographic trend elsewhere in Europe as well, the proportion of *children* within Finland's otherwise slowly but steadily growing population is declining (Table 1). The total number of children in the age group of 0-17 years is presently somewhat over 1.1 million. The decline in the proportion of children is mainly due to the fact that Finland's baby boom cohorts (born in 1945-1949), with their increased life expectancy, will steadily increase the top heaviness of the age pyramid for the next two or three decades, and because of the diminishing birth rate after the baby-boom years, each subsequent age group reaching adulthood is smaller than the previous one. Immigration is showing positive trends and adding to the increase in the total population, but this cannot compensate for the decrease in the proportion of children being born and living in the country.

Currently the share of children is around 22% of the total population, which is expected to decrease slowly and to remain around one fifth of the population for the next 10-15 years.

**Table 1.** Children (0-17 years) in the population in 1950-1999, and the prognosis up to 2030.

Year	Total number of children	Proportion of child population (%)
1950	1 393 400	34.6
1960	1 574 100	35.4
1970	1 370 400	29.8
1980	1 193 100	24.9
<b>1990</b>	<b>1 148 100</b>	<b>23.0</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>1 145 500</b>	<b>22.2</b>
2005	1 137 300	22.0
2010	1 054 500	20.1
2015	1 021 400	19.3
2030	985 100	18.8

*Source: Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 8-9.*

Internal migration moves children, as well as adults, and their spatial distribution in the country shows the same pattern as the rest of the population. A quarter of all children live in the province of Uusimaa, spread around the metropolitan area of Helsinki, the capital. Over half of the child population lives in urban areas, and the younger the child, the more probable it is that he or she lives in the more urbanised regions of the country (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2000: 15-16).

Generally, the distribution of nationalities among children living in the country shows a great extent of ‘Finnishness’. At the end of the year 1999, the proportion of children of Finnish citizenship was as high as 98%, leaving just a little more than 20,000 foreign children residing in the country at that time (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2000: 21). Additionally, the languages spoken by children as their mother tongue in 1999 confirm the fact of the linguistic (and cultural) homogeneity of the child population: 97.6% of children speak one or the other official languages (Finnish/Swedish) of bilingual Finland.<sup>8</sup> Sami is an indigenous language with the status of an official language in the northernmost municipalities of the country, but the number of native speakers of Sami in the child population is extremely small. According to the statistics of 1999, only 328 children spoke Sami as a native language. Roma is the second indigenously spoken language in the country, but as the Roma population in itself is small (about 10,000) and lives scattered within the country, their children rarely become native speakers of the language. There are in fact more speakers of e.g.

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<sup>8</sup> However, most of the children that speak Swedish as their mother tongue are, or become more or less bilingual, being able to express themselves in both of the official languages.

Russian, Somalian, Estonian and several other European and non-European languages than Sami or Roma speaking children (see Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 11).

The various language groups (excepting the Roma) tend to live within the same areas, and especially the children of the more newly-arrived 'new Finns' (among them, Somalis, Vietnamese, Kurds etc.) often live within their own small cultural and linguistic communities. Multiculturalism is a very recent and small-scale phenomenon in Finland. Day care centres and primary schools, for instance, have in most cases only just begun to respond to the more various composition of the child population and to develop solutions for providing space within their regimes for the 'new Finns' with their various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. At present, multiethnic day care groups and school classes can be found mainly in the south of Finland, particularly in the region of metropolitan Helsinki.

### **The public infrastructure for childhood**

The Finnish welfare state model is based on a high rate of adult participation in the labour force, by both men and women. The model may therefore be called a 'work and welfare model'. This implies that traditionally both parents have worked outside the home, and for the great majority of them, the work is full-time. The integration of women into the labour force has long been a characteristic feature of the country's economic and social life, in contrast to the other Nordic countries in the 1960s and early 1970s where women working outside the home was less frequent. This is a somewhat surprising fact, given that the *public day care* system was hardly developed at that time. In 1957, slightly over a third (37%) of mothers with children under seven years of age (that is: under school age) were gainfully employed (Early Childhood Education..., 2000: 11), most of them evidently taking care of the baby boom generation of children at home. Since the late 1970s, when a radical growth of the public day care system had begun, four out of five married or cohabiting women with children under seven years of age were included in the labour force – many of them themselves working in public services, providing various services for other mothers to be able to work outside the home (e.g. Julkunen, 1990).

Recent labour statistics show that the parents of children now tend to be even more often employed than the rest of the working age population (see Economic and Social Welfare for more details). This high statistical rate, however, hides the fact that some of these mothers are utilising the provision of so-called childcare leave (that is: they are at home taking care of infants), but aim to return to their jobs. In the statistics they are included in the employed population. Of mothers with children who are not employed (30%), the majority



are utilising the fairly long publicly financed maternity leave and caring for their small children.

The development of a fairly comprehensive system of various ‘family policy’ benefits<sup>9</sup> is the accomplishment of the three decades of welfare state building before the 1990s. The system was started with the intention of covering the costs of child care (especially in poorer families), but in the welfare state period, it is increasingly meant to provide the opportunity for parents of both gender to enter into the labour force, to take temporary leaves, and to be able to return.<sup>10</sup> The public day care system, started in the 1970s, is the most notable part – also in public debate – of the by now elaborate body of services and entitlements, and is second place (after child allowances) in the distribution of public costs of family benefits.<sup>11</sup> The day-care system itself presently covers several forms of child care. Since 1997 it has included ‘home care’, which means care at the child’s home, whether by the child’s parents or some other caretaker. This is made possible by legislating a ‘private child care allowance’. Consequently, this means that the child’s own family is now defined as a publicly supported care arrangement – a solution that in international (and even Nordic) comparison is exceptional (Välimäki and Rauhala, 2000).

In the late 1990s, the different forms of care provision and the proportions of children (under 3 and under 7 years of age) cared for within each of them was the following (Table 2).

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<sup>9</sup> These include the child allowance, parental allowances, child home care allowance and private child care allowance (see Early Childhood Education..., 2000: 112–18).

<sup>10</sup> For this reason, the development of the system is increasingly known by the heading of ‘reconciliation of family and work life’.

<sup>11</sup> The tradition of publicly organised children’s out-of-home care dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, beginning with the Froebelian concept of *Kindergarten*. The dominant ideas of child care have since then varied, according to the dominant social and political issues of the time. Consequently, the arguments for the proper way of organising the relations of the state to the care of its child population, and the practical solutions opted for have varied. Through the history of public day care the idea that it exists to make it possible for mothers to work outside the home has been surprisingly absent in the continued political debates on how (and which) children should receive public care. The arguments for greater or lesser responsibility of the state in the issue of child care have ranged between ‘enlightened’ views of its civilizing effects and of bringing together children from all social classes, and more circumscribed views on the protection and welfare of children of the lower classes (Välimäki and Rauhala, 2000).

**Table 2.** Children attending day care by age and forms of the care, 1998 (%).

Form of day care	Children aged under three	Children aged under seven
Care on parental allowance	26	10
Care on child home care allowance	43	26
Municipal day care centre	11	32
Other	5	12
Municipal family day care	13	17
Care on private child care allowance	2	3

*Source: Early Childhood Education..., 2000: 26-27.*

From these statistics can be seen that younger children under three years of age are mostly cared for at home whereas every second child (49%) under the age of seven years spends the day (or, as it also may be, the evening or the night) in municipally organised care, either in day care centre groups (32%) or in family day care groups (17%). Full-time care dominates the picture: the figures for 1997 reveal that of all the municipally organised day care places (213,600), 79% were full-time places, and only 21% part-time places (Early Childhood Education..., 2000: 33). It should be noted that figures such as those above present the situation at a particular point of time. In many and probably most cases children (from birth to the start of school at seven years of age) experience more than just one form of day care during their day care 'career'.

Grounded on its over one hundred years of development and change, the public day care system in its present multiplex forms has established a number of social practices that define the contours of children's daily lives and experiences (Välimäki 1999: 219):

- child care has been differentiated from the sphere of parents' daily work;
- children are in day care outside the home most of their waking hours;
- child care takes place in groups with children from many and often randomly chosen families;
- children from different social classes are cared for together;
- child care is a group activity which moreover has the nature of a process;
- child care groups consist of children of the same age;
- child care has been professionalised and pedagogised;
- child care is planned and organised by public authorities;
- child care is the subject of pedagogical discussion and of the anticipation of future events;
- pedagogical and educational goals for child care are established by public decision-making bodies;

- child care environments have been specifically planned for children, giving rise to a specific genre of ‘day care architecture’.

Features like these have powerful implications for the company that children can have access to, for the material and cultural worlds in which they inhabit for a considerable stretches of their daily time, and for the social relationships they are able to form with other children and with adults of different categories (some of these implications and the ways in which children respond to the opportunities and constraints set by them will be considered in the section on Making places).

The official age in Finland for the initial enrolment in school is seven years of age, and has been so since the legislation of compulsory schooling in 1921. Since the much younger system of public day care was built up, seven years of age now also marks the boundary between the state authority under which children’s care and their schooling fall: the day care services are part of the system of *social services* and under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, while schooling is provided as part of the system of educational services which is administered by the Ministry of Education.

This boundary also manifests itself in the daily regimes of these two public childhood institutions. In the field of early childhood education (i.e. day care), the dominant concept is ‘educare’, which contains a double function of providing *both* education *and* care for children. In one recent formulation of the concept, educare was said ‘to promote children’s welfare in *all* respects’ (Early Childhood Education..., 2000: 28 – emphasis by L.A.), and not only in the development of cognitive and other more specific (academic) skills. Moreover, the educare concept implies (and accordingly the legislation on Early Childhood Education states) that the public care and education of children is to be carried out ‘in addition to the upbringing provided at home or in the immediate neighbourhood’ (ibid.). Parents or guardians are therefore to be treated by day care staff as partners in the task of upbringing and provision of welfare for the child, even while the main responsibility lies with the parents (guardians). The daily practices of carrying out public educare therefore implies that the early childhood education staff works in close partnership with parents and actively seeks to develop their mutual cooperation for the well-being of the child.

Other differences can be seen between the social (day care) and the educational (school) fields. School education, of course, is free of cost, while attending the state subsidised day care involves fees. The fees for day care, however, are based on income and vary according to the number of parents or other guardians, the number of children under school age as well as the number of children under the age of 18 in the family. Families with incomes that do not exceed the set limit are not charged for the provided care. Most of the cost of children’s day care is paid from the public purse; parents pay about 20% of the

total cost, so child care in both day care centres and in family day care is heavily subsidised by the state.

A further difference between the two institutions of childhood is that schooling, of course, is compulsory for children from the school enrollment age, while (public) day care is voluntary, and there are multiple options for parents in arranging the latter for their children. An interesting contrast exists here in the vocabulary. Schooling (whether it takes place in a school or is arranged in some other way) is formulated as an *obligation*, whereas day care has always been voluntary. Moreover, since 1990 the *unconditional (or 'subjective') right* to a day care place exists for the parents of children under three years of age, and since 1996 for parents of children under seven years of age. The unconditional right means that the local (municipal) authority is obliged to arrange a day care place as and when demanded by the parents/guardians of the child.<sup>12</sup>

This, however, is merely a difference in spoken form. In practice a similar 'subjective' right applies also to a place within the compulsory general education system although options there are much fewer: every child is entitled ('has the subjective right') to a place in a local primary school and, moreover, in the primary school nearest to his or her home. Before the 1990s, schools had their catchment areas defined and children living in each catchment area in the normal case would have no other choice than to enter the defined school. Things changed somewhat in 1993, when (after debates on the 'citizen's right to choice') the right of choice of school was introduced (Hirvenoja, 1999), making it possible for children to enter any other school than the nearest one within the municipality, but on the condition of not overruling the subjective right to school choice by children in the catchment area of the school. The experience has been, however, that few children in the primary stage of their schooling choose to go to a school at further distance than their neighbourhood school.

The provision of *pre-school education* for six-year-olds has had a long preparation. The first experimental pre-schools were started in the late 1960s. The reform was intended to lower the age of starting obligatory schooling by one year and thus to extend children's school years from nine to ten. Additionally, the pre-school – as school – linked it conceptually to the educational sector and not to day care. Like school, it would therefore also need to be free of charge, which raises the costs borne by the state in the provision of school space, free teaching and school meals for one more (although diminishing) age cohort. Financial considerations obviously delayed the implementation of the reform, but around the issue emerged a public debate that

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<sup>12</sup> Since 1997 this unconditional right also includes the right for parents to opt for the 'private child care allowance' to arrange their child(ren)'s day care as they wish, outside of the publicly organised day care system.

influenced the final decision: in the debate it was argued that the pre-school for six-year-olds would drastically ‘shorten’ the time of childhood – which had already been shortened by media technology accessing the worlds of younger and younger children. The argument stated that pre-school, especially if it would stress instruction and learning instead of care and play, was a risk to children’s welfare.

The reform was finally introduced in 2000,<sup>13</sup> in an ideological post-recession climate. The dominant discourse in favour of the reform stressed less the economic burden caused by the reform to the state than the benefits to the economy of educating the younger generation to be fit to confront the challenges of the ‘Information Society’ in a globalising world, and preparing them from their early years to boost the international competitiveness of the country. Advocates of the latter discourse therefore see it appropriate to have the pre-school system developed under the governance of educational authorities and into a predominantly instructional regime, instead of the *educare* ideology of the day care tradition.

The new institution of pre-school is in many ways halfway between day care and school. No national curriculum exists for the service, only national guidelines (analogous to the guidelines established for primary educational institutions); the actual pre-school curricula are to be built up locally, in partnership with children’s parents. The guidelines given for formation of the curriculum of the new institution of pre-school function only as a recommendation. Furthermore no final decision on the degree of scholarisation of the six-year-old children has yet been made, as the local authorities responsible for the organisation of the pre-school service are to decide themselves whether the service should be organised within the social or the educational sector (*Early Childhood Education...*, 2000: 59).

From the public discussion on pre-school as the newly established bridge between the fields of day care and school, and the debate on the ‘shortening of childhood’, emerged also concern for young school children, and particularly for their mornings and afternoons. The day care system covers only the under-school-age children, and the new pre-school would take care of the six-year-olds. But what about the seven- and eight-year-olds? With short school days which moreover mostly begin after parents have already left for work, children are left home alone and without supervision. These worries centred around the issue of children’s ‘long, lonely afternoons at home’ and have developed into a ‘lone child’ discourse that in turn has contributed to a variety of local actions launched to solve the problem (see section on Time and space). Non-

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<sup>13</sup> In the following year (2001) it became mandatory for local authorities to offer pre-school for all six-year-old children living within the municipality. Pre-school hours only cover part of the day care day, and participation is voluntary.

governmental organisations in the field of child welfare and other voluntary associations, supported by child care and professionals in the child psychology/psychiatry field as well as concerned parents, have kept the discourse<sup>14</sup> alive, and also initiated and organised adult-supervised afternoon activities for children. Furthermore state authorities have recently begun to examine the possibility of expanding day care to cover the school mornings and afternoons of the youngest school children. At present (late 2003), municipal authorities are provided with funding from the government to organise such activities for children within their region.

The public *school* was, of course, the first public institution to specialise in the regulation of children's daily lives and futures. The Finnish public school was built into a comprehensive school system in the 1970s, closely following Nordic models, and with the expressed goal of creating equal educational opportunities for children regardless of social background, geographical location, gender or ethnicity. The earlier two-tier school system ended in 1973, and the new comprehensive school was to be a pedagogically uniform institution educating the entire age cohort in the same classrooms. For some time, however, streaming by ability remained part of its organisation. The practice was abolished in 1984, on the grounds that it excluded children of lower class backgrounds (and boys) from entering academic routes in post-compulsory education and was therefore seen as the last obstacle for creating true equal educational opportunities for all children (Hirvenoja, 1999).

From the 1970s to the 1990s, a prescriptive National Curriculum existed for comprehensive school. After it was dismantled, the state educational authorities have only defined a core curriculum with certain guidelines on syllabi, the subjects to be taught in schools, how hours should be allocated for specific subjects and by which criteria pupils should be assessed. In relation to these developments, as in the recent pre-school reform, one may detect the neo-liberal market ideology gaining the upper hand, in parallel with the general deregulation of 'market forces' in the economic field, and the increasing stress in state policies on clients' and customers' 'choice' (Johannesson et al., 2002). In conclusion, while the worthy goal of educational equality remains the (only)

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<sup>14</sup> A minority – and losing – voice in the debate points out the fact that children in the afternoons are in fact seldom alone and in most cases have a functioning 'safety net' around them. The contested issue within the debate is, whether the home, school, playground, nearby woodland, sport and other outdoor facilities, shops, library etc. – along with the use of calls to parents by mobile phones – provide a good enough network for children to support them in their after-school time, which they mostly spend with other children and adults other than their parents. The contested issue seems to boil down to the question of the quality and extent of supervision and control (see section on Home: empty without adults?).

legitimate one in the discourse of politicians and educational authorities, and is widely supported by the people, signs have begun to appear indicating that the shifts in state ideology and policy in the 1990s are straining also the equality discourse, and risk its legitimacy also as the dominant educational ideology.

### **Shifts in child policy: rights for children or back to protection?**

‘Child policy’ is a fairly recent terminological invention within welfare policy discourse and in political terminology more generally. Until the late 1980s, in Finland as well as elsewhere, social issues pertaining to children were taken up in public discourse under other titles, such as family policy, educational policy or health policy. The recent emergence of ‘child policy’ in public discourse and in state level policy-making may be taken to signal a new kind of awareness of children’s place in modern society – an awareness of children as a social group or category which, while consisting of unique individuals, also shares among them a set of specific relations with its (changing) material, social and cultural environment, and therefore has a place in welfare policy ‘in its own right’.<sup>15</sup>

The promotion of the social uniqueness of children was one of the achievements of the social movement advocating human *rights for children*. The struggle to win respect for the subject of children’s rights in public and political discussion and to lobby for on government policy and legislation to include rights for children has taken decades (see e.g. Franklin, 2002). The ultimate international victory thus far was the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), which also helped to bring ‘child policy’ – or, rather, forced itself – onto the agenda of Finnish welfare discussion and policy-making. Admittedly, in Finland as well as other countries, non-governmental organisations, especially in the child welfare sector, had already been prominent in upholding the discourse of the rights of children, advocating not only their rights to adequate social protection but also to a just share of the resources of the nation (rights to provision) and rights for their voice to be heard and even rights to a place of their own in societal decision-making (participation).

The Finnish government ratified the UN Convention in 1991, and could at that point be convinced that its newly reformed child legislation already complied with the Convention. These legal reforms had been started two decades earlier, and the full ‘child legislation package’<sup>16</sup> was finalised in the 1980s. This reform work ran parallel to the international discussions on

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<sup>15</sup> Child policy may of course be taken to cover any public measures that can be shown to make an effective impact on children’s social relations, life conditions and well-being, whether the effect is intentional or not (cf. Satka et al., 2002).

<sup>16</sup> The main laws of the package were the Day Care Act (1973), the Child Welfare Act (1983) and the Child Custody and Rights of Access Act (1983).

children's rights, and benefited greatly from the increasing acceptance of the case of children and the reconsideration of children's status that was taking place in the international (UN) discourse. This re-conceptualisation was written into Finland's new child laws. The new legislation included also stipulations on the general condition of children and childhood in Finland, and not just on particularly vulnerable children or children with specifically 'risky' life situations. In this sense it clearly had matured and marked the beginning of the development of a national-level child policy.

'Child policy' appeared on the state-level policy agenda first in 1995, as the government of the time issued a White Paper on the state of children in the country and the measures it aimed to take in order to put the Convention into full effect. The document already signals in its title – 'From Child Protection Towards Child Policy'<sup>17</sup> – the political will to shift the national child welfare agenda from a set of limited measures concerning specified groups of children into a full-blown policy pertaining the the child population as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

The three principles that were adopted as the foundation of the child policy to implement follow the UN Convention closely. It was acknowledged as the following.

- The paramount starting point of a child policy is the concept of the *child as an autonomous subject*. Although the child depends on the support of family and adults, s/he also has her/his autonomous rights, needs and wishes, which all need to be taken seriously;
- In recent decades, the *understanding of childhood* has changed in a decisive way. A new appreciation is growing of childhood as a life stage that is valuable in its own right, and not to be reduced to the fact that children are also in the process of growing up to become adults;
- Since the first half of the 1980s, Finnish private law relating to children includes, as its central point of departure, the concept of the child as a subject, in accordance with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Both of these (i.e. Finland's child legislation and the UN Convention/LA) are to function as *orienting norms* in the politics of childhood as well as in the professional field of child welfare. A further essential principle follows from recognising the child's status as a subject: in all matters pertaining to her/him, the *child's own views* must be acknowledged and taken into account, in a way appropriate to the child's age and level of development,

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<sup>17</sup> Lastensuojelusta kohti lapsipolitiikkaa (1995).

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, in the first periodic report by Finland on the implementation of the UN Convention issued in the previous year (in 1994), the term 'child policy' does not yet appear.



and the child's best interest must be given priority in all activities by public authorities affecting the child.

In the main part of the government's child policy document, the substance of the new policy concept is laid out and specified. The section on policy measures address, first, the need and the means to further develop the welfare system serving children (provision) and then the need and the means to develop genuine opportunities for children to participate in the decision-making on matters of importance to them. The concern of the third and largest section in the document is the protection and care of children living in vulnerable or risky situations – the traditional child welfare sector. The government intends to take steps towards reaching the goals set in the White Paper by promoting (1) child advocacy, e.g. through ombudswork and the distribution of information on children's rights, (2) child research activities and information production, and (3) the development of work practices and the professional skills of those working with children, to comply with the content and spirit of the UN Convention.<sup>19</sup> (Lastensuojelusta..., 1995: 25-48).

Did this policy materialise during the four years of the government that produced the White Paper?

The Finnish government presented its second periodic report on the implementation of the Convention to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2000. Nine years had gone since the ratification of the Convention and five years since its foundational principles were written into the child policy action programme referred to above. In its response, the UN Committee, after giving due to the progress that has been made, however pointedly states that it 'remains concerned at the absence of a focal point for children within the Government and of mechanisms, both at the central and local level, for coordinating visionary policies relating to children and for monitoring the implementation of the Convention' (Concluding Observations..., 2000). Accordingly, it strongly encourages the State to establish a better coordinated policy and action for the realisation of children's rights. The Committee finds several other problematic points in the way the Convention has been (or, rather, has not been) implemented. These concern:

- budgetary allocations by the state – *provision*;
- the collection and analysis of data on and indicators of children's welfare – *child research and information production*;

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<sup>19</sup> A fourth area of developmental work is also listed: the effective assessment of the efforts put into child policy work and its outcomes.

- the continuing absence of a children's ombudsman<sup>20</sup> – *child advocacy* – as well as
- the inadequate and unsystematic dissemination of the principles and provisions of the Convention, especially in the training and retraining of professionals working with and for children – *skills and practices of child professionals*.

The Committee also states that:

- enough attention has not been given to provide children with opportunities of *participation*, especially in the field of education (and this may be taken to refer also to early childhood education, or the day care field).

The achievements of the government's rights-based child policy are certainly not brilliant. One rather embarrassing disparity may hint towards an at least partial explanation of the failure, if not a total cancellation of the first explicit governmental policy to promote children's rights.

On the one hand, the child policy was formulated in 1995 when the national economy was already emerging from the severest recession in the country's post-war history and better financial prospects were lying ahead. This implies that now, more than ever, it would be possible to invest material, social and cultural resources in the nation's children as intended in the child policy paper. On the other hand, five years later, in 2000, when the UN Committee gave its critical commentary on the (lack of) progress in the implementation of the Convention, national prosperity had continued to grow almost incessantly. There surely were enough resources to put these good intentions into effect, but this did not happen, according to the observations of the UN Committee. The conclusion must be that the priorities of state policy, obviously, had changed during the 1990s. Some support for this reasoning can be found in the shifting dominant themes in much of the public and media discourse on children and childhood in the course of the 1990s. Systematic analysis on the changes that may have taken place in public opinion, civic attitudes or the use of expert knowledge by government agencies is lacking; however, in the section below a few sociological observations will be offered.

Fortunately, the picture is not quite as deplorable as the description above on child policy developments on the state level paints it. Both municipalities (local government) and the large sector of non-governmental organisations and

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<sup>20</sup> This was one of the objectives the government itself in the 1995 White Paper. So far only an Assistant Parliamentary Ombudsman, with limited opportunity to function to effectively, has been appointed to supervise the implementation of children's rights.

voluntary associations around the country did add more weight and substance to the idea of children's rights.

In Finland, the municipalities are largely responsible for provision of social and health services, with government grants. The Finnish welfare state was built in the 1970s and 1980s under the strict guidance of the national government. Municipalities in reality did not have much to say in the extent and content of services to be provided for citizens irrespective of where they live. In the 1990s this steering by norms came under criticism and the system was changed by abandoning it and 'decentralising' decision-making. This reform occurred during the recession, putting the budgets of municipalities under great stress. Their tax incomes had declined and the state had lowered the municipalities' grants. Cuts had to be made in the provision of services, with the result that not only did the level of services suffer, but also the differences between municipalities in the level of provision increased (Satka et al., 2002: 253).

The times, then, were financially risky for attempting any innovation in the structure of services for children. Local initiatives and actions however sprang up, animated by the 'Child Policy Strategy 2015', which the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Kuntaliitto) launched in the late 1990s. The goal of this nationwide programme was to generate in each of the country's 446 municipalities a local child policy program, based on the protection – provision – participation frame of the UN Convention. Reading the Strategy 2015 document shows, however, that the promotion of children's participation was given a rather limiting interpretation. It stated only that children's own views should be heard and their experiences taken into account when services are developed (Eläköön lapset ..., 2000). In many, although not all municipalities the local authorities have already approved local action programmes and have hopefully proceeded to their implementation. There is yet no systematic review of the programmes. However, in many cases the goals are modestly set for increasing the coordination of available services and the cooperation between the planners and administrators of the services; the plea to listen to children's – the 'clients' – views has been heard. (see Kuntien lapsipoliittiset ohjelmat – The child policy programmes in Finnish municipalities).

The fact remains that the rights of participation are, generally, the least developed rights in the case of children, as seen in the municipal child policy programs (Satka et al., 2002: 254). Creating new 'opportunity structures' for children's participation in matters pertaining to them has been left mainly to small experimental and innovative projects, funded for short durations of time (ibid.). It will take longer, and require more systematic efforts to begin to create new cultural models and practices of participation in citizenship – models that will not exclude children. This is the message to read in the critical observations of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child (see above), and its recommendation that efforts are needed in Finland to disseminate information on the

Convention, its principles and provisions, and based on this to develop new skills and practices among professionals and other people who as part of their everyday life relate with children. Opportunities of participation imply not just that children's voices are heard (as e.g. in opinion surveys); so far only in rare instances are children given equal opportunities to participate.<sup>21</sup>

### **Children's welfare? New issues in public discourse**

The review and assessment of presentations of children's welfare (or 'illfare') constructed and disseminated in the public sphere by various media in the 1990s is made difficult by a lack of systematic information. The Academy-funded broad research programme on the recession and its consequences did address the role of the media during and after the recession, but ignored its impact on child-related issues. The way in which social concerns are framed, presented and discussed in and through the media can decisively influence public opinion, civic action and also officially instituted policy. This section will present a few brief observations on trends in the public discourse on children and childhood during the 1990s and beyond, and some suggestions about their origin.

First, it is hard not to observe that the dominant way to speak of children's welfare has turned towards (adult) priorities rather than children's greater inclusion in shared citizenship and participation. In fact the buzz word of the period was (and continues to be) '*exclusion*' but now exclusion is framed very differently from, if not in dire contrast to the 'inclusion' proposed by the participation agenda of the UN Convention. Briefly stated: the dominant idea is that:

- children are presently at serious risk of being excluded;
- this is a recent and alarming development, and therefore
- new solutions are badly needed to correct it.

What grounds are there to believe that children are now more at risk of becoming excluded, than they have been? Why has a discourse of exclusion emerged into such a prominent frame for dealing with children's welfare? The first answer to this question seems obvious, and is the one repeatedly appearing in public: the recession of the early 1990s is to blame; children, too, became its victims. The recession brought cuts all across the social and health service sector, including schools and day care centres; the cuts in turn lowered the level

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<sup>21</sup> Community design and planning has been the pioneering field in including children as genuine participants in its projects and practical experiments, in all their stages (e.g. Horelli and Vepsä, 1995).

of provision and quality of service; and unemployment hit many families with children, increasing the economic problems in households and causing parents to feel stressed and depressed. Linked to these developments were others: divorce rates appeared to be increasing, disturbances in children's behaviour were reported by professionals across the health, educational and social service system, more and more children were reported to have experienced bullying in school and were themselves bullying others, young people remained unemployed and outside of education in increasing numbers, and the rate of drug-related crime was announced to be increasing. Representatives of psychology and health professions, in TV or radio programmes, newspapers and civic events, added to the growing public worry about the growing severity of children's distress and problems.

When factual information was available and published to confirm or dismiss these alarming developments, the indicators tended to show that in general children's health and well-being was developing positively – for the majority of children – but that more and more problems were affecting a small group of children (e.g. Karvonen et al., 2000: 9). The information, however, tends to be individual-based and a link between a complex societal condition such as a recession and aggregated information on the state of children's welfare is difficult, if not impossible, to show in any sociologically credible way. Confronted with such huge and worrying questions, however, answers were badly needed to guide the concerned public towards imagining solutions and a better future for children. Experts in child psychiatry and family psychology were most frequently drawn into public arenas to give their view on the troubling issues and to discuss solutions. The (psychological) explanations offered commonly suggested that children's distress is caused by the weakened cohesiveness of families and strained family relationships, especially in households experiencing unemployment, by mental instabilities that many parents experience when facing an insecure future, and by alcohol and other drug problems in families.

Thus the dominant frame for understanding children's problems was a predominantly familial one and accordingly, so would be the solution. The argument went generally like this: because of their troubled living environments, children were often left without support and supervision that they as children would have needed especially from their parents and other family members, in order to grow up 'normally'. Parents, because of their own problems, did not or could not live up to their child-rearing responsibilities. Therefore, the normal development of an entire generation of children was potentially at risk. The solution proposed for this situation was the 'responsibilisation' of parents. Parents needed to be made aware and reminded of their primary responsibility to secure a normal development for their children, to provide their children with care, control and a good enough environment for

their growth into responsible adulthood – ‘love and boundaries’ was the popular crystallisation of this way of thinking. But parents were not to be alone. They were seen to be in need of support, expert advice and even parenting lessons from their immediate environment – from teachers, child experts, other parents, social workers, the police. The second popular crystallisation suggested by the responsabilisation discourse was the ‘whole village’ that is needed to raise the child.<sup>22</sup>

To conclude, a few interlinked points can be made about this discourse. First, from a sociological point of view, it is a curious feature of the imagined village that *children are absent* from its everyday operation and only appear as the objects of adult activities. Children’s presence – including, importantly, the co-presence of other children – is missing from the image, thereby absenting not only their voice in the organisation of their ‘growing up’ but also the significant role of other children in creating and maintaining the social and cultural worlds of childhood – in homes, day care groups, schools, playgrounds and organised activities (e.g. sports). This pointedly exclusionary view of children also complies badly with the idea of children’s rights of participation. Even the least demanding form of empowering children – giving them a voice and listening to them – is notoriously absent from the discourse.

Linked to this is a second observation. The concept of exclusion that the discourse promotes, takes for granted what it is that children risk being excluded *from* – ‘normal development’. The discourse is grounded on the idea of a normal, standard, mainstream childhood, and the media presentations of the discourse abundantly have helped to disseminate among their audiences the conviction that there is scientifically validated knowledge to support the idea of a normal childhood. Moreover, this point begs the (sociological) question of which and whose construction of childhood is offered here to guide children back to the ‘mainstream’.

Third, the entering of social ‘exclusion’ into the Finnish policy agenda, and its subsequent popularity across all kinds of civic and media arenas, was greatly helped by the country’s membership in the European Union since 1995 and the engagement with the EU-defined agendas that followed membership. In the 1990s, ‘exclusion’ as a term was on the rise within these agendas (while the term poverty was falling out of favour; see e.g. Saraceno, 2001). The social exclusion agenda of EU-policy obligated Finland, as a new member state, to carry out investigations on the extent of exclusion and the typicalities of excluded groups (but not children!) within its borders, to start actions to prevent further exclusion and to experiment with solutions for ‘inserting’ the excluded back into the mainstream. And a re-entering into the mainstream implied, above

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<sup>22</sup> This is a saying popularised by Hilary Clinton and claimed to have originated in African folk wisdom.

all, regular employment, normal family relations, and the duties of a citizen (such as responsible parenting). The dominant discourse thus can be seen as deriving part of its strength from the EU-policy discourse.

Finally, it can be argued that the (psychologically diminished) discourse of children's exclusion reflects political developments in the 1990s – the search for 'costless' social policies on the part of both state-level and municipality-level government. The policies, both those proposed and those carried out, have been less responsive and relevant to children's material, social and cultural concerns and needs.

## **Economic and social welfare**

In this section, two major themes are discussed in the light of statistical evidence. On the one hand, the issues of an ageing society, population trends and family diversification are specified from the point of view of families with children. Secondly, recent developments in the availability of welfare resources such as time and money are analysed focusing on the conditions of the parents in the labour market and shifts in the relative income position of families with children.

### **Diversifying families<sup>23</sup>**

During the last decades families in Finland have experienced changes that can be characterised as diversification. The dominant family type is still a married couple with two children, although it is slowly becoming less typical while non-married cohabitation, family instability, and lone parenthood are slowly but constantly increasing. A growing individualism and liberal attitudes towards formalities in family formation, or de-institutionalisation, seem to be the most appropriate description of trends at the societal level, but at the level of families these developments are less easy to judge. Commitment to marriage is certainly weakening. Whether the increasing family instability may be seen as a sign of weakening commitments towards children is more difficult to say. The effects of family break-ups on children are not monitored in Finland's statistical system, neither has it been an issue of concern in academic research.

Along with the ageing of the population, families with children have decreased in numbers, the proportion of population living in families with children has decreased and the number of children is diminishing. Additionally,

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<sup>23</sup> If not otherwise stated, all statistics in this section are based on official statistics of Finland, published by Statistics Finland in Population series by the name Families, from various years.

the age of reproduction and family formation have been postponed to later in life. Furthermore, an increase in voluntary childlessness seems to tend towards accelerating in the future. On the other hand, family size has increased – a surprising turn of the otherwise general trend of decreasing familism.

### **Childlessness – individualism or lost opportunities?**

A rise in childlessness is known in all western societies. In Finland, the childlessness of women at the age of 45 has increased from 13% in 1990 to 16% in 2001. At the age of 35, one in four (25%) was childless in 2001. Therefore, it is evident that the trend of overall childlessness will escalate in the coming years, in spite of the fact that fertility rates after the age of 35 have been slightly rising. The childlessness of the women now in their thirties is expected to be 20 per cent when they reach the age of 45 (Families, 2001: 15).

It is a common belief that the trend of increasing childlessness reflects an uprise of a child-hostile society. According to a recent opinion survey (Paajanen, 2002), only four per cent of women under 30 years of age did not wish to have children. In the respondents' opinion, the rise in childlessness reflects in general a societal change towards individualistic and selfish attitudes. Their own childlessness, however, was explained by rational causes, such as unfinished studies, economic instability, the immaturity of the spouse or the lack of a spouse, etc. In another study (Turunen, 1998), women under 30 years of age explained away their childlessness with unfinished studies, immaturity and economic reasons, but for women older than 30 years of age the main reason was an inability to become pregnant. Postponing childbirth had, so to speak, led to involuntary childlessness. According to this study, only a small proportion, one to two per cent of women had truly planned not to have children. In a third survey, women with an unestablished status in the labour market explained that they had postponed or completely abandoned their plans for having children because of the lack of continuous work contracts (Sutela, 1999). Women with temporary jobs do indeed have fewer children than women with permanent contracts (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 59).

There is no way of knowing for sure the reasons for childlessness, whether the choice is positively voluntary or forced by the subjective notion of constraints in life that give no room for children. It is easy to believe in the real constraints caused by temporary jobs and violent economic fluctuations in a country like Finland, where the work ethic is strong and generally internalised, the women's labour market activity is high, and family benefits and other support is often tied to earlier work history. Moreover, years spent in education are substantially prolonged by simultaneous odd jobs that students are engaged in either for reasons of economic independence, pure subsistence or early career building.



The most interesting background factor behind childlessness is the level of education. Its impact seems to be quite different on women than men. A prevalence of childlessness and never marrying is highest among highly educated women. A prevalence of childlessness is also high when only married, highly educated women are considered. On the other hand, highly educated men are more often fathers (and married) than men with less education (Kartovaara, 2003). Two hypothetical explanations, both supporting traditional sex roles in a family are obvious. First, that educated women have more difficulty finding a spouse than men, and second, that children are considered less of a burden for an educated man than for an educated woman.

### **Changes in family size and structure**

In the eighties, more than 86% of women at the end of their fertile age (the cohort aged 45 years in 1986) had given birth to at least one child. In 2001, the corresponding figure was 84. Although the proportion of those who have children in their lifetime has decreased, the changes in the family structures and dynamics have been much more dramatic than the mentioned decrease. The ageing of the population is the main but not the only reason for the rapid diminishing of the proportion of the population in families with children. In 1980, 69% of the population, and in 2001, only 44% of the population were members of families with children.

The absolute number of families with children has decreased by 13% since 1980 but amazingly, the number of children has decreased by only five per cent. During the last two decades, the average number of children in the family has increased from 1.69 to 1.83. The number of families with four children has grown by 40%, and the number of families with one child has diminished by 20%.

Looking at a time-series depicting the average number of children in families by the mother's age, we observe that the growth in the number of children has most remarkably taken place in families in which mothers are aged 35 and older. The fertility rates of women younger than 30 have been decreasing and those of women of more than 30 years increasing. But the number of mothers younger than 30 has decreased. The real change is, then, the change in the mothers' life course: the postponement of births to a later age. The mean age of mothers at first birth was 28 years in 2001; an increase from 25 years of age in 1980. Almost every second child, 46%, was born to a mother older than 30 in 2001, while the corresponding figure in 1980 was 31%.

A slowly growing number of young adults remain childless, while at the same time those who choose to have a family seem to end up with larger families than the earlier generations. This growing dualism calls for explanations. In fact, the picture must be much more complicated since we do not know the entire situation. It is very difficult to follow family dynamics with statistical

means while families break and unite again into new formations called 're-constituted families'. No research has been undertaken to analyse why the cohorts born in the late fifties and presently at the end of their fertile period have increased their late births. No serious forecasts of the behaviour of the next cohorts have been drawn, either.

From the children's point of view, the subject of family size means the number of siblings and with that, many aspects of the material and social quality of life. The share of one child families decreased from 27% in 1985 to 24% in 2001. However, family statistics with its yearly cross-sectional grasp and definition of the child<sup>24</sup> does not suit well when attempting to estimate the average number of siblings. The number of only children is at the lowest at the age of seven in cross-sectional statistics. The share of only children at the age of seven was 12% in 1995, and 12% in 2001, in spite of the family size increase. The statistics do not allow us a deeper analysis.

At the same time, family size is affected by divorces and other family break-ups. In 1980, eleven per cent of children lived without a biological or social father in the same household, while only 1.3% had no mother living with them. In 2002, 15% of the children had no resident father and 1.8% had no resident mother. Information on contacts between children and their biological but non-resident parents are scant. According to a study in 1986, one third of children with a non-resident parent had no contact with him/her at all (Kartovaara and Sauli, 1994: 63-64).

### **Changing family forms**

The most typical family type is a *married couple with children*. This type is slowly losing ground to other family types: from 83% of families with children in 1980, to only 64% in 2001. Most of this change is due to the increasing popularity of not entering into a proper marriage but into cohabiting. In the eighties, in less than five per cent of families with children the parents lived in such a *consensual union* (co-residency, cohabiting). From that time the figure has tripled to 16%.

From the child's point of view, in both cases he has two parents whether his parents' relationship is registered (marriage) or not (co-residency). But there is a significant difference between these two types of families as to their stability. The risk of family break-down is higher among cohabiting than among married parents. A special study<sup>25</sup> in the 1990's showed that cohabiting parents

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<sup>24</sup> By children we mean persons aged less than 18 years.

<sup>25</sup> Co-residing persons are not registered as spouses in population register, on which all family statistics data is based on. They are deduced as such by the statistics maker, and no data exists for events such as entering or ending a relationship.

separated on average four times more often than married parents (Table 3, from Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 30). For those families in which all children were common to cohabiting spouses, the risk of breakdown was three times higher than the average risk of all married couples with children. If some, but not all, of the children were common to the spouses, the risk was four times higher and, if none of the children were common to the spouses, the risk was ten times higher (ibid.: 31).

**Table 3.** Children in dissolved families in 1997 (% of age group).

Age	Total	Parents moved apart			Father died	Mother died	Population in age class
		Total	Married*	Co-habiting**			
0-2	3.58	3.49	2.19	7.62	0.06	0.02	183 000
3-6	3.67	3.55	2.59	8.65	0.09	0.03	263 000
7-12	3.14	2.93	2.19	9.09	0.16	0.06	381 000
13-17	2.94	2.63	1.95	10.32	0.22	0.09	332 000
0-17	3.29	3.09	2.21	8.71	0.14	0.05	1 159 000
0-17 (N)	32 038	30 132	18 645	11 487	1 376	530	

\* In proportion to all children with married parents

\*\* In proportion to all children with cohabiting parents

Source: Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001.

For a child, living in a *single parent family* often means lower than average living standards. Poverty rates are higher and employment rates are lower in single-parent families than in two-parent families. The proportion of single-parent families rose from 14% in 1980 to 20% of families with children in 2001. In 1980, the absolute number of single-parent families was 85,000; in 2001, it was 118,000, an absolute increase of more than a third. But the number of children in single-parent families increased by more than half from 115,000 (10% of all children) in 1985 to 183,000 (16% of all children) in 2001. In other words, family size has also grown in single parent families.

An increase in the number of children in single-parent families was especially conspicuous in 1990-1995, the years of the economic depression. The number of children with a single mother increased by a third at that time. Additionally, the relative increase of children with a single father was higher at that time in comparison to the change before and after the depression years (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Children in one-parent families, 1985-2001 (N, %).

Year	All Children (N)	Lone mother family		Lone father family	
		N	%	N	%
1985	1 136 027	102 413	9.0	12 648	1.1
1990	1 135 686	113 184	10.0	14 483	1.3
1995	1 150 562	148 706	12.9	18 379	1.6
2001	1 105 988	163 061	14.7	20 372	1.8

Source: *Families, 2001*.

Before the 1990's, *reconstituted families* – families with at least one child non-common to parents (i.e. the child has received a new social parent) – were virtually unknown as a term referring to remarriage or a new consensual union of children's parents. They certainly existed but were not observed as a particular statistical group.

The proportion of reconstituted families has grown from seven per cent in 1990 to eight per cent in 2001 and the children of these families from eight to nine per cent of all children. The number of these families has not changed and even their internal structures have remained the same through the decade. At a cross-sectional glimpse, in 2001, about 35% of the children in reconstituted families were only children – in comparison to the respective percentages of 44 in all child families and 37 in all 'married couple with children' families reveals that reconstituted families are larger than average.

Reconstituted families are most often (95%) unions in which only one of the spouses has brought children with them to the new union. In 2001, there were about 100,000 children living in reconstituted families, of whom 70,000 were born in a former marriage or consensual union. These 70,000 children obtained a new social parent. Of these children, 60,000 were brought into the family by their mothers.

The usual constellation in a reconstituted family is a single mother whose present spouse is not the child(ren)'s biological father. In nearly half of these families the parents also have a common child. Usually, if a common child is born, the parents marry. Cohabitation is, however, becoming more common even in reconstituted families.

### Changing age patterns of family dynamics

Nowadays, on average, children have older parents than children had two decades ago. An average mother had her first child at the age of 23.4 in 1970, at the age of 25.5 in 1980 and at the age of 27.6 in 2001. As mentioned earlier, one in two children is now born to a mother older than 30 years, in contrast to one in

three in 1980. The fathers are presumably older, too, since the age difference of married spouses has remained at 2-2.5 years for all years. Published data for cohabiting couples do not exist. The spacing between the first and the second child has remained at 2.5 years for the years 1980-2001, whereas between the second and third child the time span has shortened (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001).

Children's demographics between 1980 and 2001 have certainly changed. Today they have older parents, more siblings and the age differences between the younger siblings are somewhat smaller. This is the consequence of the changed reproductive behaviour of postponing fertility to later life and of condensing the time period of having small children. Today children live more often than earlier in families with a higher risk of family break-up. Living with a single parent is a more probable consequence of a family break-up than receiving a new social father or mother in a reconstituted family.

### **Time and money in children's families**

In this section, the focus is on welfare resources. The main source of income in Finnish families is income from work. Parents' labour market situation forms a special conflict of interests between economic subsistence and the time used with the family.<sup>26</sup> Child poverty and the general income situation in families with children<sup>27</sup> are intertwined with the pressures of working life. Time stress originating from working life seems to permeate into life in general through mechanisms that we do not precisely know. Public family support operates through services and benefits. Along with unemployment, policy changes in the late 90's seem to have had an impact on child poverty.

### **The labour market conditions of the mothers and fathers**

An important aspect of working life from the viewpoint of children is the time parents use at home with them and the time they spend elsewhere. At times recommendations are directed to parents to reduce their working hours in the 'lone child' discourse. However, in this discourse, no solutions have been offered to the dilemma arising, among others, of time and money. As work is usually the most important source of income, the time parents use with their

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<sup>26</sup> If not otherwise stated, in the following sections, the labour force statistics presented is based on the Labour Force Survey by Statistics Finland published in the official statistics series Labour Market, various years.

<sup>27</sup> If not otherwise stated, in the following sections, the income statistics presented is based on the Income Distribution Statistics by Statistics Finland published in the official statistics series Income and Consumption, various years.

children conflicts with the need to maintain their income level. Moreover, the question of reducing daily working hours has never been a real alternative for any sector of the work force. We shall analyse the changes in 1980-2001 in employment rates, weekly or daily working hours, atypical working hours and part-time work and parental leaves using mainly the results from the Labour Force Survey and Surveys on Working Conditions, both by Statistics Finland.

Parents of families with children are, indeed, more often gainfully employed than the working age population on average. According to official statistics, the employment rate of mothers was 70%, while it was 58% for childless women aged 15 to 64 at the end of the year 2000. In 1980, the employment rate of mothers was 79%, and was 57% for childless women. In other words, the gainful employment of mothers has decreased considerably during the period under observation while the figure for childless women has not changed. The general female employment rate ranged from 58% in 1980 to 62% in 1990, through 51% in 1994 to 57% in 2000.

The official employment rate of mothers of even the smallest children is high, but this statistical construct does hide a large-scale utilisation of family leaves.<sup>28</sup> Paid family leaves significantly increase parents' (mostly mothers') ability to stay at home with small children on a full-time basis. In addition to long maternity leaves,<sup>29</sup> a childcare leave system<sup>30</sup> has been instituted in Finland. In this section those parents who were temporarily absent from their job due to different forms of parental leaves were reclassified either as 'employed, temporarily absent' or as 'persons not in the labour force'.

It is important to note that the full-scale utilisation of these arrangements is dependent on the labour market situation. The popularity of childcare leave grew in spite of several cuts in the compensation system during the 1990's. The possibility of utilising this benefit has grown as employment has improved since

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<sup>28</sup> In official statistics based on the Labour Force Survey, gainfully employed parents who are temporarily absent from their job due to maternity (paternity) leave, are classified as employed according to the ILO standard. Parents utilising the childcare leave system are, however, classified as persons not in the labour force in the official system of the LFS. In this section, however, all parents on family leave regardless of the form of the leave are regarded as non-working because that would be a child's experience of the situation.

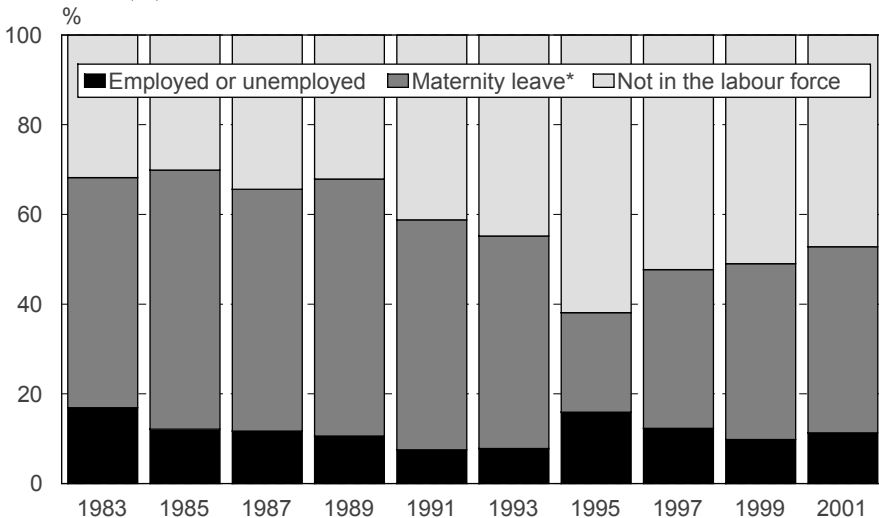
<sup>29</sup> The parenthood allowance is payable for 263 working days (about 11 months). The allowance is equal to 70% of annual earnings up to about €24,400 (in 2001). On earnings exceeding this limit the allowance is less than 70%.

<sup>30</sup> The mother (father) can agree with her (his) employer to take an unpaid leave of absence without losing her (his) job. She (he) is entitled to this right after the maternity or parenthood leave period until the child reaches the age of three. Families which do not use public day-care services during this period are entitled to a monthly home care allowance (of approx. €250 + an income-related supplement in 2001).

1995. For example, about 12% of mothers of under three-year-olds took advantage of this opportunity in 1998, but in 2000 their use of childcare leave had reached 22% (unpublished figures from the Labour Force Survey, Statistics Finland).

Mothers of children under one year of age are virtually all at home – either on maternity leave or on paid home care leave – only six per cent of mothers with babies go to work. Twenty years ago the share of homemakers was smaller than in 2001 (Figure 1). There are two possible explanations. As we can see from Figure 1, the share of paid maternity leave schemes seems to be connected to economic fluctuations, with a delay. In 1995, after the deep economic depression in Finland, the number of new jobs decreased and young women suffered from unemployment more often. They did not have jobs and thus did not have the right to maternity leave. Short-term job contracts have become somewhat more common and are most common among young women, especially highly educated women. In addition, maternity leaves have become longer. A new form of parental leave, the care leave, gives the mother or father a chance to keep her/his job until the child’s third birthday. This system has become gradually accepted by employers and employees. A complementary support form, the home care allowance, came into full effect in 1995. It is aimed at parents of children less than three years old to care for them at home.

**Figure 1.** Mothers of children aged less than one year by labour force participation, 1983-2001 (%).



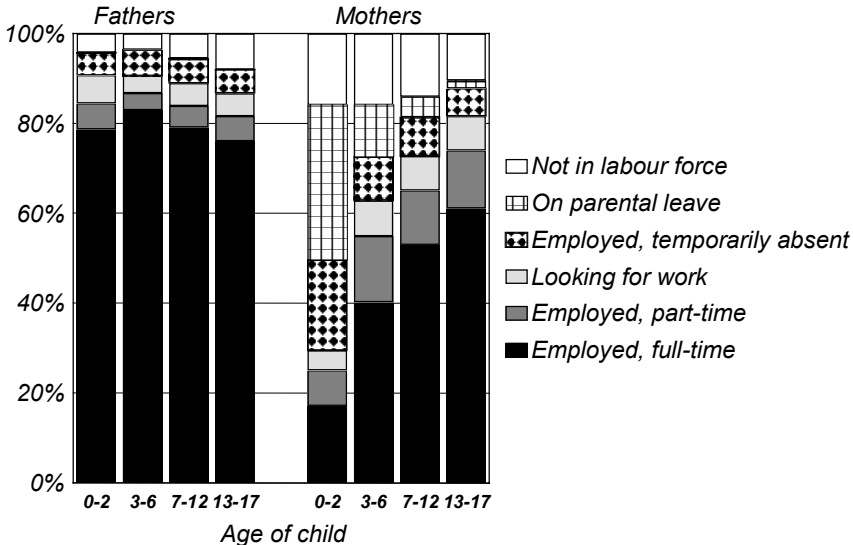
\* with a valid job contract

Source: Statistics Finland: Labour Force Survey, unpublished figures.

The effects of these developments are seen in Figure 2, in which employment and parental leave rates are depicted by the child's age. It is amazing how little impact the existence of children – small or older – has on fathers' working lives. Mothers, on the other hand, give up their careers for the period when children are small. When children reach school age, 50% of mothers have taken a full-time job.

The average weekly working hours of employed mothers of children aged 0-6 was 35 hours and for fathers 42 hours in 1998. For employed mothers and fathers of children aged 7-12, the figures were 37 and 43 hours (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001). Part-time arrangements are much less frequent in Finland than in other western societies – about 17% of all female employees worked part time in 2001. The share has gradually grown from 13% in 1998. Younger childless women work part time more often (32% of childless women under 30 years of age) than women with small children (17%). Part-time work is seldom a voluntary choice in Finland. It is negatively associated as a poor alternative to working full time. When asked about reasons for working part time, instead of child care options mothers usually state that the main reason has been the unavailability of full-time jobs.

**Figure 2.** Children by age group and parent's labour market activity, 1998 (%).



Source: Statistics Finland: Labour Force Survey 1998.



In spite of the societal arrangements that help Finnish mothers of small children to reconcile family and work, mothers seem to choose either full-time employment or no employment at all. The scant popularity of part-time work in general and even the supported form of partial child care leave proves this. Very few fathers use their rights to parental leave.

Fathers of children have longer working hours than other men. They work full-time or even longer hours more often than men without children. Fathers have a two hour longer average weekly working time than childless men. The same applies to employed mothers. They work more often full-time and longer than childless employed women of the same age (Hulkko, 2003: 31).

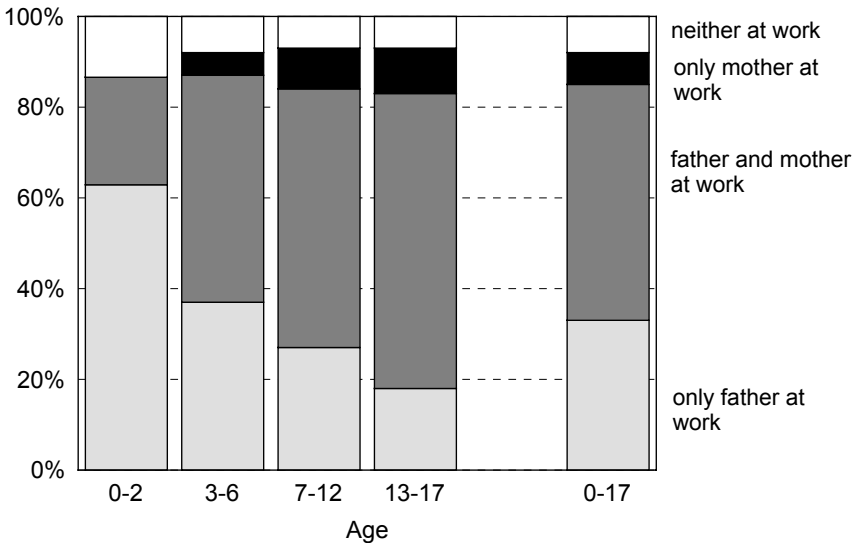
Employed mothers and fathers also work overtime – whether paid or not – in spite of the age of their children, less than other women and men. The existence of children makes no difference in doing shift work or atypical working hours (ibid.: 32-49).

When looking at mothers' and fathers' working times together, we have an idea of the opportunities families have of spending time together during the day at different stages of children's lives (Figure 3). Of children under three years of age only 23% are in need of external day care because both parents are working. Of children between three and six years of age, the corresponding figure was 50%.

In 1980, 64% of children under school-age (0-6 years) were in full-time care at home with their mother, father or other member of the family. The corresponding figure in 2001 was 50% (Hulkko, 2002), the fall being slow but steady. The reduction of home care is not in line with the fact that employment rates of parents have decreased. And – peculiarly and opposite to today's situation – in the 1980's, the number of children in home care notably exceeded the number of children with either parent not working and thus present. The explanation may lie in a changed occupational structure. Occupations in which one can easily combine child care and work at home – for instance farming or self-employment, such as home hair-dressers, dressmakers, and the like – have almost disappeared. At the same time wage work has gained ground. Children are less and less present when parents work.

The debate on where children under school age should spend their day has been and continues to be quite polarised in Finland. The alternatives offered are primarily either to stay at home with the mother (or father) or to attend full-time day care outside the home. This debate is a reflection of a working life with very few options; parents either should work full time outside the home or not work at all. The Finnish model for combining work and family is quite inflexible and differs from other Nordic countries.

**Figure 3.** Children living with two parents by parents' employment, 1998 (%).



Source: Statistics Finland: Labour Force Survey 1998.

The above observations are based on statistics for the year 1998 and later years. Comparable figures from twenty years ago do not exist. However, from the results of a regular survey on the working conditions of employees started in 1977, we have learned that although the weekly working hours have actually shortened, the tempo and intensity of working life, however, have been accelerating in a negative sense of increasing haste and mental exhaustion and in a (positive?) sense of an increasing feeling of significance and commitment and decreasing monotony (Lehto and Sutela, 1998; Lehto, 1999). We can safely assume that parents have not been excluded from this development.

According to time use studies from 1987-88 and 1999-2000, the feeling of time pressure was approximately at the same level, in spite of increased leisure time. Parents with children under school-age, especially mothers, felt themselves to be stressed. Around 60% of the parents have felt time stress according to both surveys. The more educated the parents, the more stressed they are. It has been suggested that the increase in the feeling of time pressure is a middle-class delusion and more a reflection of a changing attitude towards time than a real change in time use (Takala, 2002). On the other hand, it has been reported in Surveys on Working Conditions that the concepts of working time and leisure time have become less and less mutually exclusive, especially among the highly educated. Be it subjective, illusionary or not, we cannot wipe out the

high level of anguish caused by time stress on parents, which may have an effect on children.

Finnish family policies have always had two lines of action: support has been aimed at home care on the one hand and day care services on the other. In debates about work and family, it is often stated that the family has had to adapt to the demands of paid work. It has been pointed out by some (Koroma, 2001) that active participation in the labour market became overvalued in the post-war labour shortage and that in the 60's and 70's, this debilitated family values. In debates of recent years, trade unions of both workers and employers have been active and influential. They have set up committees and made proposals for reconciliation. In these proposals, the aim is to further gender equality in sharing family responsibilities and to encourage employers to support their employees' opportunities for reconciliation (Kallinen, 2001; Koroma, 2001).

### **Poverty in generations**

Poverty rates<sup>31</sup> have been decreasing for some time in Finland. Exact and reasonably comparable statistical time-series on monetary poverty are available from 1966. The general poverty rate almost halved from a high 18% in the sixties to eleven per cent in 1981. In families with children the development was even more positive: from 20 to nine per cent (Figure 4). After 1981, relative poverty rates have been falling until the last economic depression year 1994. Since then, with the growing economy, poverty rates began to rise again. The increase in the poverty rate was more drastic among families with children and in 2000 (10.8%) families with children had already exceeded the general poverty rate (10.6%). Internationally speaking, child poverty in Finland is still quite low.

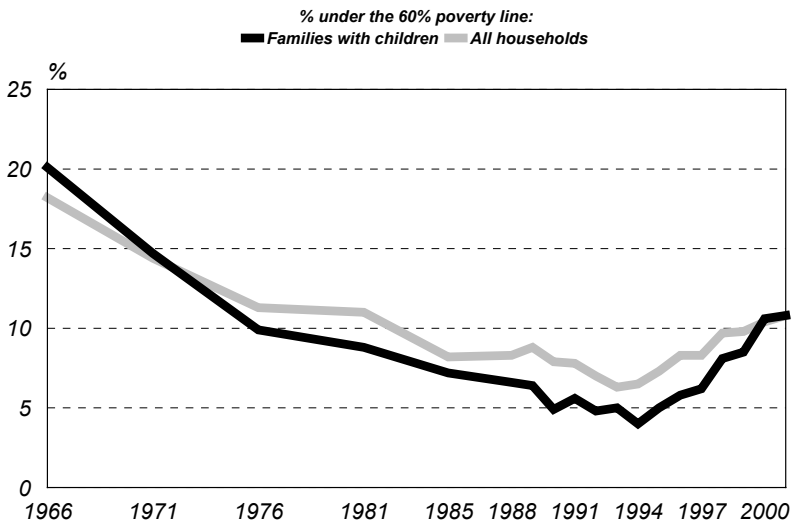
As poverty measurement is very much dependent on how it is measured, differing statistics are plenty and often conflicting. The most crucial element of measurement is the equivalence scale. In Figures 4, 5 and 6 the scale used is the modified OECD scale, which gives rather a low weight to children's consumption needs. In other words, children's needs are assumed to be less urgent on the modified OECD scale than, for example, the traditional OECD scale. As

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<sup>31</sup> The poverty level is measured using a poverty threshold of 60 per cent of the median disposable household income and modified OECD consumption units. The modified OECD scale puts a weight of 1.0 to the first adult in the household, and all the other members aged 14 or older are assigned a weight of 0.5. Children aged less than 14 years of age are assigned a weight of 0.3. For example, consumption units in a family of two parents and two children younger than 14 add up to 2.1.

a result of this choice,<sup>32</sup> the income situation in families with children may look better when the modified OECD scale is used than how it would appear if other scales were chosen – especially in comparison to households of the elderly (which are often one- or two-person households). If we compare poverty levels in families with children and among the elderly, the outcome of the comparison is quite the opposite depending on which equivalence scale we choose. With the traditional OECD scale, the poverty level for families with children is higher (13%) than for persons aged 65 and over living alone (8%). With the modified OECD scale, families with children (10%) seem to be less poor than the elderly (18%) living alone (see Sauli et al., 2002).

**Figure 4.** Poverty rates in families with children and in all households 1966-2001 (%).



Source: Statistics Finland: 1966-1985: Household Budget Survey; 1988-2001: Income Distribution Statistics.

Another crucial detail in the measurement is the poverty threshold. In this text, 60% of the median income has been used. The choice is arbitrary and quite

<sup>32</sup> This choice is in harmony with the recommendations of the European Union. The modified OECD scale is a gentlemen's agreement, not a scale based on empirical observations of the needs of different members of households. The reason why the OECD scale was modified was that the traditional OECD scale was deemed as 'too generous' for children (Sauli, 2003).

sharply defined. A family whose income is only, say, a few Euros over the threshold, is no longer counted as poor. A third point that raises doubts about our methods is that the measure is relative. In Figure 4, the poverty level is at its lowest during the deep depression of the first half of the nineties, i.e. at the time when incomes decreased throughout the whole society, even among the richest. Relatively speaking, the income situation was equalised. But absolutely speaking, the mechanism of this equalisation did not produce a happy outcome: the median income fell, and the poverty threshold with it, and in consequence, the number of poor households fell – without any improvement in the income situation of the low-income population.

Because our ability to measure poverty levels is far from satisfactory, one should not pay too much notice to observed *poverty levels*. We doubt if it is at all appropriate to compare the poverty level of, say, one-person households to the poverty level of families with many children. The consumption needs of each are different for households in different life stages. The time trends are more reliably comparable, assuming the methods of measurement remain similar over time.

A sensitivity analysis with poverty lines based on 50 and 60 per cent of median income and with two consumption unit scales, the traditional OECD scale and the modified OECD scale, shows quite different levels of poverty but similar trends through time. All four measures show an upward trend in all households, but a steeper trend in families with children than in other households. Among the elderly, a downward trend is clear irrespective of which scale or threshold is chosen. The most accelerated poverty increase is observed in families with children under school age, especially with children under three years of age. The impact of parental leaves on the earnings level combined with the ‘inflation-eaten’ family benefit levels are certainly obvious reasons for this development. Another reason may lie in the increase of long-term unemployment in the nineties. The poverty trend can be examined further by looking at employment trends of different households during the past decade.

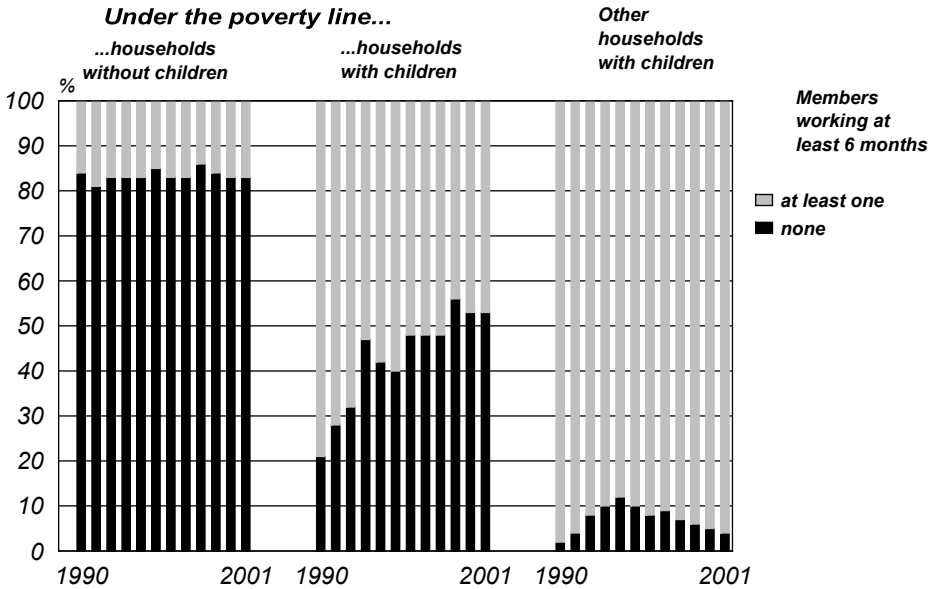
The jobless rate<sup>33</sup> is not very high in poor households with children, or not as high as in poor households without children (Figure 5). The issue of the working poor has been veiled in Finland’s poverty discourse. If such a phenomenon exists in Finland, it certainly is concentrated in families with children. However, the jobless rate of the poor child families is much higher than in non-poor child families, as can be seen in Figure 5. It is also obvious, that the employment situation has worsened for poor families with children during the economic recovery after the depression of 1991-1994. The opposite is true for other families with children. Joblessness in poor households without

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<sup>33</sup> The jobless rate is defined here as households with no one employed for six months or longer in a year’s span.

children was not affected by the economic fluctuations at all, which is also interesting.

**Figure 5.** Households with and without children under the poverty line, and other households with children by economic activity of household members, 1990-2001 (%).



Source: Statistics Finland: Income Distribution Statistics.

The duration of poverty is also an issue. It varies within different population groups. Longitudinal statistics, however, are scant. Based on two recent independent statistics,<sup>34</sup> it seems certain that poverty in families with children is often short-term. Half of the poor families with children in 1999 had been poor for at least three years during 1996-1999, according to ECHP data. According to the register data, half of the poor families with children in 2001 had been poor in 1999 and 2000, as well. Students, elderly women and the long-term unemployed had long spells of poverty more frequently.

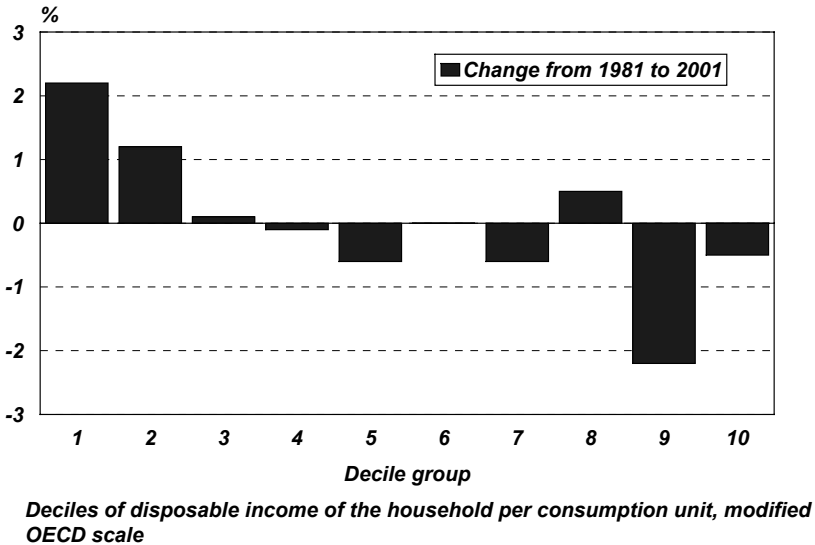
The high prevalence of short periods of poverty in families with children needs to be explained. The high percentage of poor children each year means that a great number of children experience occasional poverty. We still have no

<sup>34</sup> ECHP, a panel sample survey, and register-based (total count) income distribution panel, both by Statistics Finland. From both, only preliminary, unpublished analyses are available.

data at all about the recurrence of spells of poverty. Further, we need to study poverty with fuzzier poverty thresholds.

A more robust measure of a families' income situation is a decile distribution.<sup>35</sup> The change of relative income position from 1981 to 2001 experienced in families with children is depicted in Figure 6. The changes are not spectacular, but well in line with the increase of relative poverty, showing the overall deterioration of the relative income level in families with children. The share of families with children in the two low-income decile groups has grown and the shares in nearly all the higher-income decile groups have decreased.

**Figure 6.** The change of the shares of persons in families with children in Finland's income decile groups from 1981 to 2001 (%).



Source: Statistics Finland, 1981: Household Budget Survey, 2001: Income Distribution Survey.

<sup>35</sup> Income decile is a classification in which the population is divided into ten groups of equal size. The first decile includes the poorest ten per cent, the second decile includes the next poorest income group, etc, and the tenth decile includes the richest ten per cent. Belonging to decile five or six, for instance, shows that one is in the middle of the income distribution. A household's position in the decile distribution is judged by the equivalent disposable income. The measure is relative and the class limits in monetary terms do change each year along with the change of the general distribution.

In other words, families with children have fallen behind the general income development in the sense that there are more low-income child families and fewer with middle income today than twenty years ago. This development is rather amazing, as one connects this observation with the fact of the remarkable postponement of the first births. The income situation usually improves with increasing age. If families are started in a later stage of life, why are they not relatively better-off now than twenty years ago, for example? The explanation may lie in the technical effect of growing family size (= growing number of consumption units) or in the deterioration of the economic situation in the younger population of an ageing society. We believe in the latter explanation, but more research needs to be conducted.

The popular debates on the growth of child poverty have been quite noticeable in the popular press and other media. The main attention has been on the rapid rise of child poverty during the last decade. In public debate, however, attention has been shifted from issues of child poverty to parental responsibility in connection with observations of increasing children's illfare indicated by queues in children's psychiatric care units or the disorderly behaviour of children. A usual means of this shift is the idea that the lack of money is not the reason for deteriorated well-being of children, but parental negligence and disregard for the children's needs (eg. the Prime Minister's speech in the UN Convention day seminar, 20.11.2003, arranged by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare). Thus, child poverty does not seem to be any noted issue in Finland's public generational discourses.

Opposite inputs into the discourse on child poverty and illfare have been given in two briefings by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (Bardy et al., 2001, Sauli et al., 2002). In addition to a worsening income situation, family policy has also suffered from retrenchment. Services for children in day care institutes, schools and playgrounds have been cut, charges raised and group and class sizes have been enlarged, and income transfers such as child benefits or home care subsidies have been cut and frozen. Together with the fall of household income, these changes do weaken the quality of life.

How the distributive justice has evolved through generations is a question that we only have partial answers to. In the eighties, the level of services, transfers and benefits to families and children were not as good as they were around 1990. Many have claimed that children have suffered the most from the depression of 1992-1995, because the retrenchment of the welfare state was then started by cutting or freezing public inputs in family policy. As a consequence, and together with growing unemployment and instability in the labour market, many parents have been disappointed with their long-term life plans.



In the ageing society discourse, pro-natalist arguments have been remarkably few. The Nordic welfare policy has been reduced to a defensive position in discourses on the effect of economic incentives for increasing fertility in Finland as a means of counter-effecting population ageing. A non-belief in the effect of welfare policy seems to be spreading on the grounds that there is no proof whatsoever of any connection between fertility and economic incentives (see e.g. Wallenius, 2003). Family building is seen as a highly individual venture based on one's choice of values. Prevailing values and life styles highly emphasise the enjoyment of life, not family life. To be effective, a policy should take quite comprehensive measures through all segments of social policy: housing, employment, taxation, education and other policies. The present (2003) government's programme in regard of family policy does not contain such comprehensiveness.

## Time and space

### The changing use of time

In this section changes in the spatial and temporal organisation of childhood in the 1990s will be studied. In particular, changes that highlight the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society are of interest here. The section is structured with the aim of making such shifts visible. Children's spaces have, for this presentation, been divided into two parts. First, typical representations of the spatial and temporal organisation of childhood in modern society are discussed. Institutionalised childhood will be discussed, with *schools* and *day care* as its typical expression. The spatial and temporal organisation of this childhood space will be compared to forms of spatial and temporal organisation that can be seen as representing more post-industrial tendencies. *Working life*, *consumption* and *virtual space* will represent spaces in which children encounter new forms of spatial and temporal organisation. Contrasting different forms of spatial and temporal organisation in childhood space is of course a simplification, but will help to make changes visible. Two themes, *home* and *mobility*, will be discussed outside the division of spheres.

As far as possible, different childhood spaces will be approached from the same analytical perspectives. First, they will be discussed in terms of *access*. Secondly, *time and space regimes* will be studied. Children's agency, their use of places and their *place-making* will be the third perspective. Throughout the presentation, relations between generations of age and age separation and integration will be discussed. Parallel to the presentation of the research data, public and professional *discourses* related to the theme will also be discussed.

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**Table 5.** Time use of children 10-14 years and adults 25-44 years in 1988 and 2000 (the hours are averaged for all weekdays).

Activity Year of observation	10-14		25-44	
	1988	2000	1988	2000
Sleep	9.40	9.41	8.09	8.22
Eat, wash, dress	1.35	1.39	1.44	1.45
Be in school, do homework	3.13	2.44	0.08	0.13
Household upkeep, childcare, shopping	1.09	0.57	3.21	3.30
Gainful employment	0.06	0.02	4.27	3.58
Sports, activities in organisations, culture, hobbies	2.39	2.23	0.57	1.04
Reading books, newspapers and periodicals	0.50	0.32	0.45	0.34
Watching TV	1.51	2.23	1.32	1.56
Computing	0.12	0.47	0.00	0.07
Socialising	1.33	1.15	1.25	1.08
Travelling	1.09	1.04	1.15	1.15
Unspecified time use	0.01	0.20	0.02	0.06

*Source: Niemi and Pääkkönen, 2002: 86-91.*

Table 5 presents an overview of changes in the use of time within different age groups. The table gives a rough picture of the time used for everyday activities, and of similarities and differences between age groups. The overview will function as a background for discussions later on in the text. Children aged 10-14 here represent the child population, while the adult population is represented by people aged 25-44 years.<sup>36</sup>

Some obvious changes are seen in children's use of time. The time use of 10-14 year old children for 'necessary' activities has diminished in the 1990s; this is true for school work as well as for domestic work. For school work, homework, gainful employment, domestic work and childcare, on average 44 minutes less time per day was used in 2000 than in 1988. For the adult population aged 25-44 there is a reduction in the time used for gainful employment. This is mostly due to a higher unemployment rate in the 1990s (Niemi and Pääkkönen, 2002: 19-21).

A simultaneous increase is seen in children's use of time for watching TV and for computing. In total, the time used for these activities has increased by

<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, it is not possible to group the Time Use Survey data used here according to generation. Children under ten years of age are not included and children over 14 are included in the same group as young adults.

slightly more than one hour, and has increased considerably more for boys than for girls. Computing, together with sports and hobbies, are the leisure activities which differ most between children and adults. While watching TV, sports and hobbies are clearly leisure time activities, the case of computer usage is more complex. Computers are used for many purposes, and a smaller part of the increase in children's computing can in fact consist of homework, done in a way other than traditional written homework. Among school children, computer use has reduced the time used for other activities, most clearly for watching television, idling around, homework, work about the house and time spent with family (Nurmela et al., 2000: 27-29).

The changes in time use between 1988 and 2000 are more dramatic among children than among adults. It seems that leisure time activities have displaced part of children's work-related activities, a tendency which is present, but less clear when looking at the adult population. Children use on average more time watching TV and computing than on school and (traditional) homework.

### **Home: empty without adults?**

The home is used for many different purposes: for being together with parents and siblings, for social life with peers, for doing work, for computing and other hobbies, for being on one's own, and for resting and sleeping. Children of 10-14 years of age spent on average roughly as much time at home per day in 2000 (14 and a half hours) as they did at the end of the 1980s (Pääkkönen and Niemi, 2002: 113; Niemi et al., 1991: 94). Time use data indicate that there have been some displacements in how time spent at home is used. The increase in children's time use for computing has been striking and has probably taken place at the expense of other home based activities. Additionally, watching TV is probably an activity mostly taking place at home. If children's own rooms are equipped with both a computer and a TV, the room becomes an important basis for children's life at home. On the other hand, sports and hobbies, which children use quite much time for, often take children outside the home. Public or semi-public spaces (cafés, shopping centres, libraries) are other places children use in their free time for socialising with friends and for spending time.

Some children have two homes. Children living in one parent or in reconstituted families can have a second home with the parent they are not living together with on a daily basis. The proportion of children living in one parent families has increased from ten per cent in 1985 to 16% in 1998. Eight per cent of all children lived in reconstituted families. Some 200,000 children at that time had their mother or father living in another household, at an average distance of about 55 km (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 14; 38).

In public debates and among child professionals there is a growing concern about where and with whom children spend their time – or should spend their time. For older children the question has evolved especially around evening time; for younger school children the focus has been on after school time, when parents are still at their work place. Parents and children are said to be lacking time together. On a discursive level the problem has been labelled a ‘crisis of parenthood’ or a ‘lone child’ problem. The ‘lone child’ is a child who spends his or her hours after school without the company of adults, either parents or child professionals, regardless of other qualities of that time. A home is ‘empty’ without a supervising adult. According to a column titled ‘*Our lonely children*’ written by a professor in child pedagogy, leaving a child at a junior level alone in the afternoon is regarded as child maltreatment. Becoming too independent too early, which ‘lone children’ are expected to do, will eventually result in depression and burnout, alcohol and drug addiction, criminality or marginalisation (Kalland, 2003: 12). In another column, the general secretary of the largest child protection organisation in Finland connects the ‘lone child’ to insecurity, and refers to problems with drug use, anxiety and aggression as the potential outcomes of leaving children alone at home during the afternoons (Kuuskoski, 2003: 3).

‘Risk limits’ have been defined for depression or problem behaviours as a consequence of being without ‘safe adults’. The risk limit is passed when children under 14 years of age spend more than ten hours a week without a ‘safe adult’. According to a survey, more than half of Helsinki children between 9 and 12 years of age and as much as 67% of all children aged 7-10 years of age in Jyväskylä exceeded the risk limit (Pennanen, 2000; Svedlin et al, 2002).

The ‘lone child’ discourse calls attention to the need for developing after school care facilities for children. The claims are mostly directed toward the social policy system. Public day care for young school children in the mornings before going to school and in the afternoons after school has never been very extensive, and has in later years even declined. The number of children taking part in this type of care was 17,400 in 1990, but only 6,100 in 2001. Nevertheless, some organisations – partly publicly subsidised – do provide afternoon day care for school children (Kahiluoto, 2002: 14-15; Sosiaali- ja terveystietokeskus, 2002: 5; Svedlin et al., 2002).

As stated earlier, there has not been an increase in parents’ working hours in the 1990s – rather a decline, as unemployment and part-time work has increased and the childcare leave system has gained popularity (see the section on The labour market conditions of the mothers and fathers). The ‘lone child’ discourse, then, does not seem to have a clear reference to changes in parents’ working hours. It seems more to reflect a change in the cultural standards for what makes up a good childhood. In this effort, a good quality of life for children is more distinctly than before tied not only to the presence of adults in

children's lives, but to the social control of children's activities by professional adults. The company of other children, be they older or younger siblings or friends, does not contribute to a good childhood environment in the 'lone child' discourse, and does not make the home less 'empty'. Siblings and peers tend to be overlooked or treated as a variant of being alone. Moreover, being on their own is the same as being lonely, that is without adult company and supervision. Consequently, from inside the discourse, there has been little or no need to know about children's use of their after school time and of the time used in the home, and there is scant data about this topic.

A study on children's experiences of their home and its environment carried out in a town in central Finland revealed that most seven year old children went directly home after school, and only a minority went to an after school centre. Part of the children are at home alone and part are together with older siblings or friends. They can contact their parents by phone and know when the parents are coming home from work. The experience of being home alone after school is more positive than negative for seven year olds. The positive experiences relate to being in control of the home and the opportunities to do things the parents would forbid, like looking for good food in the kitchen, or skipping rope indoors. The negative experiences relate to feelings of fear and having nothing to do (Kiili, 1998).

Friends are an important resource in organising after school time. Having access to friends enlarges the children's spatial possibilities. Much of everyday life is organised and spent together with friends. Many activities belonging to a normal day cannot be carried out and places cannot be visited without a friend's company. Without friends days are boring. Those children who do not have close friends or siblings at home run the risk of being alone in their free time. Lacking the possibility of spending after school time with friends makes children more dependent on adults' organisation their time (Alanen, 1992; Kiili, 1998: 30-31; Pennanen, 2000).

What do children do when at home? In addition to sleeping, meals and personal care, time is used for homework, domestic work, computing, watching TV, reading and socialising (Niemi and Pääkkönen, 2002: 86-91). Computer use, as playing for the most part, structures the use of time and space at home. Among seven year old children, for boys considerably more than for girls, using the computer for playing games or watching videos are popular activities in the morning before going to school, or in the afternoons and evenings. Playing computer games, watching TV or video films fill the time when there is nothing else to do. These activities can also be used in socialising with parents, siblings or friends (Kiili, 1998: 42).

What do children feel is important in their homes and living areas? Being at home at the same time as parents are at home does not necessarily mean socialising with them. Seven year old children's self-organised activity mostly

takes place in the child's own room, or outdoors, in the yard. The child's own room, which can be shared with a sibling, is important to the child; here the child is less controlled by parents. Toys and personal belongings define the room as the child's own, where he can spend time undisturbed and feel more free. Children feel that they, to certain limits, should be in control of their own rooms, and that parents should not intervene. The yard is also experienced as important. Activities that seven year old children like most to engage in with parents are playing games and shopping (ibid.: 33-36; 40).

The need to arrange supervised after school time for small school children is one of the most visible discourses concerning children's time and space. Reports underlining the need have been published, both by authorities and organisations (see Svedlin et al., 2002). In the discourse, a child being 'alone' is in a process of redefinition in a direction which makes children more dependent on adult company and supervision. The scarce research information available about children's use of the home gives a more varied and multifaceted picture of children's after school time and use of the home than the 'lone child' discourse.

### **Child institutions: school and day care**

Childhood institutions are those which in the first place have implemented the childhood structure of modern society based on the separation of children's activities from those of adults, locating them in physical environments especially designated for those aims. Modern society has made play and learning the cornerstone of a 'good' childhood and created a whole army of child professionals, whose task it has been to create a good environment for these activities to take place. The separation of children's activities from those of adults is a separation in time and space. 'Insularisation' has been used as a term to describe the spatial and temporal differentiation of children's activities from those of adults in urban landscapes, meaning that children's places are clearly delineated entities spread in space. Insularisation applies to special forms of social control, as well (Zeicher, 2001a; 2001b). It also applies to separation, and even the contrast of children's and adults' activities, where children's activities are regarded as preparation for adult life. Specially trained adults are assigned to guide children through this preparation, thus creating a typical institutionalised childhood for modern society, with groups of children constituting the objects of child professionals' work.

### **Access taken-for-granted**

As an old childhood institution the school is a prototype for age-segregated thinking. Basic education in comprehensive school covers the entire population of children from seven to 16 years of age. All Finnish children, even those with severe disabilities, must attend compulsory education. Compulsory education does not entail an obligation to attend school, but in practice, however, practically all children go to school, and interruption is rare (The Education System of Finland; Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 64). Day care for children under school age is a younger institution. The Act on Children's Day Care was passed in 1973, and the expansion of day care primarily occurred from the mid 1970s to the end of the century.

For the oldest children in the child population, the 16-17 year olds, the inclusiveness of the school system has increased somewhat due to prolonged education. In today's society almost this entire age group continues their school education in upper secondary general school or vocational education, and some 82% complete their education (The Education System of Finland; Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 64). Previously, a part of the children went to work after having accomplished compulsory school, thus leaving the separate childhood institution behind at an earlier age. The present prolonged education situation can be observed in time use as well in the age group of 15-24 years. Time spent studying at school has increased by 17% in the last twelve years (Niemi and Pääkkönen, 2002: 88). The expected education time for five year olds is today 18.7 years, which is among the highest in OECD-countries. For women it is even higher, 19.4 years (Education at a Glance, 2002).

For younger children, a trend is developing towards using less daily time for school. The time 10-14 year old children spent studying at school diminished in the 1990s by about 10%, thus leaving more time for children's everyday life outside child institutions. In terms of age-segregation, the development has been different for the two age groups.

There are no data on how many daily hours children spend in day care or on recent changes. A large majority of children in day care are there full time, spending approximately seven to nine hours per day in day care. Flexitime and the possibility of working shorter days give parents of small children the possibility to shorten their children's daily stay in day care.

The day care system is less inclusive than the school system. The opportunities for parents to stay home with children under three years of age have improved in the 1990s, due to social reforms. As a consequence, a great majority of children under three years of age are cared for at home. In the late 1990s, a good one half of all children under school age spent their days at home with their mother, or in a few cases, with their father. Outside urban areas the proportion was even higher (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 61). The proportion of

family day care has declined during the 1990s (Early Childhood Education..., 2000: 34). Although the great majority of children in day care have parents who work or study, children with unemployed parents have access to day care, because of the subjective right to a day care place.

Participation in pre-school education for six-year-olds is voluntary. In 2001 it became obligatory for municipalities to offer pre-school education. In that year 93% of the age group participated in pre-school education (The Education System in Finland; Opetusministeriön toimintakertomus, 2001: 12). Pre-school is mostly provided in day care centres, but also in pre-school classes operating in connection with comprehensive schools. Because pre-school education is built into already existing day care and school structures, the changes in terms of space and time use are fairly small. For the majority of six year olds, participation in pre-school education does not mean a change of place during the day; they receive their education in the same day care centre where the rest of the day is spent. A minority of the children, however, must share their day between two places, a day care centre and a school, or in some cases, home and school.

The number of children under seven years of age in day care has been steadily growing up to the end of the 1990s (Statistical Yearbook on Social..., 2000: 53). However, since 1995 this age group has started to decline. One of the consequences of a diminished population of small children is that day care centres are being closed. In the city of Helsinki, plans have been made to close 40 day care centres (about 10% of the centres) in the near future, and the closures have already started. On a structural level, the closures mean that there will be fewer childhood 'islands' in society, and also fewer jobs for child professionals who work in children's day care. Institutional childhood as a structural feature in society then will become less visible. The same trend has already been seen for quite some time in schools, especially in the countryside. Many small schools have been closed down because of a shortage of children, often leaving smaller villages without a school. The web of 'childhood islands' is getting more sparse, with fewer, but often larger units.

Children's access to school and day care is almost a matter of course. Practically all children attend school. Although school attendance is not formally compulsory, it is seen as an obligation for children. With the subjective right to day care, access to day care is also, in principle, taken for granted. It depends, however, on the parents' choice of whether a child attends day care or not. Because of long parental leaves and the childcare leave system the smallest children are most often cared for at home.



### **Time and space regimes**

In more official data production, childhood institutions are regarded as services offered to families and children. However, from the children's perspective they are *places* where they spend large parts of their everyday life, and where they are involved in social relations and participate in activities with peers and adults. Child institutions are arenas for children's agency and meaning-making. They also are places in a very physical sense, as buildings with certain architecture, fenced and often marked off from the surrounding society.

School and day care buildings have specific features, reflecting the institutions' educational and pedagogical thought and the social organisation of the relations between children and adults. These features separate them from the surrounding society. A study on school space mentions long corridors, compartmentalisation and institutional differences as typical institutional features of Finnish schools. Except for lockers and desks, students lack private space, especially in classrooms. Older schools are clearly delineated for the most part, while new school buildings in suburbs blend more into the environment, and have less distinguished borders (Gordon et al., 2000: 138-146).

Finnish day care centres are mostly located in low buildings, most of them built in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. They are usually clearly distinguishable as day care centres: there are children's paintings in the windows, and the outside areas have standard equipment. The outside area is fenced and can be easily kept in the teacher's sight from all angles all the time. The usual equipment is a sandbox, swings, a tiny hut, a climbing frame and small areas where children can jump rope or play with a ball. What is typical for day care centres is that every inch is planned, starting from thinking based on ages and appropriate developmental stages. Most day care centres have a home corner, a doctor's corner, theatrical props, a hairdresser's corner and the like, equipment which reflects pedagogical thought and is aimed at inviting children to enter into certain kinds of activities, which are thought of as training for adult life (Strandell, 1994).

Both school and day care buildings differ from many adult working places in that they are group-based. Rooms are intended for groups of children. There are usually 20-30 people present in the same room at the same time during long periods of the day. Children are governed in groups, although lately some development has been made towards more individual working tasks and work done in smaller and shifting groups.

Schools offering instruction in the first six forms are especially located nearby children's homes in order to avoid unreasonably long school journeys. Teaching groups in basic school education are formed according to year classes, i.e. forms. During the first six years, a class teacher teaches all or most subjects. In upper secondary education, the study programme is generally module-based,

which means that the children do not spend all or even most of their school time in a fixed group (Education at a Glance, 2002). In day care centres there has been some change from the supervision of children as a group to social control based on more self-regulation on the part of the children (Strandell, 1994).

In day care centres the day is divided into different kinds of activities, which are planned beforehand by the staff. Activities in which all children are expected to take part in the same place and at the same time fill a considerable part of the day: meals (breakfast and lunch), organised activities like singing, playing games, painting and gymnastics. In addition, all the children sleep or rest at the same time after lunch. These are all activities which are strongly defined by and impregnated with educational goals and pedagogical ambitions. The use of space and time is restricted: children should not talk too much and not too loud, they should sit still and not run around, wait for their turn, or hurry on to the next activity. In other activities, like free play indoors or outdoors, and in situations in which the children should move on from one activity to the next, the children are usually more spread over a greater area. These activities are more open for the children's own definitions of time and space, and the educational goals are more implicit in the activities (ibid.: 177-179).

Time-space paths have been used as descriptions of how physical space is socially organised. In Helsinki schools, space was experienced as restrictive and the classrooms as small, dark and airless. The use of space in schools is routinised, ordered and controlled. Students have to be present in certain places at certain times, while at other points of time their presence is forbidden. Movement is regulated indoors: e.g. students are not to run, and not allowed to leave the school area. Timetables are fixed: lessons start and end at certain times, and breaks and lunch are fixed in terms of time. Teachers have strict control over time, although students sometimes try to take control of it themselves (Gordon et al., 2000: 148-150).

Space and group structures are closely tied to time structures. On the whole, very little has changed: institutions are sluggish to change, partly because the social organisation is built into the walls of the buildings. Though modern educational thinking favours a more open and flexible learning space, the spatial organisation of schools is based mostly on tradition. Traditional classrooms are the dominant type of space (Korkeakoski et al., 2001: 106). The organisation of time so that all children do the same things in the same place at the same time is still the main – though sometimes modified – principle in organising space and time in schools and day care centres. A comparison between Finnish and British schools as physical space found less spatial flexibility and more hierarchical and traditional teacher-pupil relations in Helsinki than in London schools. The object of the comparison was the 9<sup>th</sup> form. In London schools, students could move around more and use equipment. London schools had a greater range of different types of places, which students

liked better than classrooms, and contained more informal activities in the official school than was the case in the schools in Helsinki. The overall picture of the school was more negative in the Helsinki schools. When asked to complete the phrase ‘School is like...’, Helsinki students often mentioned more negative spatial metaphors than British students, like prisons or madhouses (Gordon et al., 2000).

There are no data available to tell if the amount of space in schools and day care centres has increased or decreased. Neither is it possible to compare the amount of space per child in child institutions with the amount of space per adult at their working places – though such a comparison would be relevant from an age generational perspective. There are data indicating that schools are crowded places, but with no comparative perspective it is difficult to draw any conclusions. Anyhow, lacking space and the consequences of it, as well as problems with spatial solutions, has been paid attention to in research as well as in official reports.

According to a survey conducted among principals in a sample of schools for forms one to six (Korkeakoski et al., 2001), the lack of space and poor ventilation are the greatest problems of the school buildings. In about one third of the schools a number of the classrooms were too small, according to an old norm that states that there should be two square metres of space per pupil. In cities, the proportion of schools with some number of classrooms that were too small rose to 60%. In addition, there was not enough classrooms. When the number of pupils in schools in regions with net internal migration has grown, other places in schools have been transformed into classrooms. Accordingly, the schools face a lack of other types of facilities, like places for sports, handicraft, smaller groups and school libraries. The poor air condition in school and day care centre buildings has been documented in research (Jalas and Kimari, 2002; Karjalainen and Kimari, 1999).

On a discursive level, the lack of space for children inside childhood institutions is not a great issue. Instead, ‘adult shortage’ has been regarded as a worsening problem as the group size grows – or is believed to be growing. Although the maximum group size in day care centres has been growing slightly in the 1990s<sup>37</sup> there are no data showing the actual group size. The ‘adult shortage’ discourse can be regarded as a variant of the ‘lone child’

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<sup>37</sup> The instructions regulating the child/adult ratio in day care have been changed. The absolute group size standard (12 children in groups of children aged 0-2 and 20 children in groups of children aged 3-6) were in 1993 substituted with recommendations stating the ratio in relative terms: there should be at least one adequately educated teacher per seven children between three and six years, and one teacher per four children under three years. Some municipalities have agreed upon a maximum group size of 21 children (Kahiluoto, 2002: 18).

discourse with its worries about children having too little adult supervision. Too few teachers and nurses in schools and day care centres is by no way a new discourse. At least for day care centres, it is as old as the public day care system itself. However, the economic depression in the beginning of the 1990s fuelled this discourse and fed it with new arguments. Because of necessary cost saving in the public sector, school teachers were temporarily dismissed in certain years, and children were for short periods left without teaching, or had to work more on their own with tasks given by the teachers. Now the closure of day care centres seems to have triggered a new wave of 'shortage' discourse.

What is interesting in the 'adult shortage' discourse is that only adults – professional teachers and nurses – are regarded as resources in schools and day care centres. The children's status is still as just the object of the adults' work; very little has changed on this point. Children's own resources and competences or children as a resource seem to have no theme in public and professional discourse, although these questions have been given attention in childhood research. Children's greater self-organisation has rather been regarded as a tragic outcome of a shortage of adults, as a result of the economic depression and continued savings in the public sector after the depression.

### **Making places**

Space and place are not just there. They are neither neutral settings nor outer frames of social action. Places are *made* in social interaction, and they are made inside relations of power and authority. Space is acted upon, and becomes part of identity-making. By attaching meaning to space places are *used* for different purposes (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Christensen et al., 2000).

Research conducted in Finnish day care centres shows that children contribute actively to organising the everyday life and the social order of the institution. Children share the day care space, without having 'ownership' of any specific part of it. This means children must make places out of spaces: they must situate activities by defining their spatial limits. A considerable part of children's communication during the day is used for situating activities in space, for negotiating limits between simultaneously ongoing activities and for defending negotiated space. In coping with social turbulence and quickly changing social constellations, children show considerable competence (Strandell, 1994, 1997).

Children are obliged to take part in activities planned by the adults of the institution, whether they would like to or not. Their freedom of choice and opportunities to influence the temporal and spatial order of the day are limited. However, there is space for negotiating, and children use their knowledge about the institutional order and power relations in order to enlarge their range of action and expand their social space. By choosing between different ways of

handling a situation, by obeying and adapting to, applying, evading, resisting and instructing each other about what actions may produce dividends, they negotiate with the adult order of the institution. By these actions children manifest considerable amounts of 'strategic competence' (Lehtinen, 2000; Eerola-Pennanen, 2002).

Children creatively redefine day-care space and equipment and the educational thought built into them. Children move around quite actively, they run, climb and jump. A way of disobeying and ignoring adult rules is to begin to run around. When many children run together, it can be difficult for the teacher to intervene. Children achieve ownership over space, which can also happen in situations strictly controlled by adults. When sitting around the lunch table or on benches during some organised activity, children can claim ownership over space by starting to laugh or ridicule and trivialise adult order. In sitting very close to each other, it is easy for the children as a group to influence the definition of the situation, and to redefine it (Strandell, 1997).

Research in schools shows that space becomes taken for granted through routinisation, and students become 'smooth operators' in it. Students are active in negotiating the time-space order in the classroom; they use inquires, requests and trade-offs, they plead, beg, test, resign themselves, step aside, ridicule, challenge, disrupt and resist. Space is redefined and used in a range of ways. A hole in the fence, through which students escape to forbidden shops, is a classical way of stepping out of the spatial order. Children also control each other; this control is partly gendered. Sometimes the children would prefer more teacher control of space, in order to obtain a good learning climate or for safety reasons (Gordon et al., 2000: 149-159).

### **The challenge of 'new' spatial and temporal structure**

While 'insularisation' of childhood spaces has been one of the most dominant trends in the order of modern childhood, there are tendencies in post-industrial society which undermine the clear separation of childhood space from the surrounding society and childhood activities from those belonging to adulthood. The segregation between childhood and adulthood, typically represented by institutionalised childhood, is paralleled and challenged by temporal and spatial structures in which the clear distinctions and boundaries are blurred.

Examples of spaces offering children new experiences of spatial and temporal structure that will be discussed here are working life, consumption, and virtual space. After a long period of invisibility, children's participation in *working life* has gained new visibility in post-industrial society, because of a change in meaning and relation to other activities in children's everyday life. The change in the context of children's work defines it to be a different

phenomenon, both for the children themselves and for society, compared to the child labour of early industrial society. The shift from production to *consumption* as the norm of securing integration in society has been pointed out (Hengst, 2000: 71-72). Taking part in consumption is today an important way of participating in society, and therefore of interest when discussing childhood spaces in society. Consumption is a strongly visible feature of urban space, not least in terms of the physical places in which consumption takes place.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the modern construction of childhood is found in *virtual space*, where even the concepts of time and space are turned around. Today's children comprise the first generation to grow up with computers and mobile phones as a routine feature of everyday life. In this respect, virtual space is a generational question. Among everyday activities, computing is the activity of which children's time use has increased the most clearly in the last decade, and in which the differences in time use between children and other age groups are quite considerable (see Table 5).

Working life, consumption and virtual space will be studied from the same analytic perspectives as the childhood institutions above. How are children allowed access to these spaces? How does the organisation of time and space in these spaces differ from the time and space regimes of day care centres and schools? And how do children create places in these spaces? These three aspects are discussed in relation to the degree to which the space in question is 'owned by adults' (Matthews et al., 2000). In this dimension the three spaces here differ from each other. The type and degree of adult ownership of space regulate children's access and their social practices of place-making.

### **Making claims on adult space**

Working-life can be defined as a sphere traditionally 'owned by adults'. The adult 'ownership' of space puts limits to children's access, their place-making in working life, and the positions and status they can gain. In the name of child protection, children's work is legally restricted. Restrictions apply both to the kind of work that may be performed and to the daily hours permitted. Children under 15 years of age cannot enter into a work contract. They are allowed to do only light work for a limited number of hours a week. Due to these protections, children are driven to find jobs in the hidden economy, where they are totally out of reach of legislative protection (Kouvonen, 2002: 20-21).

Children working for pay outside the home is a controversial issue, and remains to a large part hidden behind the cultural agreement that school and learning are children's 'work', thus having self-evident priority. Children working outside of school is, however, becoming something of a cultural norm and exists alongside school work, not instead of it. Practically no children have work for pay as their primary activity. In 1998, only 2.5% of children were

employed and another 2.5% were unemployed after finishing comprehensive school (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 66). Instead, part-time work alongside school work and short-term work during school holidays have become popular among older school children. Instead of being an either-or question, work and school have become a both-and question. School work is primary, and paid work is adapted to school hours. Children typically deliver newspapers and advertising brochures, look after other children, do cleaning work and work in shops, markets or restaurants (Rafnsdottir, 1999: 33-34). In 1997, 31% of all 15 year old and 65% of all 17 year old children had earned an income (Kartovaara and Sauli, 2001: 70).

The meaning and value for children of participating in working life cannot be reduced to simply earning money, although having money of one's own plays a central role (Kouvonen, 2000: 48). This participation has deeper cultural and symbolic meanings. In industrial society, participation in working life became the marker of integration in society for both men and women towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Children's 'will to belong' can be understood through the opportunities that participation in working life gives to children's integration and status in society. Children's claims on access to and place-making in working-life are structured by adult 'ownership' of working life space: participation is experienced as rewarding as such, although the type of work children can obtain, the working conditions and the pay they receive are far from satisfactory (Strandell, unpublished). Certain sectors of the labour market are even dependent on work done by children. This dependence on children usually grows in summer, when adults go on holiday. Of 13-17 year old school children, 42% worked during the summer in 1998 (Rafnsdottir, 1999: 23).

The role of consumption has steadily grown as the marker of integration into and membership in society. It has gradually taken over part of the inclusive capacity of working life. In addition, consumption has been largely 'owned by adults', because consuming presupposes the possession of money. Consequently, earning one's own money through work gives children greater access to the world of consumption, and to more autonomous consumption decisions.

Unlike working life and consumption, virtual space is not clearly 'owned' by any particular age group. Although the equipment necessary for movement in virtual space presupposes material resources, to which adults have greater access, the use of virtual space presupposes knowledge, to which access is not specifically age-based. Children appear to be quick at acquiring the necessary knowledge for using computers and mobile phones – quicker than many adults, for which it is often harder to adapt to new technology and learn to use it. In this respect, children have easy access to virtual space and a lower level of 'inner resistance' against using its potential than older people – if only they are able to access the equipment needed.

Today, children have easy access to computers and mobile phones. Computer use has increased rapidly in the 1990s, as well as the skills required for operating in the information society, especially among children and young adults. When comparing the density of computers connected to the Internet in different countries, Finland held the leading position in the EU with 147 connections per 1000 inhabitants in the year 2000, the average for the EU being 33 (Nurmela et al., 2000: 32; Transport and Communication Statistical..., 2001: 201).

Practically all children have access to a computer. In 1999, 82% of all children younger than 15 years of age had access to a computer at home (39% for all households), and today the figures are even higher. Computer use is also quite common in schools. Over 80% of all pupils over ten years of age had used a computer at school already in 1999. Practically all schools have Internet access, and many pupils have an e-mail address at school (Korkeakoski et al., 2001: 106-123; Education at a Glance, 2002). Children are the most active leisure time users of computers and the Internet. Among 10-14 year old children, computers are used for the most part for playing, drawing and word processing. Boys both play games and use the Internet more than girls. In schools, computers are primarily used for word processing, searching web pages for information, and e-mail. Some 40% were able to use school computers also after school time (Nurmela et al., 2000).

In the use of mobile phones, there are small differences between age groups, except for people over 60 years of age, who use mobile phones less than other age groups. In 1999, 85% of young people (15-19 years of age) used a mobile phone, and 77% possessed one. Regional differences in access to mobile phones are small; sparsely populated areas have somewhat less access than other areas. There are no differences between the sexes in this age group, as there is among people over 30 years of age. Girls and young women in particular send a great many SMS messages. Being able to call people and arrange one's affairs and being accessible to others are the most central reasons for owning a mobile phone (Nurmela, 1998: 78-79; Nurmela et al., 2000: 13; 16).

### **Flexibility and choice**

What are the temporal and spatial experiences children can have through participating in working life, consuming and moving in virtual space? How do they influence other areas of children's everyday life? And how do these experiences influence the relations between generations of age?

Working life is the closest to what children experience in child institutions: the work mostly must be done in certain places and at certain times – although in the field of information and communication technology the coordination of time and place is less important. However, there is a greater variation in



working life than in school when it comes to the types of jobs and their temporal and spatial characteristics.

By doing part-time work alongside school and during holidays, children are able to have *parallel* experiences of the two spaces. It is then easy for them to note the differences, to make comparisons and to balance the advantages and disadvantages. When talking about negative experiences of school, reference is made to the organisation of school work in time and place. Compared to the rigidity of time and place, the work place is seen to offer at least some spatial and temporal flexibility. Even though the degrees of flexibility seem minimal from an adult perspective, the children value e.g. having the possibility of taking a break and going somewhere else for a while. The work place is felt to offer at least some elements of negotiability and flexibility – dimensions which are seen to be lacking at school (Strandell, unpublished).

In the sphere of consumption, time and space take on even more flexible meanings. Through media advertising and great visibility in urban space, consumption is ‘everywhere’. Shopping centres are open until late in the evening, their offers continuously tempting. Consuming presupposes movement in public and semi-public spaces, in shops, cafés, cinemas, restaurants. Shopping malls are important meeting places for children, and places for hanging around. Consumption represents a mix of age-integrating and age-separating practices. Consumption sites are mostly not age specific, even though different age groups are partly addressed separately, e.g. in advertising. The spread of children over space by their introduction to adult working life and in the sphere of consumption in particular represent a challenge to the insulated character of childhood institutions.

The challenge from virtual space is more profound than from either work life or consumption. In virtual space, even the concepts of space and time are turned around, taking on new dimensions. Computers can be used in many different places: at school, at home, in friends’ homes, in an Internet café or in the library. They can also be used for many different kinds of activities, of which some are work related, while others are connected to leisure time activities. They can be used for playing games, school work or other work, shopping, reading, e-mailing, chat and information search. Computing is open to different social constellations: it can be done alone, together with friends, siblings, parents, school mates and teachers. Computing, then, clearly transcends boundaries between different types of places, different kinds of activities and different social constellations. With this amoebic character, computing blurs the boundaries and the differences between work, study and play, as well as between work time and leisure time.

The challenge from virtual space to relations between generations of age is profound as well. One of the cornerstones in the relation between children and adults in industrial society was its view of adults as ‘those who know’ and of

children as the 'not-yet-knowers'. This structure is strongly challenged by the extensive use of information and communication technology in today's society. Learning, the prototype of childhood activity in Western childhood, has in virtual space become decentred, in terms of place, in terms of authority relations, and in terms of boundaries with other activities. Using the Internet for information seeking and for working undermines authority relations typical of schools. It also blurs the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, as children have access to and use the same sources of information as adults do in their work. Computer use becomes both a supplement and a competitor to learning in school. Children become less dependent on the teachers for knowledge and information. What learning is also takes on new meaning, e.g. when the Internet is used as a basis for making consumer choices.

Perhaps most of all, the mobile phone transforms the traditional uses and meanings of time and space. With the mobile phone, the organisation of everyday life is more flexible, by substituting its prearranged structure with indefinite temporal points of fixation. Continuous accessibility creates a sort of timelessness. Mobile phones promote an *ex tempore* lifestyle, in which agreements can be made and altered quickly, spontaneously and flexibly. Punctuality ceases to be the virtue it used to be (Kopomaa, 2000: 49-56).

A common feature of working life, consumption and virtual space is that they are not age segregated in the same way as childhood institutions are. They undermine the sharp segregation and contrast between childhood and adulthood and blur the boundaries between age groups. They represent a *mix of age-segregating and age-integrating practices*. They undermine the relations between adults and children typical of childhood institutions, in which the children are the objects of the nursing, teaching and guiding of professional adults. In the 'new' spaces children can obtain more equal positions compared to those of adults. Although the activities of children and adults are in no way identical in these spaces, they are not in opposition to each other either, as they are in day care centres and schools. Hence, there are tendencies towards undermining the idea that childhood and adulthood are opposites, and towards some equalisation of children and adults as actors in different areas of society. The differences between age-segregated and age-integrated space can be summarised as follows.

Indicators of space	Age-segregated space	Age-integrated space
Access:	taken-for granted	restricted
Time and space regimes:	fixed time and place	flexibility, choice
Relation: children – adults:	adults ‘know’, children are objects of the work of professionals	status in principle alike, but age adjusted
Social control:	time and place	felt by adults as(partly) lacking
Place-making:	adjust, resist, redefine	lay claims on adult space, be ‘those who know’

New forms of spatial and temporal organisation also influence older ones. Consumer choice and flexibility have become central values in most parts of society, influencing childhood institutions as well, such as day care and school. An example of such tendencies is the increased freedom for children and their parents to choose the comprehensive school of their preference. It is also possible to apply for upper secondary education in any part of the country (The Education System of Finland) and it is not a matter of course that children attend the school which is nearest to their home. In large cities there is a supply of secondary schools specialised in arts, science or sports. To a smaller extent, day care institutions have also been influenced by the new trends.

Changes in the conditions of space and time in childhood have been accompanied by public and professional discourses expressing worries of a different kind. The ‘lone child’ – and the ‘shortage of adults’ – discourses contribute to childhood constructions in which the child’s dependence on adults and adults’ social control of children and childhood is reinforced, in which children and adults as opposites is upheld, and in which more space for professional intervention in childhood is being made.

### **Movement in public space**

The environment in which children move has changed noticeably during the last few decades. Greater mobility and dispersion of community structure have increased automobile traffic. The growth in automobile traffic is one of the most significant reasons for limiting children’s freedom of movement. Parents’ concern for their children’s safety has increased the transport of children to school and organised hobbies (Aarnikko et al., 2002: 11).

The opportunities for children to move around on their own have been circumscribed in previous decades. There has been a shift from children being able to move on their own towards movement organised by adults. However,

compared to other European countries, Finnish children, together with other Nordic children, still enjoy greater freedom of mobility. According to a study in the mid-1990s in three districts of varying sizes, practically all 8-9 year old school children go to and from school on their own, usually on foot. Finnish eight year olds have greater freedom than British and German children to cross roads, go to organised hobbies and to and from school, and considerably greater freedom to go by bike or bus and go out when it is dark outside. Girls' mobility is circumscribed more than boys' (Kyttä, 1997).

Since 1975, the number of children killed or injured by road traffic accidents has diminished steadily, as it has for other age groups as well. However, the reduction has been most distinct for children aged 0-9, and the least clear for people over 35 years (Liikenne ja matkailu). The figures tell not only about greater safety on the roads, but about the circumscribed possibility of movement as well. In almost the same time period of between 1980 and 2000, the volume of road transport vehicle-kilometres has almost doubled. Children's risks of being injured as pedestrians or cyclists are twice as great as for the whole population (Transport and Communications..., 2001, 32; Aarnikko et al., 2002: 23).

Mobile phones have brought a new dimension to the use of public space. Contrary to what is often believed, the mobile phone seems to promote face-to-face interaction and intensify interaction between people. Children and young people use the mobile phone primarily for staying in contact with friends and for arranging dates and appointments. The mobile phone promotes the use of leisure time outside the home and brings new elements into peer culture. In friendship networks children and young people exchange information and share experiences in real time, wherever the members of the network actually are physically. They share the feeling of living together by staying in intense contact through the use of the mobile phone. Physical, social and psychological distance, as well as spatial separation, are diminished. As a meeting place in itself, mobile communication is physically displaced. It also functions as a zone free from authorities and control, as a 'third place', a 'virtual plaza', where people can meet without temporal and spatial restrictions (Mäenpää, 2000: 135-136; Kopomaa, 2000: 20; 49).

### **Concluding remarks**

In this country study we have reported, fairly critically, on the state and visible trends in the 1990s of childhood in Finland – a wealthy Western nation with a highly developed comprehensive (Nordic) type of welfare state. We note that the economic re-framing of Finnish society since the early 1990s and its impact on the material and social conditions of the population, children included, was backed up, in Finland as well as elsewhere in the globalising world, by neo-

liberal arguments that demanded a down-sizing of the welfare state and argued for more ‘choice’ and freedom for individuals (which seemed always to refer to a curiously abstract, genderless and classless *adult*). We have asked in this section what these shifts have implied in terms of the social, economic, spatial and temporal, as well as in the discursive framing of the daily lives and welfare of children.

The 1990s started with great promises for a heightened public awareness of the social position of children and its betterment. Government documents, NGO actions, and (some) professionals were, for a few years at least, taking steps in the direction of implementing new social rights for the nation's children, following the articles of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. However, as the decade wore on, it became clear that neo-liberal ideologies in the economic discourse were gaining strength. Both in public discourse and in subsequent welfare policy-making, other priorities reigned and the emphasis shifted to economic factors in the provision and management of welfare for the population. Moreover, in the post-industrial ‘welfare society’, work and welfare continued to coexist, and therefore these priorities were mainly concerned with adult workers and citizens.

We note as well that a broad diversification of family types continued to develop in the 1990s, which had an impact on children, although research and other data hardly touched upon these changes. Linked to this, the family-related legislation of the 1990s was conspicuously silent about children and the implications for children of the proposed and accomplished legislative reforms. Individualism was institutionalised (cf. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) for adults by promoting the diversification of family forms, equalising adult relationships, moving from mothering and fathering to gender-neutral ‘parenting’ and generally leaving relationships between adults free for individuals to contract and to form. However, even if social policy and legislation were silent about children, words of worry were repeatedly spoken about the situation of children’s welfare. During the decade this talk multiplied itself into a number of interlinked discourses which we have named and analysed: the ‘lone child’ discourse, the ‘empty afternoons discourse’, the ‘shortage (of adults)’ discourse and – proposing a familist solution to the supposedly risk-filled state of Finnish children – the (moralising) parental ‘responsibilisation’ discourse. A result of the individualisation of social policy and the inclination of public discourse towards moralising familism has been, among others, that even the *direct* effects of poverty on children’s material well-being and choices are treated indirectly, from the viewpoint of the protective influence of good parenting.

We thus conclude that the main trend of the 1990s in legislation, social policy and public discourse can in fact be described as child-blindness, and even downright *adultism*: children were depicted and treated as victims of societal

circumstances and objects of adults, by parents, professionals and policy-makers alike.

In addition, most of the social research and other publicly produced information touching on children's lives and circumstances failed to bring children into a more prominent view. Their diverse everyday conditions, the spaces they inhabit and also intrude into, and both the new possibilities and the new risks inherent in the childhoods of the 1990s and onwards were not brought into the light. The continuing discursive emphasis on children's families – and especially the benefits for children of having proper, normal, stable nuclear families – massively leaves aside the multiplex material, social and cultural worlds in which children actually live and by which they are daily influenced – and influencing. The result of this familist partiality (coupled with normativity) is a misrecognition of actual lived childhoods and the condition of children's welfare.

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