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School as a source of child subjective
well-being in the framework
of children's rights: Perspectives
of children and young adults

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School as a source of child subjective well-being in the framework of children's rights: Perspectives of children and young adults

Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation bases on three original publications, which will be referred to in the dissertation by their respective Roman numbers.

Study I: Kutsar, D., Soo, K., Strózik, T., Strózik, D., Grigoraș, B., & Bălță-tescu, S. (2019). Does the realisation of children's rights determine good life in eight-year-olds' perspectives? A comparison of eight European countries. *Child Indicators Research*, 12, 161–183.

Study II: Kutsar, D., Soo, K., & Mandel, L.-M. (2019). Schools for well-being? Critical discussions with schoolchildren. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 11, 49–66.

Study III: Soo, K. & Kutsar, D. (2022). "Negative and positive experiences form the backbone of my understanding of myself and other people": School life recollections of young adults. *International journal of Emotional Education*, 14 (1), 53–68.

Related studies:

Beilmann, M., Soo, K., & Kutsar, D. (2022). Jagatud mure on pool muret: Rahulolu kaasõpilaste ja koolieluga koolikiusamist kogenud õpilaste seas [A problem shared is a problem halved: satisfaction with classmates and life as a student among the children who have experienced bullying at school]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri = Estonian Journal of Education*, *10*(1), 61–89.

Murakas, R., Soo, K., & Otstavel, S. (2019). Children's subjective well-being at school. In D. Kutsar & K. Raid (Eds.), *Children's subjective well-being in local and international perspectives* (pp. 67–84). Tallinn: Statistics Estonia.

Soo, K. & Kutsar, D. (2019a). Minu lapsepõlve 'õnn' ja 'õnnetus' seoses hariduse ja õppimisega: üliõpilaste mälestusi kooliajast [Luck and misfortune of my childhood: Students' memory talks about school]. *Mäetagused*, 74, 99–124.

Soo, K. & Kutsar, D. (2019b). Subjective well-being and realisation of rights in children's perception. In D. Kutsar & K. Raid (Eds.), *Children's subjective well-being in local and international perspectives* (pp. 51–66). Tallinn: Statistics Estonia.

Soo, K. & Kutsar, D. (2020). *Kuidas elad, Eestimaa laps? Ülevaade 8–12-aastaste laste subjektiivsest heaolust [How are you, the child in Estonia? An overview of the subjective well-being of children aged 8–12 years]*. Tartu Ülikool: Tartu.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

As the author of the dissertation, I have contributed to these studies as follows:

Study I: The first two authors made major contribution to the article, while I was fully responsible for the data analysis. In addition, I participated in interpreting the results and writing the manuscript.

Study II: I co-authored the theoretical framework of the article and contributed to the data analysis and writing of the article.

Study III: I co-authored the theoretical framework of the article. I was primarily responsible for analysing the data, interpreting the results and writing the article.

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INTRODUCTION:
THE AIM AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This doctoral study is about the relationships between children's rights and child subjective well-being. The study asks whether following categories of children's rights as translated into relational aspects of subjective well-being safeguard better lives in the perspectives of children, focusing on school environment as one of children's primary environments outside the home. The study tests quantitatively the realisation of children's rights using assessments of 8-year-old children and qualitatively in the case of 12-year-olds, as well as retrospectively of young adults.

The chosen topic is actual in both international and local contexts. Internationally, several authors (Kosher et al., 2014; Kutsar & Kasedaru, 2017; OECD, 2013; and others) have paid attention to the gap between academic success and the subjective well-being of schoolchildren. Visionary documents, such as OECD Education 2030 project (OECD, 2018) and the respective document in Estonia (Smart and active Estonia 2035; Valk 2019), go beyond learning success when pointing to the centrality of child agency and well-being in education. According to the policy glossary "Learning for well-being" (Kickbusch, 2012), children's well-being in education is a key component of sustainable development as well as our present and future; therefore, it is important societies invest in happy, secure and flourishing childhoods. Another confirmation of the actuality of this theme is the World Happiness Report 2015, where Layard and Hagell (2015) first came up with the term 'schools for well-being'.

The originality of the present study lies in the following: (1) the conceptual framework that translates the main categories of rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into measurable items of subjective well-being and puts them in relation to a general assessment of one's own life as an indicator of subjective well-being; (2) generational perspective[1] through testing the 'work-ability' of the conceptual model; and (3) demonstration of persistence of school experiences, both good and bad, in young adults' recollections.

Acquiring education is an essential task in children's lives that occupies a substantial amount of time from childhood on. The CRC considers every child to have a right to education and well-being at school (Kosher et al., 2014). Education aims to develop children's knowledge, skills, values and norms of behaviour, enabling them to become dignified, self-respecting, creative and responsible citizens (Republic of Estonia Education Act, 2020). Shamgar-Handelman (1994) argues that the education system attempts to make children desirable future adults

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[1] 'Generation' in this doctoral thesis denotes more than just an age group in the life course. It refers to a relational social form that structures social relations and positions between members of society like other similar social constructs, such as gender, class and ethnicity (see Alanen, 2014). Children and young adults can be seen as categories (or positions) in the existing socially created generational structure (*ibid.*).

through schooling, replacing existing generations by transmitting "state-selected information, as well as values and norms" (p. 262). Kutsar and Kasearu (2017) critically note that the education system has occupied children as agents of knowledge production, making them responsible for the "goodness" of society in the future (p. 141). Specifically, education is a cornerstone of social development and economic prosperity in society (Woessmann, 2016) and an indicator for comparing countries' academic achievements (including schools and children). However, such a future-oriented approach to children can easily overlook their well-being, worries and joys at the time of attending school.

Layard and Hagell (2015) criticise schools in some countries have become exam factories because they over-emphasise academic success and pay less attention to children's well-being. The authors use the concept of *school for well-being,* referring to a school where a supportive and safe learning environment is considered most important, and children, teachers and parents jointly contribute to overall well-being. Thus, providing formal education is not only a matter of future achievements, but also the quality of students' life during school age. As stated in the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic Schools (Põhikooli …, 2018), the learning environment encompasses an intellectual, social and physical setting. The school should be a model of a democratic society that prioritises human rights and equal treatment, where trustful and friendly relations are crucial, assistance is provided in the case of learning difficulties and personal concerns, and students are encouraged to express their views (*ibid*.).

On a global scale, education in Estonia is of good quality. Based on the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test (OECD, 2019a), students in Estonia are academically successful, ranking at the top in reading, mathematics and science, and socioeconomic background affecting students' learning outcomes less than in most other OECD countries. However, competitive education and outstanding academic achievements do not automatically mean satisfaction with school experiences and high subjective well-being. For example, children in Estonia, together with children in Finland and South Korea, scored high on the PISA test, but assessed low on their school-related happiness. The opposite occurred with children from countries with relatively modest scores on the test (e.g., Albania and Peru) (OECD, 2013). Children in Estonia differentiate from children from many other countries in feeling pressured by schoolwork and experiencing a high rate of bullying (Inchley et al., 2016; Rees & Main, 2015).

In the children's responses, a decline in estimates of well-being is expected with age. Data from the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB; also known as Children's Worlds study) confirmed this evidence – younger children reported higher levels of school liking than older ones (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017). The decline was sharper for the former socialist countries, particularly Estonia. The proportion of students who consider their teachers as caring and helpful decreases with age as well. For instance, only one in four 12-year-old students in Estonia completely agree that teachers care about and listen to them, and 38% are

convinced that teachers help them if they have a problem at school (Soo & Kutsar, 2020). Among 8-year-olds, these shares are almost twice as high.

Compared to students, similar issues reveal positive bias in teachers' responses. Almost all teachers (97–98%) in Estonia who participated in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) believe that students' well-being is important at school, students receive extra help when needed and teachers and pupils usually get along well (Taimalu et al., 2020). In addition, 93% of teachers in this study agree that most teachers are interested in students' opinions. However, the latter result is not in line with the feedback of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to Estonia disapproving the lack of consideration of children's views in education (Lundy, 2012).

Despite formal education being accessible for all children in Estonia as a children's right, daily life seems not so pleasant for too many children. Children's school experiences collide with the views and expectations of adults because of the difference in social positions that lead to various life experiences and assessments. Still, they should act jointly as co-agents in the school environment. Conventions, regulations and curricula follow a 'top-down' approach, meaning that adults create the rights, norms and rules for children. Using the bottom-up approach, i.e., asking children about their opinions and experiences as to whether these regulations work, may lead to surprising or unexpected evidence for adults.

In this doctoral thesis, I make insights into the subjective well-being of children in the school environment. I employ the generational approach. First, I conceptualise and operationalise the subjective well-being of schoolchildren by translating children's rights in the CRC into items of subjective well-being (**Study I**). Secondly, I test my approach among 8-year-olds who have recently started school (**Study I**) and 12-year-olds with a longer school experience (**Study II**). As the family plays an important role in supporting a child's attendance at school, I also briefly analyse the children's assessments of home as a source of well-being, particularly in the case of younger children. Thirdly, I explore young adults' retrospective narratives of their experiences of school time (**Study III**). The inclusion of young adults in the analysis seeks to discover how persistent the aspects influencing well-being at school are in the view of the members of two different generations. The latter is used to seek confirmation about the importance of following children's rights in the school environment. Moreover, this also offers evidence to explain the value of the schools for well-being approach besides gaining the high study outcomes in education.

The thesis aims to explore the aspects that create subjective well-being at school in the framework of the realisation of children's rights from the perspective of children and, retrospectively, of young adults. Using data from children and young adults, I look at whether patterns of subjective well-being operationalised from the rights' framework and their effects persist across generations and time. To reach this goal, I apply mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches and present and retrospective assessments.

The current doctoral thesis synthesises three original studies. It sets the following objectives and seeks answers to the respective research questions:

Objective 1: To operationalise child subjective well-being in the children's rights framework and explore reflections of rights realisation in children's perceptions of a good life (focusing on opinions of children in Estonia; a quantitative study with a top-down design in the form of an adult-led questionnaire). (**Study I**)

> Research questions (RQ 1): To what extent have three types of children's rights (provision, protection and participation) and the principle of non-discrimination been realised in 8-year-old children's everyday lives? What is the relation between the realisation of rights and the perception of having a good life?

Objective 2: To investigate in-depth aspects of the school domain that increase or decrease subjective well-being at school among 12-year-old children from their perspectives (a qualitative study with children in Estonia that offers insights into children's understandings and views about school atmosphere through a 'bottom-up' children's led approach). (**Study II**)

> Research questions (RQ 2): How do children understand 'well-being' as a term in general and in school settings? What are the aspects of the social, academic and physical dimensions of school climate that create positive and negative feelings according to children? What are the roles of teachers and other students in the creation of students' subjective well-being at school?

Objective 3: To estimate aspects of the school domain that have increased or decreased subjective well-being at school in the retrospections of young adults (a qualitative study among young adults aiming to assess the persistence of school experiences in generational perspectives with a 'bottom-up' young adults' led approach). (**Study III**)

> Research questions (RQ 3): What people and situations concerning school attendance do young adults recall and relate to positive and negative feelings? How do young adults (re)construct the impacts of school experiences on their lives and well-being?

The structure of the introductory article is the following. In the theoretical framework, I introduce the theories of sociology of childhood, provide an overview of definitions and the multilevel approach to well-being, and present children's rights as a framework for understanding well-being. I then introduce the concept of school climate and its dimensions as an important aspect affecting child well-being. The second chapter is dedicated to methodological and ethical considerations and describes the data used in the original studies. In the third chapter, I describe the main findings of each study. The introductory article ends with a discussion and concluding remarks with recommendations and a summary in Estonian.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Theorising childhood

Childhood as a generational marker refers to the early years of human life, a temporary period for children but a permanent social category (Corsaro, 2011). Concepts of child and childhood have varied over time based on social, cultural and historical factors and processes (Ariès, 1979). According to the legal definition of child in the CRC, childhood studies mostly cover individuals under 18 years of age. Still, although this is a long period in the span of an individual's life, children remained invisible in the social sciences, including sociology, for a long time. Since the 1920s, children began to appear in the sociological literature with a focus mostly on child development, socialisation and problem behaviour (Johnson, 2001). Decades later, the range of themes extended to child abuse and intervention.

The early childhood studies were largely brought about by developmental psychological ideas depicting children as immature, dependent, irrational and still "unfinished" objects in need of socialisation and cultural integration by parents and other social forces (James, 2011; James & Prout, 2015). In addition, they were considered innocent persons in need of protection from dangers of adult society and preparation for the next stages of life. Children were seen as future adults, not the current but the next generation, thus paradoxically not yet the citizens of society (Ben-Arieh, 2008; Qvortrup, 2009). In sum, childhood was understood as a biologically defined period of human becoming, leaving children and their lives *here and now* behind.

In the 1980s, a number of works appeared criticising the dominant notion of the child as a passive and immature person whose voice was muted in research, instead prevailed paternalistic and institution-centred views of adults (Brady, Lowe, & Lauitzen, 2015; Sandin, 2014). More attention was paid to children's activities, experiences and skills, leading to a paradigm shift in the social sciences and the birth of a new sub-discipline in sociology. The new sociology of childhood emphasises that childhood is a social construction (James & Prout, 2015), a set of socially, historically, culturally and politically constructed social relations that has been institutionalised for the younger members of societies (Alanen, 2014).

Childhood is not a universal phenomenon, always and everywhere the same, but is plural and dependent on time and space. According to Qvortrup (2011, 1994), childhood can be defined as a permanent structural form in economy and society, although its members are constantly changing, and is interrelated to other variables such as gender, age groups, ethnicity, and social class. Childhood is not static but changing and is linked with social processes and macro-level entities, including changes in educational and family institutions.

Beside the former future-oriented approach, a new understanding of children emerged, portraying them as active and competent social actors with their own rights (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 2015; Qvortrup, 1994).

External factors affect children's lives, but children themselves also perform as influencers and creators of their childhoods. Moreover, children participate in constructing and determining their and others' lives and the societies around them, being active subjects in social structures and processes (Alanen, 2014; James & Prout, 2015). Children are involved in social interaction with family, friends and school on a daily basis. They have their own thoughts, expectations, feelings and opinions about themselves and things related to significant others, close environments and society. In short, the new sociology of childhood conceptualises children as human beings and holders of agency, a notion that had little room in the previous approach (James, 2011).

Nowadays, the sociology of childhood recognises both concepts of the child: human becoming and human being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). It is also argued that all humans are both being and becoming in parallel (Uprichard, 2008), individuals who are constantly changing and developing in relation to their life experiences and social environments that influence their well-being at present and in the future. Uprichard (2008) claims that one of these views does not deny the importance of the other but that they are complementary. The UNICEF's (2020) view of a good childhood – which means children having positive experiences of childhood and the prospect of a good future – also brings both approaches together. A child's quality of life (e.g., living in poverty, exposure to violence, or being raised with care and support), usually understood as current well-being, may be a topic for discussion in a forward-looking context: negative experiences may reduce children's prospects and positive ones increase them, i.e., reveal negative or positive outcomes in adulthood. Furthermore, children as future adults are already creating the coming society. The better the lives of children now, we may assume, the more cohesive and stronger society will be in the future.

However, an exclusive focus on an outcome-oriented approach to the well-becoming of children may run the risk of neglecting children's current life situations, postponing their "good lives" and pushing them into the frame of the expectations of successful adulthood as defined by adults (Ben-Arieh, 2008; Qvortrup, 2009). The CRC states that children's immediate well-being is essential in its own right. Qvortrup (2011, 2005) alleges that developments in knowledge and economics have led to the institutionalisation of childhood – children spend more time in various regulated institutions (including day care, school, or extra-curricular education) working for their well-being (often rather for well-becoming) and less time with their families. Due to scholarisation, even early childhood is now more planned, and children's play and creativity have become a part of the (pre-school) curriculum (Qvortrup, 2005). However, depending on the extent to which the curricula are oriented to teacher-directed activities and children's achievements, there may be a risk of limiting the development of children's spontaneity, sense of responsibility and agency (Dahlberg, 2011; Miller & Almon, 2009).

1.1.1. Child agency

Agency is a key concept in the new sociology of childhood, but its meaning in sociology and social sciences has remained controversial. In its Position Paper "The Future Education Skills; Education 2030", OECD (2018) proposes the need to extend the goals of education to individual and collective well-being and the development of learner agency. This document defines agency as a sense of responsibility to participate in the world, the ability to set goals and find means to achieve them and influence people, events and circumstances for the better. Greene and Nixon (2020) highlight agency as not a fixed and personal property that a person inherently possesses but a dynamic and multidimensional feature of the engagement of human beings that is exercised relationally. Mostly focusing on the socialisation process in family, Kuczynski and De Mol (2015) argue in their social relational theory that children and parents interact as human agents, influencing each other bidirectionally – they interpret and construct each other's behaviours and resist, negotiate, and adapt each other's perspectives. A child's agency forms and is expressed in such interdependent albeit asymmetric relationships.

According to Kuczynski and De Mol (2015), agency combines three aspects. The first, *autonomy*, refers to a person's inherent motive for self-preservation and self-determination, which is related to the need for effectiveness in interactions (co-actions), caring for and being cared for by others, without allowing one's thoughts and actions to be externally affected. The second component of agency is *construction,* a person's ability to interpret their own and others' co-actions and create new meanings from the experiences (*ibid.*). This process contains both emotions and cognitions. Children do not passively absorb information from their surroundings or copy adults' behaviour and thoughts, but interpret, construct and internalise the messages that are meaningful for them. Children's agency as a construction is revealed, for instance, in making sense of family conflicts which can lead to self-blame, compliance and suppression of agency, or on the contrary, negotiation, attempt to solve the situation and co-agency (see Notko & Sevón, 2018). Thus, to understand the amount of agency children express, it is relevant to pay attention to what meanings children give to daily activities (Stoecklin, 2012) and how they perceive themselves in these interactions.

The third aspect of agency is to be active in different environments (incl. at home and school) with the ability to intervene and influence the processes (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). It embraces intentional, strategic and goal-oriented *actions*. Here, a child's agency may manifest, for example, in resistance to unwelcome parental demands using overt or covert strategies (Kuczynski, Pitman, & Twigger, 2018), offering protection to a victim in case of school bullying, or active participation in school-related decision-making, school events and competitions with high aspirations.

Kuczynski's and De Mol's perspective (2015) is in line with Corsaro's theory of interpretative reproduction. Corsaro's (2014, 2011) main premise is that children are social agents who collectively participate in the reproduction of childhood

and society and contribute to their own well-being. Using the term *interpretative*, he argues that "children create and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively taking or appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns" (Corsaro, 2011: 20–21). Reproduction embraces the notion that children are not only internalising culture but also actively contributing to, expanding and changing both their own culture and that of adults. Children as active agents challenge, resist, negotiate, improvise, and create social life. However, at the same time, children are members of a subordinated social group, and their agency is constrained by the existing social structure and limited social, cultural, physical and economic power (Johnson, 2001).

The understanding of children's agency, children's status and the moral and political ideas about what kind of agency adults consider appropriate for children in a particular cultural context are closely linked (Bordonaro, 2012). Concerning education, Bordonaro (2012) alleges that we tend to consider daily routine school attendance as a proper activity for children and youth and do not regard it as the outcome of a limited agency. School settings are highly institutionalised; rooms, activities and curricula are adult-directed. Although the ultimate purpose of education is to make a student an agentic and autonomous actor, the pedagogical relationship between a child and a teacher always involves some forms of coercion by adults (referred to as 'the paradox of pedagogy', see: Rainio & Hilppö, 2017: p. 87). The authority of teachers and the social and moral order of the school culture frames children's opportunity to express their agency (Sirkko, Kyrönlampi, & Puroila, 2019). However, the promotion of children's agency as a principle and its realisation in practice may not always coincide.

Thus, enabling children's agency in education (but also elsewhere) relies on relationships with parents, peers, teachers, and the community, so-called "co-agency" that is "the interactive, mutually supportive relationships that help learners to progress towards their valued goals" (OECD, 2018: 4). Glăveanu (2015) defines co-agency as a relational process between people and their social and material environments operating as a cyclical movement between intentionality, (re)action, and reflexivity. In the frame of interrelation, an actor (re)formulates their intentions or goals and acts or reacts, simultaneously creating changes within themselves and the environment. Reflexivity refers, in Glăveanu's theory, to the ability to adopt new views on one's action and its outcomes and shape one's intention and coming course of action.

In sum, agency is a shared phenomenon; people not only express their agency but also 'participate' in the agency of other people (Glăveanu, 2015). Children's agency is related to social institutions, wider socio-cultural context, and material resources (Brady, Lowe, & Lauritzen, 2015; Greene and Nixon, 2020), expressed not only in actions but also in thoughts, plans, feelings, evaluations, and reflections. The capacity to perform agency develops with age, but relational and cultural conditions influence the experience and valuation of it above all. Agency is a close concept to the notion of participation stipulated in the CRC (Sirkko, Kyrönlampi, & Puroila, 2019) and has a connection with child well-being.

1.2. Diverse understandings of child well-being

1.2.1. From child welfare to well-being

The new sociology of childhood and the spread of a broader notion of children have played an important role in understanding and evaluating child well-being. The previously dominant approach to child welfare, which focused more on children needing intervention and protection from harm and the provision of services, viewed children as individuals becoming mature and productive adults, ignoring their agency (Sandin, 2014). In the 1960s, the interdisciplinary movement of social indicators began with the growing interest in assessing people's living conditions and quality of life (Casas, 2011). The collection of child-related indicators sprung forth a few decades later, bringing a conceptually and methodologically different perspective beside child welfare. Three developments initiated and drove this change: the elaboration of a new sociology of childhood, the normative concept of children's rights, and the proposal of ecological theories of child development (Ben-Arieh, 2010). The developmental path that Estonia has gone through as well (Kutsar, 2020), expresses a shift from the earlier child well-being indicators concentrating on objective aspects, mainly measuring survival and negative issues of children's lives, to the later indicators emphasising positive aspects and subjective views of children (Ben-Arieh, 2010, 2008).

So far, there is no single definition of well-being. It can be understood as quality of life, including elements such as health, social cohesion, active citizenship, education, and security in addition to material resources (OECD, 2018), or defined by the state of being happy and prosperous, by self-fulfilment, positive functioning, and a balance of pleasure and pain (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011). Although well-being has some overlap with in-the-moment feelings and experiences, it is an ongoing process (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014).

Well-being exists in both subjective and objective dimensions (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012; UNICEF, 2020). Objective well-being refers to people's material living conditions and quality of life, including, for example, health state, job opportunities, safety, socioeconomic development (Voukelatou et al., 2021), and educational achievement (UNICEF, 2020). Here a child is an object rather than a subject. Objective well-being covers children's risk and protective factors concerning health and development, such as rate of immunisation and overweight, school enrolment and reading skills, child poverty and living in a single-parent family (Axford, Jodrell, & Hobbs, 2014). However, subjective well-being, that is much more than simple counting children, pays attention to the subjects' perceptions and assessments of their lives (*ibid*.).

Objective and subjective dimensions of well-being are complementary, although they may indicate conflicting results or have some overlap (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Casas, 2011). For example, a child living at home with poor material conditions but with warm and close relationships between family members could be more satisfied with their life than a child with an affluent family but a lack of closeness and support. Moreover, objective information about children, often

drawn from administrative data sources created by adults, cannot describe children's perceptions and evaluations of a relevant phenomenon.

As this dissertation aims to discover the sources of children's subjective well-being, I introduce the meanings and components of subjective well-being in the next section.

1.2.2. Subjective well-being: hedonistic and eudaimonic approaches

There is an extensive debate in the scientific literature around how to conceptualise subjective well-being. The most well-known approach to well-being was proposed by Diener (2006, 1984), a leading researcher in this area. To Diener subjective well-being is "*an umbrella term for the different valuations people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which they live*" (2006, p. 153). It comprises the presence of pleasant affect and lack of unpleasant affect as well as the assessment of one's own life; in other words, subjective well-being is subdivided into emotional and cognitive dimensions.

Emotional well-being is measured by particular feelings or emotional states experienced during a certain period (Mackie & Smith, 2015). It reflects people's reactions to their lives, events or others and indicates whether they perceive their lives as proceeding in a desirable way or not (Diener, 2006). Emotional well-being forms from positive affect, like happiness, joy and contentment, and negative affect, such as fear, sadness, anxiety and anger. Positive and negative affect are negatively interrelated (Suar et al., 2019); however, they do not constitute the endpoints of a continuum. The absence of negative emotions does not mean that a person certainly feels positive ones. Gere and Schimmack (2011) argued that an event might produce both negative and positive feelings and that a person can experience a high level of positive emotions and a high or low level of negative emotions during a certain time. Estonian data from the Children's Worlds survey illustrate this pattern well. In 2018, 41% of 12-year-olds predominantly reported positive and very few negative feelings in the last two weeks (Soo & Kutsar, 2020). About the same share were children who perceived themselves as quite happy, calm and energetic but bored and stressed as well. However, 15% of children felt more negative than positive emotions.

The cognitive part of subjective well-being captures reflective appraisals that people make of their lives as a whole or of some specific domains of life, such as family, school, health, friends, and leisure (Diener, 2006). Life evaluation based on how people remember their experiences can differ from how they actually experienced these things (Kahneman et al., 1999, cf. Mackie & Smith, 2015). Judgement of one's life is a complex process, which is a function of perceived discrepancies between present and past experiences, comparison of oneself with others, and comparison of circumstances of one's real life with a self-constructed standard rather than externally imposed objective criteria (Davern, Cummins, &

Stokes, 2007; Pavot & Diener, 2009). Cognitive well-being can be measured by using multi- or single-item context-free instruments (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your life in general?", "I have a good life") (Aymerich & Casas, 2020) or measurements that provide a domain-specific profile of well-being (e.g., satisfaction with family, friends or school) (Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003). Overall cognitive judgements of one's life are usually rated higher than context-specific evaluations. For instance, the vast majority of 12-year-olds (73%) in Estonia gave the maximum estimates of their overall life satisfaction, but only one-fifth were totally satisfied with their lives as students and with classmates (Soo & Kutsar, 2020).

The above-described approach to well-being belongs to a hedonic tradition of aiming to obtain pleasure and happiness and avoid pain (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Despite criticisms for ignoring the aspect of positive functioning, the hedonic perspective is widely applied in the academic field (Ryff, 1989). The alternative is an eudaimonic tradition (following the Greek notion of eudaimonia) that lies in fulfilment of one's potentials, goal orientation, and pursuit of virtue (Diener et al., 2010; Mackie & Smith 2015; Ryff, 1989; Vittersø, 2016). Eudaimonic well-being (also called psychological well-being) has been variously conceptualised and is a relatively under-developed aspect of studies on children's well-being (Nahkur & Casas, 2021; Rees, 2017).

In their self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci (2001) identified three basic psychological needs – *autonomy, competence and relatedness* – that they argued to constitute the prerequisites for well-being. The model of psychological well-being proposed by Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Singer (1996) includes six dimensions, partly similar to those of Ryan and Deci (2001). The first, *self-acceptance,* is a central characteristic of positive functioning and mental health involving possessing positive self-regard while being aware of and accepting one's shortcomings. The second dimension comprises having *warm, supportive, and trustful relationships with others*, capable of strong empathy and affection. *Autonomy* refers to being independent, self-determined, and able to resist social pressure. An autonomous person can make important decisions on their own. The fourth dimension, *environmental mastery,* denotes competence in controlling and modifying one's environment (e.g., surrounding opportunities, everyday affairs) to meet personal needs and values. *Purpose in life* refers to having meaning in life and a sense of direction. The last dimension, *personal growth,* includes feelings of continued development and self-realisation with an openness to new experiences and becoming more effective. Shortly, a person with high eudaimonia is self-confident, competent, interested in various activities, purposeful and optimistic. International studies have indicated the relatively modest level of psychological well-being among children in Estonia in cross-national comparisons (see OECD, 2019b; Rees et al., 2020). For example, in the PISA test, children in Estonia reported a lower sense of meaning in life and self-efficacy compared to the average of OECD countries (OECD, 2019b).

Taken together, hedonic and eudaimonic components of well-being are strongly correlated and can be understood as an integrated model (Strelhow, Sarriera, &

Casas, 2020; Suar et al., 2019). Thus, a child with high well-being in the frame of these concepts can be portrayed as somebody satisfied with their relationships at home and school, frequently cheerful and enthusiastic and seldom sad and worried, and self-respecting, independent and active setting goals in their life.

Subjective well-being is usually stable and positive. Assessments of one's life and emotions can fluctuate slightly in the short term, depending on the events experienced, but across time, they tend to be persistent (Diener, 1994; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). For example, a good grade at school can increase perception of well-being, but a quarrel with a friend diminishes it; however, after a while, the former level of well-being will be restored. According to the theory of subjective well-being homeostasis, neurological and psychological processes actively control and preserve the level of well-being, similarly to the maintenance of body temperature (Cummins, 2014; 2010). Each individual has a relatively steady baseline level of well-being that is generally quite positive. Cummins (2014) argues that homeostatic processes seek to keep well-being within a normal range from the set point. When facing adverse challenges, the level of subjective well-being falls below the set point, but after the normalisation of circumstances, the baseline is re-established.

In general, the current state of well-being is less likely to affect the long-term well-being level. However, in the case of persistent stressful life events, such as poverty, domestic violence or emotional negligence, the homeostatic system cannot maintain the baseline and may result in a substantial decline in well-being and an increase in mental health problems (Casas, 2019; Cummins, 2010). It can be assumed that a child who experiences negative events at school (e.g., bullying or unfair treatment by teachers) and does not perceive care and support at home may feel overwhelmingly negative emotions, be dissatisfied with their life, undervalue themself, and set modest goals.

1.3. Setting the scene

1.3.1. The multilevel approach to child well-being

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1996), which explains child development as a complex process affected by interrelated systems of the surrounding environments, is a basis for many further elaborations and modifications, including the multilevel approach to child well-being proposed by UNICEF (2020). The multilevel model of well-being sees the child in the middle of concentric spheres which directly or indirectly affect their objective and subjective well-being (UNICEF, 2020). The most immediate spheres (or microsystem according to Bronfenbrenner), the so-called *world of the child*, include activities (e.g., playing and learning) and relationships in which the child directly participates at home, at school and among friends. *The world around the child* consists of resources (e.g., the child's household economic conditions, school quality, teachers' remuneration and training) and networks. The latter refers to the connections between people

around and influencing the child that are not immediately experienced, including, for example, communications between parents and teachers or the school experiences of older siblings (UNICEF, 2020). *The world at large* is a more distal sphere affecting child well-being indirectly (*ibid*.). It embraces wider economic, social and environmental factors of society and policies such as social and educational policies and curricula. The multilevel approach shows that personal well-being is not an individual project but a social one (see Fattore & Mason, 2017; Street, 2021). The well-being of persons is related to the well-being of their relationships and the community in which they live (Prilleltensky, 2005). Using the concept of relational well-being, White (2017) claims that well-being emerges through the dynamic interplay of personal, social and environmental structure and processes.

In the current dissertation, I follow the idea that child well-being is formed as a result of interactions with other people and between different spheres. However, the child's immediate environments – the world of the child and the world around the child – play a particularly important role in this process. In addition, I use the CRC to offer a normative framework to measure child well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2010). In the following, I introduce the principles and rights of the CRC and relate them to the notion of well-being.

1.3.2. Children's rights framework of well-being

The Convention on the Rights of the Child or CRC (United Nations, 1989), passed by the UN General Assembly in 1989 (resolution 44/25), is globally the most ratified international convention. The CRC defines a wide range of children's rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. All countries that have ratified the convention – including Estonia, which ratified the CRC on 21 October 1991 (OHCHR) – are obliged to respect, promote and protect the children's rights through the implementation of standards and principles described therein (Verhellen, 2015).

The CRC recognises that children are active, autonomous and independent subjects competent enough to express their views in accordance with their development, on the one hand, and dependant and growing persons in need of protection, on the other (Reynaert et al., 2015; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Helwig, 2014; Sandin, 2014). Thus, children can be autonomous and dependent in parallel. The children's rights framework unifies both understandings of the child: the child as a human being here and now and the child as "becoming", with the rights to develop and realise their potential (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014).

The convention is guided by four basic principles: the best interests of the child; the child's right to life and development; respect for the views of the child; and non-discrimination, which prohibits unequal treatment based on the child's views, sex, ethnic or social origin or any other characteristics of their background (Reynaert et al., 2015). The principle of equality and non-discrimination means that all children should be treated with respect and dignity. These four principles

constitute the general philosophical framework for the convention and the standards for well-being and a child-friendly society.

The rights in the CRC can be differentiated into three interdependent and indivisible types, the so-called 3*P*s: provision, protection and participation (Verhellen, 2015). Provision rights include children's right to food, clothing and appropriate living conditions, emotional support, health and healthcare, and education (e.g., see Articles 7, 24, 27, and 28 in the CRC). The second category addresses children's special needs and vulnerability compared to adults (*ibid*.), embracing rights to be protected from violence, neglect, injury, and sexual and economic exploitation that reduces human dignity (e.g., Articles 19, 32 and 34). Rights to protection refer to children's rights to live without harsh punishment and maltreatment and feel safe at home, school or elsewhere. In addition to abuse prevention, the convention also provides for the right to intervention and (psychological) assistance and support in case of abuse (e.g., Article 39).

Rights to protection and provision are sometimes dealt with together as one broad category, nurturance rights, which refers to the obligation of others in society (e.g., parents, school staff) to provide for and safeguard children's emotional, psychological and physical welfare (Helwig & Turiel, 2017; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Helwig, 2014). Providing and guaranteeing certain resources and services and caring and respectful treatment by society and important others can ensure children's healthy development. For example, warm, secure, and involved parenting is supposed to facilitate children's feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Baumrind, 2005; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997), the basic needs proposed in the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

However, children are not passive recipients of parental care and consumers of goods and educational opportunities. They actively communicate and negotiate their interests, needs and wishes, thereby exercising their agency. According to the understanding of the convention, children are open to changes in society and are active influencers in their lives. Children's agency is most evident in the third type of right. Children's participation right (also named self-determination rights) – one of the most innovative parts of the CRC – refers to rights to act and participate in society (Ruck et al., 2014; Verhellen, 2015). The participation right is expressed in children's freedom to control, make decisions on and have a say about matters that affect them, including the right to express their own views and have them taken seriously in accordance with age and maturity (Article 12), the right to privacy and the right to choose one's friends and recreational activities.

Emerson and Lloyd (2017) consider adults to play an important role in realising children's participation rights. In particular, the contribution of adults is not limited to listening to and respecting children's opinions but also providing information and encouraging and assisting children in forming and expressing these opinions. Thus, the fulfilment of participation right involves much more than just listening to a child. According to Lansdown (2010), higher levels of children's participation manifest in their collaborative engagement at any stage of the decision-making process and in child-led participation in which adults act as facilitators providing support and advice.

Children's participation is not only important by itself, but it is also essential for the realisation of other rights (Ben-Arieh & Tarshish, 2017) – for example, making decisions on educational opportunities or informing adults about unfair and abusive experiences to obtain protection and assistance. Moreover, ensuring children's participation rights has several developmental outcomes. Taking children's views and experiences into account at home, school and other settings may give children a sense of being important and respected, strengthen their self-confidence, develop social and cognitive skills and help to establish new friendships (Bjerke, 2011; Kränzl-Nagl & Zartler, 2010; Lansdown et al., 2014; Pećnik et al., 2016). Studies have confirmed that children who report greater knowledge of their rights and perception that, in their country, adults respect children's rights are more likely to be satisfied with their lives than those children who note the opposite (Casas, González-Carrasco, & Luna, 2018; Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017).

In the thesis, I rely on the 3*P*s classification (provision, protection and participation) and the general principle of non-discrimination phrased in the CRC as a normative framework for studying sources of subjective well-being of children, particularly in the school setting. To simplify wording, I will mention these three types of rights and the principle of non-discrimination using the umbrella term 'categories of children's rights'.

1.3.3. School climate – an important source of well-being in children's lives

Research on children's subjective well-being has shown that children's main sources of well-being are embedded in their direct environments – at home and at school – that, unlike for adults, do not relate to national wealth but rather to children's subjective assessments of relationships with family members, teachers and friends (Bradshaw & Rees, 2017; Lee & Yoo, 2015). In this thesis, I focus primarily on the school environment as an important world of the child according to the multilevel approach to well-being (UNICEF, 2020), but I also glance at family and friends (often schoolmates) as persons who contribute to shaping child well-being and school experiences.

The approach to school climate, which embraces a wide range of characteristics related to the school experience, also relies on the multilevel model, including school-related factors from closer and more distant worlds of the child. The school climate is a widely discussed concept in research on children's school lives and has been linked not only to children's educational performance and school outcomes but also to their well-being. School climate "is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organisational structures" (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 5). A positive climate promotes child development and learning essential for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society. Such a climate includes norms and values that support children being engaged, respected and feeling emotionally, socially and physi-

cally safe (*ibid*). School climate is more than individual experience or a simple academic learning environment – it is a relational phenomenon including a range of internal and external factors that form individual and collective experiences of school life that we pay attention to, interpret, and remember as a result of our internal experiences (e.g., fears and hope) and interactions with students, teachers and parents (Cohen et al., 2009). Thus, students, teachers, school authorities and families act as co-agents in shaping school experiences that can be perceived more positively or negatively. School climate is a multidimensional construct that consists of three to five larger areas in the visions of different authors (Cohen et al., 2009; Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). In this dissertation, I use three divisions of school climate – academic, social and physical dimensions – by combining and modifying different approaches. These dimensions and their components partly overlap and affect each other.

Academic dimension of school climate

The academic dimension of school climate consists of four components. *Quality of instruction* is an important component of the academic dimension of school climate, a combination of the application of diverse and inclusive teaching methods, use of exciting learning materials, students' receipt of help when needed, valuation of their participation and creativity, and learning being linked to "real life" (Cohen et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016). Good instructional practice consists of high expectations for students' achievement, provision of feedback, and recognition and rewarding of students. *Social, emotional, and ethical education* given by teachers, intentionally or as a part of curricula or otherwise, is also important (Thapa et al., 2013) because it is related to developing social and emotional skills, prosocial behaviour, supporting mental health and even academic performance (Cefai et al., 2018). Wang and Degol (2016) add aspects of school life as contextual factors, such as *leadership* (school principals' and administration's support for teachers, communication of school's vision) and *professional development* (programmes for improvement of teaching strategies and curriculum design, assessment of teaching practices).

A positive academic climate is conducive to students' learning abilities and educational achievements (Wang & Degol, 2016). In the PISA test (OECD, 2019b), students scored higher in reading when they considered their teacher more enthusiastic and interested in the subject. Teachers' expectations for students learning are associated with students' academic performance as well. Studies have shown (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Szumski & Karwowski, 2019) that teachers can express higher expectations for some children (e.g., high-achieving students, non-stereotyped ethnic groups) and lower expectations for others (low-achievers, children with stereotyped ethnic background), thereby increasing the gap in learning outcomes between groups. Teaching and learning processes intertwine with relational aspects of school climate. Teachers' interactions (e.g., communication of their expectations) can directly affect students' engagement in the classroom (Thapa et al., 2013). Reeve and Tseng (2011) detected a path from students'

perception of autonomy, competence, and relatedness at school to better academic achievement at the end of the semester. This path is mediated by children's behavioural (on-task attention and efforts), emotional (interest and joy in learning), cognitive (use of sophisticated learning strategies, active self-regulation) and agentic engagement during learning activities. The authors defined the latter notion as students' intentional, proactive and constructive acts to improve and enrich the content and conditions of learning by asking questions and seeking explanations, expressing preferences and making recommendations on themes and the teaching process. Moreover, students' agentic engagement works in a dialectical way: teachers' autonomy, supportiveness and motivating style increase the agency and engagement of students in class, which in turn can lead to a change in teachers' motivation style (*ibid.*).

Social dimension of school climate

The social dimension of school climate refers to the quality of interaction among and between students, teachers, school staff, and parents (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015), usually identified by four components. First, *positive interpersonal relationships*, described as mutual feelings of support, trust and caring (Wang & Degol, 2016), are pivotal in shaping school climate. In the learning context, 'relationship' refers to much more than interpersonal communication between teachers and students – it constitutes an essential frame for instructional interactions, embracing, for instance, introducing educational values, motivating engagement in learning, reducing task-related anxiety, and listening to and understanding students (Murray-Harvey, 2010). Second, *fair treatment* of students by teachers and staff, as well as respect regardless of individual differences or cultural background, is another important aspect of a positive social atmosphere at school (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Wang & Degol, 2016). The third component of the social dimension is *participation,* that means shared contribution to decision-making, common academic planning possibilities, cooperative learning (Cohen et al., 2009; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015), and children's opportunity to express their views and be heard and taken seriously.

Teachers demonstrate how they care about students when they listen to them, encourage their efforts, and treat them fairly and with respect (Hallinan, 2008). In their review article, Allen and her colleagues (2018) confirm a strong correlation between positive relationships and school belonging (also called connectedness). Precisely, students who describe their teachers as supportive, caring and empathic are more likely to feel a greater sense of belonging to school than those who do not see their teachers in such a positive light. Caring, participatory and fair school environments also foster children's social, emotional and academic outcomes (Murray-Harvey, 2010), increasing feelings of school liking (Graham et al., 2022), satisfaction with school (Pupeter & Hurrelmann, 2017) and their lives in general (Diter et al., 2021; Huebner et al., 2014). The more children are taken seriously at school, the higher their self-confidence and well-being (Andresen, Hurrelmann, & Schneekloth, 2012).

The fourth component, c*ommunity partnership,* is usually characterised by the collaboration of parents and other community members through contributions to school development and the promotion of students' education (Wang & Degol, 2016). Mostly, it indicates parental involvement in their children's education process to benefit children's good academic outcomes and future success (Hill et al., 2004). Parental involvement includes school-based involvement (e.g., parent-teacher communications and attendance at school events), home-based involvement, and academic socialisation, such as establishing rules for homework and leisure time, communication about school, expression of parental expectations for education, helping children with homework and fostering their educational aspirations (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Parental involvement activities decrease with the age of the child but remain an important factor in shaping their educational outcomes and well-being. Researchers have found that parental involvement is positively associated with students' engagement at school and educational success (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). An intellectually supportive and motivating home environment may provide children with a sense of caring and being connected, increase their self-esteem and confidence in their academic competence and foster effective coping strategies for dealing with challenges at school (Ho, 2003; Shumow & Lomax, 2002; Soo & Kutsar, 2019a; Wairimu, Macharia, & Muiru, 2016). The latter can lead to greater learning efforts and better educational results. Parental involvement in children's everyday activities and school activities contributes to children's well-being as students, sense of belonging to school and overall life satisfaction (Diter et al., 2021).

Although *safety* at school is a separate dimension of school climate (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016), I prefer to consider it a component of the social dimension. Feeling safe is a basic human need; however, many students do not feel physically and emotionally safe at school due to being targets or witnesses of bullying, assaults or victimisation by schoolmates, teachers or others (García-García et al., 2017; Inchley et al., 2016; Rees & Main, 2015; Soo & Kutsar, 2019a; Undheim & Sund, 2010). School bullying is not a series of aggressive actions by a malicious person but the social process involving power relations at the group, institutional and societal levels (Horton, 2011). Bullying is more present in school environments where the relationships between peers, and particularly between children and teachers, are conflictual and are less close, kind or respectful (Bouchard & Smith, 2017; Harel-Fisch et al., 2011; Raskauskas et al., 2010). In the case of bullying, fellow students are more likely to defend victimised classmates when the student-student relationships are perceived as warm, caring, and friendly (Thornberg at al., 2017). Thus, school safety is relational and can be categorised under the social dimension of the school climate. I consider security related to the physical environment, such as the condition of facilities and equipment, as under the physical dimension of the school climate.

School safety refers to the degree to which bullying and aggression occur at school and the measures to ensure safety (Wang & Tegol, 2016). It includes students' and school personnel's attitudes towards and responses to bullying and

clearly communicated rules (disciplinary climate) that children believe in and consider fair (Cohen et al., 2009; Wang & Tegol, 2016).

The level of safety at school has an essential effect on students' outcomes. Bullying is one of the most explored aspects of safety that impacts students' engagement negatively, lowers their commitment to schoolwork (Thapa et al., 2013), reduces academic success (Erath et al., 2008) and leads to early school leaving (Beilmann, 2017; Beilmann & Espenberg, 2016). Frequently bullied students tend to feel sad and scared and are more likely to report a weaker sense of belonging at school than those not frequently bullied (OECD, 2019b). Nevertheless, children who perceive school as a safe place are more apt to like school (Hallinan, 2008; Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017) and are more satisfied with their lives in general (Rees, 2019).

Physical dimension of school climate

Physical dimension indicates the physical characteristics of facilities, such as the appearance of the school building and classrooms, cleanliness, temperature, lighting and air condition (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015; Loukas, 2007; Wang & Degol, 2016). It also embraces school and class size, safety, school start and end times, organisation of classrooms in the school and availability of resources. Maxwell (2016) found that school-building conditions affect students' academic achievement; however, this influence is mediated by higher students' assessment of school social climate and attendance.

The results of the *Children's Worlds* survey conducted among 8–12-year-old children in Estonia showed that school size and the subjective well-being of children are related, though weakly (Murakas, Soo & Otstavel, 2019). The study revealed that the more floor area in the school and the more spacious the gyms, the more positively children assess their school experience. Compared to students in larger classes (students per teacher), children in smaller classes are much more satisfied with school and consider teachers more helpful and caring. Thapa et al. (2013) conclude that smaller schools can improve school climate by enhancing connectedness and benefit for students' relationships, feelings of safety and enjoyment of personal achievements. For instance, if there are fewer children per teacher in the classroom, the teacher has more opportunities to pay attention to each child, notice both their problems and achievements, and maintain personal contact. The students, therefore, feel that they are cared for and are more engaged in lessons.

School climate in the children's rights framework

The components of school climate can be addressed in the framework of the children's rights that, to my knowledge, have not yet been extensively elaborated. In the academic literature on school climate, references to children's right to education (e.g., Varela et al., 2020) and the rights-violating nature of school bullying (e.g., Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015) can be found. In addition,

research has occurred on the relationship between some aspects of school climate and children's views on rights (Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009). However, there have been no significant attempts to place the dimensions of school climate in the frame of the main categories of children's rights, as I propose below.

The academic dimension intertwines foremost the children's rights to provision and participation. For example, the component of *quality of instruction* emphasises the right to acquire a good education and develop one's abilities, as an inclusive teaching style invites children to active participation in the lesson. The social dimension of school climate is compatible with all categories of children's rights. *Positive interpersonal relationships* mainly correspond to the right to provision (care and emotional support). *Fair treatment* and respect of students originate from the principle of non-discrimination. The component of *participation* that encourages children to express their opinions and contribute to decision-making in school life seems to follow the articles on the right to participate in the CRC. *Safety* at school coincides with the right to protection and receipt of assistance. The physical dimension of school climate mostly refers to the children's right to an appropriate and healthy learning environment, i.e., if translated into the 3*P*s classification, the right to provision.

Above, I conceptualised how the dimensions of school climate connect with children's rights. How it manifests in children's daily school life still needs investigation. In my thesis, I explore children's and young adults' evaluations of their school experiences as sources of subjective well-being, classifying them according to school climate dimensions. I then explore their accordance with the categories of children's rights (realisation of rights in the children's lives).

2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1. Studying children as rights holders and experts of their lives

Previous studies on quality of life have held the opinion that children are not yet able or competent to answer questions about their lives (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014), and adults' assessments of children's well-being would be valid enough (Casas, 2011). Ben-Arieh et al. (2014: 10) criticised this position, as focusing on the third-person's perspective when measuring children's well-being is "a misuse of the concept "quality of life" because it betrays the basic definition of the concept: people's *own* perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations". The recognition of children's rights with the approval of the CRC, as well as the spread of the ideas of new sociology of childhood, have contributed to a methodological shift in children's studies dealing with children as primary and valuable sources of information about their well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2010; Ben-Arieh et al., 2014).

A major part of my dissertation applies data received from children. I am in line with many authors (e.g., Clark & Statham, 2005; Connolly, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fattore & Mason, 2017; James & Prout, 2015; Malone & Hartung, 2010) who believe and express trust in the social competence of children as experts of their own lives. Assessments of children's well-being from the children's point of view may differ from those given by adults, which does not mean that one of them is wrong (Casas, 2019).

Studies with children and their parents about the experiences of children (e.g., Pećnik et al., 2016; Sukk & Soo, 2018) or opinions of both about some social phenomena (e.g., Casas et al., 2012; Reinomägi, 2021; Spilsbury, Korbin, & Coulton, 2009) have revealed a discrepancy in findings. For example, Casas and his colleagues (2007) affirmed that important aspects of well-being vary in children and their parents. Such discrepancies can be due to belonging to different social groups (generations) and fulfilling different roles in society (Casas, 2011) or a lack of communication between generations (Casas et al., 2012). Children create their own peer cultures by interpreting and reconstructing information about the adult world, contributing thereby to cultural change (Corsaro, 2011). In fact, it is difficult to assess children's well-being in a reliable way if information from children about their personal experiences, feelings, and aspirations is not taken into account (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). Moreover, Andresen and her colleagues (2017) and Dockett and Perry (2003) demonstrated that even young children are competent enough to make sense of what is happening around them and communicate this to others in a survey situation.

Secondly, I proceed from the idea that children, as rights owners, have the right to be heard and taken seriously. The inclusion of children as subjects in research is not only the realisation of the rights of the CRC but the opportunity for children to express their autonomy and agency. Hereby, I look at children as active social

agents (Mason & Hood, 2011; Sirkko, Kyrönlampi, & Puroila, 2019; Stoecklin, 2012) and co-agents (Glăveanu, 2015; Salmela-Aro, 2009) with the capacity to change their environment in the process of co-creating relational well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2017; Street, 2021; White, 2017) in the school environment.

When studying children and well-being, there is a need to make a distinction between different understandings of top-down and bottom-up approaches. The first view refers to the interest in assessing children's well-being and rights, applying either the perspective of adults (top-down) or children (bottom-up) (Harcourt & Hägglund, 2013; Katz, 1992). The second view digs more into research methodology, the top-down approach refers to using instruments constructed by adult researchers to test hypotheses among children (deduction) and bottom-up to finding out children's expressions and meanings qualitatively (inductive) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mason & Watson, 2014). The third view indicates top-down versus bottom-up theories of subjective well-being as described, for example, by Diener (1984) and Headey, Veenhoven and Wearing (2005).

In my thesis, I employ both top-down and bottom-up approaches. I follow the bottom-up approach particularly in the sense of examining children's and young adults' subjective well-being through their own eyes (the first view, **Study I, II and III**), but also in exploring children's and young adults' thoughts and interpretations of their experiences (the second view, **Study II** and **III**). **Study I** represents the top-down approach, investigating children's responses to an adult-led questionnaire (the second view).

2.2. Strategy of the study

In this study, I look at the school environment as an important life environment and source of well-being for children. To reach the aim and objectives and answer the research questions (see the introduction), I make five operational iterations. First, I 'translate' the main categories of children's rights in the CRC into questionnaire items to measure subjective well-being (**Study I**). Second, I control for the relationships between the responses to these items and the general assessment of one's own life (**Study I**). Third, I test the previous top-down approach with a bottom-up approach, asking children about their understandings, explanations and opinions about sources of subjective well-being at school (**Study II**). Fourth, I go beyond the school years and analyse retrospections of subjective well-being at school to demonstrate the persistence of well-being sources at school in time and its outcomes in young adults' lives (**Study III**). Fifth, I 'retranslate' the findings back to the normative frame of CRC (**Discussion** in this introductory article).

2.3. Data and methods

This doctoral study applies the mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data corpus contains three datasets.

(1) The International Survey of Children's Well-Being – *Children's Worlds* (ISCWeB) (**Study I**). ISCWeB is a worldwide survey on subjective well-being from children's perspectives. The survey collected data from 8-, 10- and 12-year-olds from 18 countries in 2013–2014 using a self-administered questionnaire at school. Around 1,000 children of each age group participated in each country. The questionnaire covered topics related to children's satisfaction with different aspects of their lives in various settings, including home, school, friends and community. The sample of this study included 8,149 8-year-old children from eight European countries: Estonia, Germany, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, and the UK. More details on the survey and sampling strategy are available in Rees, Andresen and Bradshaw (2016) and on the project website (www.isciweb.org).

(2) Semi-structured focus group interviews with children (**Study II**). Eight focus group interviews with 12-year-old children in rural and urban schools in Estonia took place in 2015. Altogether, 55 children (29 girls and 26 boys) from grade 6 participated in the study. This age group was selected for our study because 12-year-olds can be sufficiently critical concerning school compared to younger age groups, as revealed in the ISCWeB study (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017; Rees & Main, 2015). In addition, children of this age face many changes in school arrangements. In Estonia, due to moving from one school level (elementary school, mostly grades 1–3), where children predominantly have only one class teacher, to another (grades from 4), children see several subject teachers on a daily basis and interactions with the class teacher, who acts more as a mentor, are weaker. In addition, homework load increases compared to former years and children start receiving marks instead of qualitative assessments.

(3) Retrospective narratives of young adults about their school life (**Study III**). This dataset consists of 70 memories written by undergraduate students as a learning assignment in the course "Children and Childhood" at the University of Tartu in 2016–2017. In the learning task, students recalled one event related to positive feelings and one related to negative feelings concerning their school time. Out of 70 memories, 34 reflected bad feelings, and 36 were good ones. No socio-demographic data about the authors of the memories were collected, but it was known that the majority of the participants in the course were female, and their school time mainly remained in the first decade of this century.

Next, I describe the operationalisation of the measured constructs and the techniques of analysis by iteration.

Iteration 1 (Study I). We used the three *P*s typology (rights to provision, protection and participation) and a general principle (non-discrimination) from the CRC to create an operational model to measure reflections of rights realisation at home, school and among friends and its relationships with children's perceptions of a good life. In this study, we used eight indicators from the instrument of subjective cognitive well-being to examine the reflection of rights realisation in

four categories (Table 1). The right to protection was reflected in the children's assessments of *feeling safe at home and school*. The right to provision we translated as being cared about in terms of good relationships with family and friends. The right to participation we measured by the children's estimates as to what extent their *parents and teachers listen to them and consider what they are saying*. Being *treated fairly by parents and teachers* depicts the principle of non-discrimination. The dependent variable in the analysis was a single item, "I have a good life", that stems from the subjective cognitive well-being instrument called the Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991).

Children could respond to all items on a 5-point agreement scale ranging from 0, "I do not agree", to 4, "Totally agree". In the study, we focused on the extremely positive answers as children tend to mark maximum values, meaning scales do not have a normal distribution. Thus, we explored the manifestation of a high realisation of rights and having a good life, recoding the scales as follows: 1 – "totally agree", 0 – "the rest").

Table 1. Indicators by categories of children's rights realisation

Rights category / sub-indices (Right to…)	Indicators (Scale: 0 = "I do not agree" to 4 = "Totally agree")
Protection	I feel safe at home
	I feel safe at school
Participation	My parents listen to me and take what I say into account
	My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account
Care for	We have a good time together in my family
	My friends are usually nice to me
Non-discrimination	My parents treat me fairly
	My teachers treat me fairly

Iteration 2 (Study I). Next, we calculated two types of indices of children's rights reflections. In the first instance, we computed sub-indices for each category of rights by summing up the original scales of two independent variables in each category; the new scales ranged from 0 to 8. Second, to gain a better overview of the degree of rights realisation in children's lives, we aggregated all eight statements into a summated index. A higher score on the index indicated a higher level of realisation of rights in children's well-being assessments. In the first part of the data analysis, we examined differences in children's assessments of good lives and reflections of rights realisation by country, using mainly descriptive statistics. In the second part, we performed a series of binary logistic regression analyses separately for each country to find out the main or most essential factors that determine children's perception of a good life. In the models, we both used each individual indicator of rights reflection separately and used the categories of rights as independent variables.

Iteration 3 (Study II). Proceeding from the former evidence about the decrease in school liking and subjective well-being at school during the years of schooling (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017; Rees & Main, 2015), our intention was to apply children's expertise to explain this phenomenon. In relation to the present study, we were interested in children's own explanations of both, positive and negative sources of subjective well-being at school. We applied the protocol of the multinational qualitative study "Children's Understandings of Well-Being in Global and Local Context" (Fattore et al., 2019) as a framework, adapting it to the school context. In addition to group interviews with children, we used mapping exercises of well-being sources and the magic wand method, where children were asked to imagine what they would change if they had a magic wand and could change anything in their school. We applied the understanding of cognitive well-being by Davern, Cummins and Stokes (2007) – perceived discrepancies between owned circumstances and self-created standards or desires, to find out what children would like to change at school. The magic wand exercise helped us to reveal the gap between the perceived reality and the ideal. We analysed the focus group interviews thematically, paying special attention to the meanings of negative sources of well-being at school.

Iteration 4 (Study III). We were interested in what school experiences undergraduate students remember in terms of positive and negative feelings and how they construct and re-construct the impact of these experiences on their lives as young adults – that is, the persistence of school experiences. Autobiographical memories are episodes of human life. People, however, do not remember all past experiences in the same detail: they recollect events, things and persons that have an important personal meaning for them and are emotionally binding (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002; Fivush et al., 2011). When remembering childhood, adults cannot re-experience their childhood or follow their worldview at that time (Korkiakangas, 1994). They can only interpret their childhood in their personal narratives based on their understandings as young adults. Thus, autobiographical recollections from school life reflect persons and events that young adults vividly remember and find meaningful in a positive or negative sense.

We studied memories of school experiences as autobiographical narratives (Riessmann, 2008), using a thematic analysis method that focuses on the content of narratives, events described in the stories, experiences of individuals and the meanings assigned to them (Bold, 2012). Repeated reading of the students' stories revealed events and persons defined as happy or unhappy memories. In the analysis, we focused on the role of teachers and fellow pupils as important characters in the memories as well as the impacts of experienced situations on life in their remembered childhoods and now as young adults. We paid particular attention to the reappraisal of these impacts. Following Kuczynski and De Mol (2015), we dealt with teachers and pupils as active agents (co-agents) who bidirectionally influence each other and co-create school atmosphere.

2.4. Ethical considerations and reflections

In these studies, we followed ethical principles approved in social research and studies with children, such as obtaining consent, voluntary participation, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and minimising harm (Gallaghar, 2009; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012; SRA, 2021).

In **Study I**, drawing data from the International Survey of Children's Well-Being, the national research teams received appropriate ethical clearance from the relevant authorities, including ethical committees, institutional review boards in universities and government departments (Rees, 2017). School principals were contacted to request permission to carry out the survey in their schools. Students were informed about the goal of the study and the ethical rules. In general, passive parental consent was used (only parents who did not wish their child to participate notified the school), including in Estonia. In some countries, no parental consent was required. For legal reasons, active parental consent was sought in two countries, meaning that parents signed a consent form before their child's participation. Participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary; however, there were very few children who refused to take part. In Estonia, previously trained undergraduate students carried out the fieldwork. Their feedback demonstrated that children really liked participating, and those who were left out due to their parent's refusal were rather sad. This issue indicates that adults' gatekeeper role in access to children (generally motivated by the desire to protect children) can instead limit the realisation of their right to make decisions about matters concerning them.

Researching well-being inevitably touches on children's relationships, experiences and feelings. While answering questions about personal life, some children may feel disturbed, particularly those with a lack of safe and caring relationships in close environments (Morrow & Boyden, 2014). Thus, in order to reduce potential harm, children had the opportunity to interrupt filling in the questionnaire or skip questions they perceived as sensitive. After completing the questionnaires, the children were rewarded with a small chocolate. They were not notified of receiving it in advance.

In **Study II**, the third author conducted focus group interviews. She asked permission for the study from school principals and received passive informed consent from parents whose children expressed interest in participating in the interview. She introduced the children to the aim of the study, its content and rules of procedure. In addition, she told them who could have access to the data (other authors of the paper) and how the data would be analysed and presented. It was emphasised to the children that participants' and schools' names would not be disclosed. To protect the identities of the children, we used codes referring to the participants in the article. Children had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

An aspect of the interview relationship that emerged is the power imbalance between adult researcher and child participant (Punch, 2002). As a solution to this issue, we chose the focus group interview method and a familiar venue for the

children – school. Interviewing in a peer group softens children's perceptions of power differences, reduces their anxiety and fear, encourages them to express their opinions and creates shared meanings (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Lange & Mierendorff, 2011).

In one focus group interview, an ethical dilemma arose regarding confidentiality – participants complained that a teacher occasionally hit children. The interviewer perceived the children's expectations to help them in this regard. Following the Child Protection Act (2022), which prohibits corporal punishment of children and stipulates the requirement to notify of a child in need of assistance, the interviewer informed the school leader about the abusive teacher, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. In the following interviews, she discussed with children about such exceptional cases in which she would have to report to school principals without revealing any child's name. In addition, she encouraged children to seek help if necessary.

In **Study III**, narrating memories as the learning assignment was voluntary for undergraduate students. Upon receipt, the lecturer (my thesis supervisor and 2nd author) anonymised the stories and compiled them into a booklet of childhood memories. Submitted stories that narrators did not want revealed in the booklet were excluded. I had access to the booklet and, therefore, to the stories available within. As the stories described very personal and even sensitive experiences related to narrators or other people, we omitted all names and other details that would allow us to recognise these persons.

3. FINDINGS

In this part, I present the main results of the original studies and answer the research questions.

Reflection of rights realisation in children's perception of a good life (RQ 1)

Study I applied a quantitative methodology and sought evidence of how fulfilled children's rights are in 8-year-old children's reflections of subjective well-being and whether rights' realisation could determine the perception of having a good life. We applied data from eight European countries. Thus, we controlled for the relationship between rights' realisation and subjective assessments of well-being and its workability in the case of small children in different countries and life domains. The results revealed a relatively high level of subjective well-being and reflection of children's rights realisation. Children in Poland, Norway and Romania had the highest scores in the assessment of a good life and reflection of rights realisation. The share of children in Estonia who totally agreed with having a good life (75%) stayed close to the average of the eight European countries. However, in terms of the realisation of rights, Estonia belonged to the group of countries with lower scores: 41% of children in Estonia totally agreed with almost all surveyed well-being items reflecting rights realisation; 7% were those who evaluated the rights were rather unfulfilled.

The rights to protection and provision seemed to be most realised in children's lives, considering their estimates of subjective well-being at home and school. In most of the countries studied, including Estonia, about three-quarters of children totally agreed that they feel safe at home and have a good time together in their family. According to children, the rights to protection and provision outside the home were slightly less fulfilled than at home. Specifically, school in general was not as safe as home, and friends were not as caring as family members. Right to participation (operationalised as 'to be listened to') was the least realised right in the children's reflections. Compared to other countries, 8-year-old children in Estonia were least likely to be in total agreement with the statements that their parents and teachers listen to them and take what they say seriously (51–52%).

Using logistic regression analyses, we examined which single indicator and domain of rights would predict the maximum assessment on having a good life. The results showed that children's right to be cared for, i.e., good relationships at home and with friends, was one of the most significant predictors across countries. The second most important determinant in relation to having a good life was feeling safe at school and home (right to protection), for six countries out of eight. Being treated fairly at home and school increased the probability of good life for children in five countries. The reflection of right to participation seemed to be least likely to predict having a good life. Caring relationships with family and friends, a high sense of safety at school and fair treatment by teachers, as well as

participation in family issues, predicted the perception of a good life among children in Estonia. To conclude, **Study I** confirmed that children's assessments of good lives (operationalised as 'subjective well-being') are related to being cared for and listened to as well as feeling safe and treated fairly (operationalised as 'rights' realisation').

Social, academic and physical aspects of school climate as sources of subjective well-being from children's perspective (RQ 2)

Study II applied a qualitative methodology and focused on 12-year-old children's views on their subjective well-being at school. First, we asked children how they understand 'well-being', i.e., the central term in our studies. The results showed that children understood 'well-being' as the presence of 'good' and the non-presence of 'bad' in their lives, including in school settings. The presence of good meant safe places, good people and inspiring activities that evoke positive feelings; the presence of bad, they defined as experiencing danger and risky situations, difficulties and negative feelings.

Next, we found out the roles of aspects of school climate as well as of teachers and fellow students in the creation of subjective well-being. In the group discussions on well-being, 12-year-old children extensively described the academic and social aspects of the school climate. Regarding the academic school climate, exciting teaching methods, personal attention and assistance in learning by teachers were important factors that increased subjective well-being. However, too high of a learning tempo, numerous homework assignments and being left out of decision-making reduced it. On the one hand, children associated getting good marks with good feelings, but on the other, a lot of pressure to perform successfully made them feel bad, diminished learning motivation and even led to dishonesty in taking tests.

Children described the aspects related to the social dimension of school climate the most. According to them, high-quality relationships between peers and between students and teachers are the main sources of well-being at school. School bullying is the most important cause of bad feelings. Interviewees felt distressed not only about being victims of bullying but also about the limited opportunities to receive help, particularly from adults at school: a school culture that condemns reporting incidents of bullying, resulting in (re)victimisation of children, hinders asking for assistance. Children also admitted that fear and distrust of some teachers can prevent the disclosure of bullying. Moreover, children revealed that teachers are indifferent concerning bullying or have poor skills at solving complicated situations. Therefore, children preferred classmates and friends as helpers and support persons instead of teachers. Children also mentioned some teachers' lack of professional ethics, including unfair and stereotyping treatment and favouring one student over another as sources of bad feelings. Rules restricting talking during lunch and a lack of opportunities to make decisions at school diminish children's freedom to participate and exercise their agency.

Children referred to only single aspects of well-being related to the physical environment of school. They noted the dining room as a place that creates well-being, but the toilets having the opposite effect due to poor sanitary conditions. Physical insecurity on school campus, such as the risk of theft and physical attacks, also decreased subjective well-being.

To conclude, **Study II** highlighted the aspects creating subjective well-being at school that were also evident in **Study I**: good relationships with schoolmates (often friends), a safe and bullying-free atmosphere, and fair and respectful treatment by teachers.

Aspects of school climate as sources of subjective well-being from young adults' perspective (RQ 3)

Study III applied a qualitative methodology and dealt with retrospective narratives of young adults about their school life. Here, we explored school-related people and situations that young adults associated with positive and negative feelings in their recollections and the impact of childhood experiences on their lives then and now. Our interest was in understanding the persistence of negative and positive aspects of school climate in young adults' memories.

In positive memories, young adults recalled supportive, encouraging and motivating teachers who used active learning approaches, launched discussions and encouraged them to express their opinions. Sources of good feelings also included teachers who noticed children with difficulties doing learning assignments or other concerns, reassured them and sought solutions, who treated children with respect and who motivated them to realise their developmental potential. Young adults considered such teachers to be authorities. Providing care, autonomy and opportunity to participate worked as a resource for the development of personal agency and exercising co-agency, which in turn made them happy and self-confident as children and strengthened their liking school. Friendly, caring and cohesive classmates and participation in school events also created a sense of togetherness, taught the value of maintaining relationships and increased school satisfaction.

School bullying was the most frequently mentioned experience as a misfortune during school time. The young adults depicted victims of bullying, including themselves, as children who had different appearances, abilities or family backgrounds. Bullying was more prevalent in classes where relationships between students were spiteful and less close. However, fellow students were also active interveners who condemned aggressive behaviour and tried to stop it. The teachers were rarely helpers who successfully resolved bullying incidents. The narrators found teachers to be rather ignorant and incompetent in intervention.

The young adults described teachers' professional ethics and tact as an important source of well-being. Treating pupils with respect and consideration and as equal partners seems to increase joy and self-esteem. However, teachers who were cruel, criticised students openly, disbelieved in their abilities or were prejudiced caused fear and disappointment, undermined their self-concepts and could constrain the exercise of agency.

In their memories, young adults gave the impression that negative experiences, particularly bullying and unethical behaviour by teachers, produced unpleasant feelings, loss of self-esteem, and exclusion that had left a still-persisting 'scar'. Still, in some stories defined as misfortune, the narrators re-assessed the experiences' initial bad impacts and emphasised positive changes, such as acquiring willpower, learning to stand up for oneself and pursuing previously abandoned educational goals (e.g., continuing studies in higher education). Thus, instead of constraining agency, re-constructing negative experiences from school time might strengthen it.

Young adults memorised many similar aspects of school climate that cause positive or negative feelings as did the 12-years old children (**Study II**). With this, we came to the conclusion that schools carry persistent problems that lower the subjective well-being of students.

4. DISCUSSION

This doctoral thesis explores the aspects that create the subjective well-being of children in the framework of children's rights. First, I tested the operational approach by evaluating the reflection of the children's rights in the subjective well-being of children in their close life environments – home and school. Then I focused on school as an educational institution where children spend a significant part of their childhood. In this chapter, I first discuss the sources of subjective well-being at home and school and the functioning of child agency in the creation of well-being. Then I look at the persistence of subjective well-being from the generational perspective. At the end of this part, I deal with the aspects of creating well-being in the framework of the CRC and discuss the rights' fulfilment in children's lives according to the (retrospective) assessments of children and young adults.

Table 2 outlines the sources of children's subjective well-being drawn from the original studies' findings in the framework of school climate and children's rights. The three middle columns of the table summarise the children's and young adults' evaluations of experiences at home and school as aspects that shape their well-being. The first column refers to the belonging of these aspects to home and school settings; the latter is divided into three dimensions of school climate. The second column indicates whether the aspects shaping well-being reflect the fulfilment of children's rights based on the *3P*s typology (provision, protection and participation; Verhellen, 2015) and the principle of non-discrimination. The grouping of aspects into categories of rights is conditional, as some aspects may fit under several types of rights. The very last column shows the effects of the aspects on (the partially-overlapping) cognitive, affective and psychological well-being following Diener's (2006) and Ryff's (1989) definitions.

Table 2. Summary of sources of well-being at school and home in the frame of children's rights and dimension of school climate; children's and young adults' perspective

Domains of well-being	Children's rights categories	Perceived behaviour and characteristics of oneself, parents, teachers, and peers			Cognitive (Cogn.), affective (Aff.) and psychological (Psy.) well-being outcomes
		8-year-olds, measured items **(Study I)**	12-year-olds, received evidence **(Study II)**	Young adults (retrospective), received evidence **(Study III)**	
HOME					
	Provision (+)	*"We have a good time together in my family"*			Cogn: Having a good life
	Participation (+)	*"My parents listen to me and take what I say into account"*			
SCHOOL					
Social dimension	Provision (+)	*"My friends are usually nice to me"*	Good relationships with teachers and other students	Teachers were nice and caring, assisted with personal concerns Classmates were friendly, caring, helpful and cohesive	Cogn: Having a good life Liking school Aff: Joy, good mood Psy: Increase in self-confidence, independence, sense of closeness Ability to create warm and trustful relations
	Protection (+)	*"I feel safe at school"*	Teachers help in case of bullying The presence of teachers prevents or stops bullying	Teachers helped in case of bullying or other problems at school	
	Participation (+)	*"My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account"*	Socialising with peers in the dining room	Participated in class/school social events Successful participation in competitions	
	Non-discrimination (+)	*"My teachers treat me fairly"*		Teachers treated children with respect	
	Provision (–)		Cruel teacher Harsh discipline	Cruel teachers who often scolded and threatened	Cogn: Disliking school Dissatisfaction with schoolmates and teachers Aff: Feeling fear, anger, helplessness, shame, sadness, stress, disappointment Psy: Decline in self-esteem Feeling trapped Keeping away Distrust of others (teachers) Loss of interest in learning Hopelessness Uncertainty about the future Development of willpower and coping skills
	Protection (–)		Teachers do not notice or intervene or cannot help in case of bullying Students are afraid to disclose bullying to teachers Having no friends who (dare to) help in case of bullying	Teachers did not notice or intervene or did not help in case of bullying Students were afraid to disclose bullying to teachers	
	Participation (–)		Teachers do not listen to or believe in victims Rules forbid talking in the dining room Lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making Lack of privacy if necessary	Teachers did not ask for explanations about behaviour, nor believed in victims or took heed of students' wishes	
	Non-discrimination (–)		Teachers treat students unfairly, blame students wrongly or without any reason; treat boys and girls differently; prefer one student to another Peers and teachers bully others due to different social backgrounds, abilities or appearances	Teachers treated students unfairly or prejudicially, blamed students wrongly or without any reason; favoured one student over another Peers and teachers bullied others due to different social backgrounds, abilities or appearances	

Domains of well-being	Children's rights categories	Perceived behaviour and characteristics of oneself, parents, teachers, and peers			Cognitive (Cogn.), affective (Aff.) and psychological (Psy.) well-being outcomes
		8-year-olds, measured items **(Study I)**	12-year-olds, received evidence **(Study II)**	Young adults (retrospective), received evidence **(Study III)**	
Academic dimension	Provision (+)		Use of active learning methods Inspiring learning tasks (e.g., games, study trips) Individual contact with teachers Getting good marks	Teachers helped in learning, encouraged to be active and develop abilities, used creative and inclusive learning methods, talked about a student's shortcomings in private Teachers recognised students for good achievement Getting good marks	Cogn: School liking Sense of belonging Aff: Feeling of being heard Joy and good mood Psy: Increase in courage, self-confidence and competence Experience of success Greater interest in learning and getting better marks Goal-setting for life
	Participation (+)		Opportunity to participate actively in the class	Teachers initiated inspiring academic and non-academic (e.g., everyday life, students' views and wishes) discussions	
	Provision (–)		Unattractive teaching method Too high learning tempo and demanding requirements High load of homework Pressure to get good marks	Teachers criticised openly for mistakes, questioned students' academic achievements, did not believe in their abilities Too high learning tempo and demanding requirements Pressure to get good marks	Cogn: Disliking school Aff: Feeling of being neglected Fear of attending classes, asking for explanations and getting bad marks Shame Feeling discomfort Psy: Disappointment in oneself Feeling unskilled and under-valued Demotivation to learn, passivity
	Participation (–)		Teachers do not ask children's opinions concerning the learning process	Teachers did not listen to students' opinions and wishes Fear of asking questions or expressing opinions	
Physical dimension	Provision (–)		Poor appearance and cleanliness of the toilets		Aff: Feeling unsafe Feeling bad, frightened
	Protection (–)		Risk of theft, school shooting or terrorism Insecure school facilities		

Note: The rights marked with (+) indicate that the described aspects in the middle columns reflect the fulfilment of the given rights in the children's lives. The rights marked with (–) refer to the rights not realised in children's lives. Regarding **Study I**, the table presents only the statistically significant aspects related to the maximum assessment of having a good life for 8-year-old children in Estonia.

Thesis 1: Sources of subjective well-being at school are meaningful and important for children

Studies I–III in this thesis confirmed the statement of other authors (e.g., Bradshaw & Rees, 2017; Casas, 2011; Lee & Yoo, 2015; UNICEF, 2020) that main sources of child well-being lie in high-quality social relationships in immediate life environments – home and school (see Table 2). In addition, the findings demonstrated that subjective well-being is relational (White, 2017). Following the ideas of White (2017) and Prilleltensky (2005), children's well-being is a process created through interactions with parents, fellow students and teachers and influenced by the wider community, including values, power relations, school culture, curriculum and educational facility. Important sources of children's well-being, such as care, support, recognition and respect, whether experienced at home or school, are of a social nature and play a significant role in the expression of agency and operation of co-agency of children.

The main findings in the original studies about school climate revealed that its social dimension primarily determines a pleasant school experience, while school physical setting plays a modest role in the children's subjective perceptions. Perception of fellow students as friendly and of teachers as helpful, inclusive, and respectful seemed to increase the feeling of happiness, self-confidence and a sense of belonging to school. These findings are in line with the results of earlier studies (Allen et al., 2018; Anderson & Graham, 2016; Diter et al., 2021; OECD, 2019b; Šakić & Raboteg-Šarić, 2011). Positive relationships underlie a school atmosphere that encourages interaction, reduces anxiety and motivates active participation in the learning process (Diter et al., 2021; Huebner et al., 2014; Murray-Harvey, 2010; Soo & Kutsar, 2019a), as well as prevent school bullying (Bouchard & Smith, 2017; Harel-Fisch et al., 2011). However, the occurrence of bullying, whether experienced by oneself or as a bystander, causes bad feelings and decreases self-esteem, learning motivation, and satisfaction with classmates and teachers (**Study II** and **Study III**; Beilmann, Soo, & Kutsar, 2022; Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; OECD, 2019b). Having supportive relationships with significant others at home or school can compensate for the harm from bullying to maintain certain satisfaction with school life (Beilmann, Soo, & Kutsar, 2022). **Study III** provided some evidence for the operation of homeostasis of subjective well-being (see Cummins, 2014, 2010) in coping with bullying at school. It revealed from young adults' re-constructed memories that their (the retrospective child's) resources, internal (e.g., willpower, learning from bad experiences) and external (e.g., assistance from schoolmates and teachers), helped to solve bullying incidents, restore well-being and (re)set their own educational goals. This finding refers, on the one hand, to the growth of agency despite an unfavourable social environment, and on the other hand, the functioning of co-agency in the complex relations at school.

The contribution of peers, as equal participants in social relations, to the creation of a sense of well-being seemed to depend on the working of mutuality in relationships (Fattore & Mason, 2017). Acceptance of each other (even in case of differences), pleasant co-actions, and cooperation (e.g., providing protection or support

to a classmate) increase the perception of closeness and subjective well-being. However, a deficit in reciprocity and power struggles bring relationships out of balance and threaten well-being at school (**Study II** and **III**). Although child-adult relationships inherently consist of power dynamics, the degree of mutuality in these relations appeared to be an aspect of shaping well-being as well. Reprimanding, cruel, belittling and unfair treatment by teachers promoted passivity, hopelessness, fear and aversion to going to school in children (**Study II** and **III**; Hallinan, 2008). Experienced vulnerability and unsafety reduce the opportunities and encouragement of children to express their agency and challenge the perceived unfair authority of adults. The perception of a teacher's communication and instructional style as oriented to inclusion, acceptance and shared relational excitement (the term by Lester et al., 2019) in and out of classes contributes to a student's (agentic) engagement in learning activities, good educational outcomes (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2012; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Thapa et al., 2013) and a positive assessment of well-being.

Academic achievements, including obtaining good grades and earning high places at subject competitions, carry the meaning of social relationships, norms and values. Good grades made children happy, but the social pressure to be successful, heavy homework loads, and focus by adults on grades rather than real knowledge was demotivating for children, caused tension and even encouraged cheating in tests (**Study II** and **III**). This uncovers an issue in the current educational system, curricula, or instruction methods, indicating that learning objectives remain vague for some children and make them feel like they are studying to meet someone else's expectations. Thus, adults' expectations of children and their education seem to be more future-oriented and inclined to the creation of 'well-becoming' (a high-achieving child becoming a successful citizen and a creator of economic prosperity of the future society), while the child's well-being in the school environment is less in the foreground.

The assessments of 12-year-olds and young adults (**Study II** and **III)** revealed how school-related events and persons increased or decreased their affective (mostly feeling happy and fear) and cognitive well-being (predominantly liking school, see last column in Table 2). Children and young adults mentioned outcomes related to psychological well-being the most. Based on Ryff and Singer's (1996) classification of psychological well-being, the participants mainly described situations that affected their self-acceptance (e.g., self-confidence, self-esteem), personal growth (e.g., learning motivation, sense of competence) and positive relationships with others (e.g., social (self) isolation, trust in others). The results also uncovered the signs of a lack of autonomy and environmental mastery, including feeling (un)able to change or improve the surrounding context, especially in the case of bullying. The impact of school experiences on life purpose appeared only in the narratives of young adults.

In summary, a positive school climate, especially social and academic dimensions, importantly contributes to a child's cognitive, affective and psychological well-being. However, shortcomings in some aspects of school climate, particularly in the quality of social interaction and teachers' instructional methods, can

undermine subjective well-being in children. Senses of affective and cognitive well-being have relational roots (Fattore & Mason, 2017), as well as psychological well-being, of which one component refers directly to positive relations to others (White, 2017). Relationality manifests in the complexity of shared (school) experiences that cause joy or sadness, positive or negative evaluations about school, oneself and one's life, contributing to personal well-being, according to Prilleltensky (2005).

Thesis 2: Positive interactions with teachers and classmates enable the expression of a child's agency

One goal of school education is to contribute to schoolchildren becoming agentic and independent actors (Rainio ja Hilppö, 2017). Learning and obtaining new skills increase children's ability to operate in the world and express their agency; however, paradoxically, children's agency is largely structured and limited by the educational institution, culture of the specific school, and the expression of the power of their parents and teachers (Greene and Nixon, 2020; Sirkko, Kyrönlampi, & Puroila, 2019). The results of this dissertation demonstrate both the enabling and restricting of the child's agency within the functioning of co-agency through interaction with teachers and fellow students. Following the idea that agency is relational (Greene and Nixon, 2020; Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015) and Glăveanu's (2015) cyclical framework of co-agency, poorly- and well-working patterns of co-agency can be outlined based on **Study II** and **III**. An example of the first type is how teachers' authoritarianism and vertical power relations, which reduce children's interest in learning and desires to actively participate in lessons (intentionality), leads to passivity or insufficient studying (reaction). This is expressed in students being negative towards the subject and the teacher and doubting their abilities and educational goals (reflection).

The stories about school experiences where teachers treated children with respect, created an inclusive environment, and were interested in children's thoughts and activities represent a well-functioning co-agency. Such openness of the teacher and minimisation of power differences in interaction inspires children to be active and to participate in classes and increases the perception of closeness between teachers and students and joy around schooling. In addition to teachers, fellow students as co-agents also contribute to encouraging or reducing the agency of other children (Greene and Nixon, 2020; Salmela-Aro, 2009), for instance, by forming alliances against the teachers, standing up for each other or excluding someone from their group (**Study II** and **III**). To conclude, poorly-working co-agency and constrained agency tend to decrease children's well-being and foster distancing from school. However, a learning environment providing rich opportunities for expressing agency can create well-being and a sense of belonging to school, demonstrating the relational nature of well-being.

A Finnish study (Sirkko, Kyrönlampi, & Puroila, 2019) with young schoolchildren revealed how certain pedagogical practices that categorise children as

obedient or rule-breaker could enhance the agency of some children while reducing it for others. A similar inequality in enabling agency was evident in the studies of my thesis as well, precisely in 12-year-olds' and young adults' descriptions of unfair and unethical behaviour of teachers (**Study II and III**). Differential teacher treatment, like ability-based motivation and public comparative evaluation, can provide favoured and high-achieving students an advantage in the development of their abilities over non-favoured and less successful students (Bohlmann & Weinstein, 2013). Perceived injustice in the classroom can diminish students' motivation to study and their capability to participate and exercise agency (**Study III**; Bjerke, 2011). In sum, the differential treatment of schoolchildren can stimulate their sense of agency in positive or negative ways. Glăveanu (2015) called for thinking about the ethical nature of interrelations between the people, material and social systems within the development of agency occurs, conceptualising "*moral co-agency* as the basis for better, more fair, and inclusive societies" (p. 263). Particularly in light of the latter, this is a commendable proposal showing the important role of adults' (teachers') and peers' interactions in shaping a 'thickened' or 'thinned' agency (the terms used by Jerome & Starkey, 2022) and the well-being of a child here and now and possibly in the future.

Thesis 3: Well-being sources are persistent in the generational perspective

My dissertation provides strong evidence that many school experiences as sources of subjective well-being are persistent through generations and across time. Good relationships, fair treatment and safety/bullying at school are aspects that increase or decrease joy and satisfaction with (school)life in the evaluations of 8-year-olds and teenagers as well as in young adults' recollections of childhood. It appeared from **Study II** and **III** that as sources of well-being, the use of exciting and inclusive teaching methods and getting good grades pervaded through the generations. Study load and opportunities for participation in decision-making were topics picked up on by participants of various ages, but to a different extent. Compared to the young adults, 12-year-old children spoke more about heavy homework load. This duty affects their daily lives, causing stress and leaving little room for leisure, hobbies and socialising with peers (Liu & Huang, 2021). Children's excessive academic burden and curriculum overload have even become an issue of educational policy (see OECD, 2018). Most likely, young adults had forgotten worrying about large amounts of homework over time or did not consider it an unpleasant enough memory to write down.

The teenagers and young adults mentioned the importance of having a say and being heard in the creation of well-being at school. However, participation at school was insignificantly related to 8-year-olds' ratings of having a good life. There may be a couple of explanations for this difference. Firstly, in the case of the youngest age group, we examined general cognitive judgements of one's life as an outcome variable and not the domain-specific subjective well-being. School-

related indicators can more likely predict satisfaction with school than general estimation of life. Out of this study, I made an extra regression analysis among 8-year-old children in Estonia to control this hypothesis. I included in the model the same argument variables as in **Study I**, but I used satisfaction with school life as the dependent variable instead of having a good life. The results confirmed all school-related indicators (including being heard by teachers) to remain statistically significant predictors of school satisfaction. Secondly, as Bjerke (2011) found in his research, participation manifests at home rather than at school among 8-year-olds (a similar result also revealed in **Study I**), but adolescents, who expect more independence and consideration of their opinions, perceive a low level of participation at school as a problem causing them frustration and anger, especially towards teachers.

The previous analysis shows how those experiences of school life that cause positive and negative feelings and thoughts do not disappear from memories after graduation and can still cause pain to or delight young adults, affecting the expression of their agency, choices and goals (**Study III**). Moreover, these findings cast a shadow on the school system as there has been little progress in the elimination of problems and creation of a learning environment that values children's autonomy, equal, trustful and friendly relationships, and expression of views, as formulated in the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic Schools (Põhikooli …, 2018).

Thesis 4: Realisation of rights means higher subjective well-being in children's lives

Study I showed that compared to other European countries, the level of realisation of rights based on the well-being assessments of children in Estonia was close to average, except for the right to participation. In the view of children in Estonia, the rights to protection and provision were most fulfilled, at home to a greater extent than at school and among friends. Concerning the realisation of the participatory right, Estonia placed in the last position of the country ranking. These findings are in line with the results of several other authors (e.g., Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017; Pećnik, Matić, & Milaković, 2016; Soo & Kutsar, 2019b).

Juxtaposing the answers of 8-year-old children with the evaluations of 12-year-olds and young adults, the most discussed aspects shaping school-related well-being were the rights to provision and protection (see Table 2, second column). The realisation of the right to provision referred, for example, to the opportunity to learn and develop one's abilities in an emotionally and academically supportive learning environment. It was inhibited when a teacher gave a large amount to study at home (especially over the weekend), reducing the opportunity for children to fulfil their other rights, including the rights to rest, engage in hobbies or spend free time with friends (article 31 in the CRC). Play and socialising with peers are important for the development of a child's social skills and expression of agency (Salmela-Aro, 2009). This shows that the excessive emphasis on children's 'well-becoming' in the form of obtaining a high-level education may

conflict with their subjective well-being and realisation of rights during child-hood.

According to the original studies, when children feel safe in the school environ-ment and receive help if something threatens their well-being, their right to protection is fulfilled with high probability. However, **Study II** and **Study III,** as well as other (quantitative) research (Erath et al., 2008; Inchley et al., 2016; Sarkova et al., 2014), indicated that bullying being a serious problem damages children's well-being and violates their rights. In addition, our data also showed a deficiency in the prevention and intervention of bullying due to children's lack of confidence in teachers to ask for help and teachers' low capacity and compe-tence to solve violent situations. Problems with receiving assistance from teachers and specialists in cases of personal concern also emerged from a previous Estonian study among children (Soo & Kutsar, 2019b), indicating not only the modest readiness and ability of teachers to solve difficult situations at school, but also the low availability or awareness of support services in general.

There were more examples of situations in the children's and young adults' stories where the principle of non-discrimination was unfulfilled in the school con-text than those where it was. I argue that the violation of the norms of equity (like favouritism and prejudicial behaviour by a teacher) is noticed more than its fulfilment, or its effect on subjective well-being is so damaging that a case of unfair treatment will be remembered years later as a very unpleasant school experience. The prevailing descriptions of negative situations among 12-year-olds might come from the study design focusing more on aspects decreasing subjective well-being at school. On the other hand, the discussion on teachers' unfairness in the inter-views could result from the growing criticism and self-awareness of teenagers as well as their expectation of respectful treatment by adults, leaving ample oppor-tunities to express their own agency (Bjerke, 2011; Hallinan, 2008).

Article 12, as the flagship of the right to participation in the CRC, places an obligation on the state to facilitate children's participation in decision-making about the matters affecting them (Emerson & Lloyd, 2017). The studies con-ducted among children show that children's right to participate, especially in the school environment, is one of the least fulfilled groups of rights (**Study I**, Anniste et al., 2018; Soo and Kutsar, 2020, 2019b). Based on Lansdown's (2010) partici-pation typology, in the school context, children are rather in the role of informers (consultants) who express their thoughts and opinions in class, mostly for the purposes of fulfilling the curriculum (**Study II** and **III**). There were only single references to higher-level participation, i.e., collaborative and child-initiated participation like organising class trips, mentoring another student and preparing for subject competitions. The realisation of the right to participation is diminished at school, for example, when a teacher ignores children's wishes and excludes them from decision-making, or in the case of the restricting rules of spending free time.

The recent studies among children and adults reveal a significant gap between their assessments on consideration of children's rights. Nearly one hundred per-cent of adults in Estonia believe that children are competent and have their own opinions which should be taken into account (Anniste et al., 2018). About the same

share (93%) of Estonian teachers in the TALIS survey think that teachers are mostly interested in students' opinions (Taimalu et al., 2020). However, almost two to three times fewer children are firmly convinced that teachers listen to them and take their views seriously (Soo and Kutsar, 2020). Children have the legal right to participation; however, in practice, it seems rather rhetorical, limited by tokenism and power relations.

The existence of the right to participation is not enough: it becomes real only through practice, specifically by exercising participation (Stoecklin, 2012). Children gradually develop their ability to act as agents who express their opinions. Through participation, children acquire skills and competencies, improve self-confidence, expand their aspirations and set goals (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014). Moreover, encouraging children to express their views and adults taking children seriously are effective tools when challenging violence (*ibid.*). Thus, experiences of participation can empower children to report or seek help in case of school bullying.

Enabling children to participate and express their agency is related to culturally constructed ideas about the extent of agency performance that is appropriate for them (Bordonaro, 2012). However, even if the democratic principle of children's participation in the decision-making process is explicitly formulated in the school and national education documents, it does not imply its realisation in daily interactions and can depend on individual teachers, as revealed in **Study III**. Teachers may reject the children's right to participate in decision-making due to fear of authority being threatened (Greene & Nixon, 2020) or inability to notice situations where children's voices should be heard. Bjerke (2011) provides a child's point of view, arguing that children do not dispute teachers' higher position, authority and right to use certain power, but teachers' attitudes towards them, treating them respectfully and consideration their rights are important for them. Democratic treatment and the opportunity for active participation at school make children feel that they are equally important (*ibid*.).

All rights are interconnected, so the realisation of one right promotes the realisation of others and vice versa (**Study II** and **III**; Ben-Arieh & Tarshish, 2017). The current thesis also demonstrates that the realisation of rights in children's (school) life being the basis for the sense of cognitive, affective and psychological well-being happens relationally by embracing different worlds of the child. Problems in the realisation of rights are detrimental to subjective well-being. Fulfilment of rights reflects the functioning of co-agency and the opportunity of children to develop and express their own agency.

CONCLUSION

In my dissertation, I explored the sources of subjective well-being of children in the home and mainly in the school environment within the framework of children's rights. I relied on the paradigm of the new sociology of childhood, considering a child as a competent social agent according to their age. I used a complex methodology, interweaving quantitative and qualitative methods, bottom-up and top-down approaches and multigenerational data (children's assessments and young adults' recollections on school life) that provided valuable information about the sources of children's well-being and their persistence over time and through generations.

Children understand well-being as the absence of bad, both in the school environment and in their lives in general. Emotions and cognitions with good and bad contents – thoughts, feelings and interpretations of their experiences – combine in the children's assessments of subjective well-being. Children's subjective well-being is relational and associated with the opportunities to express agency in relationships. The evidence of the qualitative studies (**Study II** and **III**) revealed that assessments of subjective well-being are formed in the context of social relationships. **Caring and safe relationships at home and school are essential preconditions to having high subjective well-being and enjoying a good childhood.** Moreover, in the interpretations of children and young adults, the aspects of the social dimension of school climate appeared to overreach the academic dimension. This finding shows that children's academic development occurs better when positive relationships support the learning atmosphere and contribute to sense of belonging and liking school. Cohesive and friendly classmates are important in experiencing school as a pleasant place, but caring and helpful teachers seem to play the major role by creating a high-quality relational environment and enabling children's agency.

> *Recommendation:* Based on the study results and referring to the children's right to provision, I suggest enhancing parental education and expanding its availability, as well as promoting cooperation between home and school. I recommend teachers and parents practice more equal interaction patterns with children and promote a caring, trustful and emotionally supportive atmosphere. This kind of communication inspires children to follow, supports exercising agency, and helps them to see their teachers and parents in a positive light.

Study II and **III** indicated that school bullying is a serious problem that reduces children's subjective well-being and threatens their agency. Particularly, in the case of the lack of help from school (and home), being bullied puts learning motivation at risk of decreasing and can even lead to a break in a child's educational path.

Recommendation: Based on the child's right to protection (the right to education in a safe environment), I recommend teachers take time to empathically listen to children, whether they are informants about a bullying incident or a victim, to be more attentive by noticing children in need or in danger of bullying, to improve their intervention skills, and last but not least, to be prepared to ask for advice or involve a competent specialist. Teachers' willingness to deal with complicated issues and their efforts to understand children's worries feeds children's trust in adults and develops their coping skills to manage difficult situations.

Both children and young adults (retrospectively) highlighted the qualities of relationships that foster children's agency, including involvement, cooperation, encouragement and responsiveness, particularly by a teacher, that constitute a favourable ground for the functioning of co-agency. However, co-agency did not work well in relationships characterised by a lack of mutuality and emphasising power differences resulting in the limited agency of children. Although a structural power asymmetry is encoded in the positions of a teacher and a student, certain communication patterns can minimise its negative effect and facilitate a child's independence, initiative, flexibility and ability to solve problems. The latter are the qualities that, according to the vision documents (e.g., OECD, 2018; Valk, 2019), are expected from students as the representatives of the future adult generation to cope with changes in the world and be competitive in the labour market.

This dissertation uncovered several aspects related to positive and negative school climate that were common in the opinions of the participants of different ages, referring to the persistence of school experiences as sources of well-being across generations, as well as the endurance of shortcomings in education, teaching and school culture in general. Good and supportive relationships at school increased the sense of well-being in the views of children and young adults, while feeling unsafe and bullied decreased it. Fair and dignified treatment led to positive evaluations, but a lack of participation opportunities enhanced criticism concerning the school. Looking at these findings in the framework of children's rights, it can be concluded that **the realisation of the rights to provision, protection, participation and the principle of non-discrimination in children's (school) lives contribute to their perception of the school climate as positive and the expression of their agency**. Thus, the thesis confirmed that children's evaluations of various aspects of their well-being were related to the level of realisation of rights. **The better the fulfilment of rights, the higher children rate their subjective well-being**, including the general assessment of their life ('I have a good life'). Therefore, respecting children's rights fosters the development of their lives.

The results of this thesis raised several issues. First, **it is necessary to review the school system and critically assess the content and requirements of the curricula so that students do not feel like overburdened 'test-taking machines' and lose the joy of school.** The findings pose a challenge to teacher education, their agency and the availability of support staff, especially now when Estonia is

facing overloaded, shrinking and ageing pedagogical personnel with difficulties finding professionally-educated employees (Leijen, Pedaste, & Baucal, 2021; Taimalu et al., 2020). Promoting the social and emotional components of learning in the same way as cognitive help invest in happy, safe and flourishing school-children (Kickbusch, 2012) and value their childhood.

Second, the results revealed some weaknesses in teachers' professionalism and ethics, e.g., treating children differently concerning their gender, family back-ground or ability. It turned out that discriminatory approaches to students (con-scious or not) not only reduced interest in learning and endangered academic out-comes but also had a negative effect on children's self-esteem and sense of well-being.

> *Recommendation:* Therefore, I propose teacher education lays more emphasis on the development of teachers' social skills to cope with socially, emotionally and ethically complicated situations in the classroom. I recommend teachers use more self-reflection and critically assess whether they have a tendency to think of and treat some children prejudicially or to interpret children's behaviour in a biased way. In addition, I recommend policymakers and school management invest more in valuing the teaching profession, implement reasonable working hours for teachers, and provide teachers with supervision opportunities. Presumably, a self-respecting and agentic teacher can effectively create a learning environment that is rich for well-being.

Third, the findings of the thesis showed that **children's rights to provision and protection are more fulfilled than the right to participation at school. The voice of children as a social group is not particularly heard in the school environment.** Listening to children's opinions, wishes and personal concerns varies greatly depending on the practices of individual teachers, but children's opportunities to make decisions about things that affect them is not common at school. Consequently, a paternalistic approach still dominates in the school environment. A focus on provision and protection presents children as needy and dependent and treats adults as agents who make decisions about children rather than with them (Jerome & Starkey, 2022). However, ensuring children's well-being requires a holistic approach to the fulfilment of rights. The realisation of nurturance rights in children's (school) lives provides an important basis for well-being. However, the right to treatment with respect and the opportunity to partici-pate complemented the latter allowing children to feel valued and realise their potential.

> *Recommendation:* I recommend school management and teachers allow children to be partners in school life, not just individuals who acquire the knowledge and skills prescribed in the curriculum. Partnership presumes active involvement of both parties – teachers and children – in various activities and decision-making processes, listening to and taking children's views seriously. Only through practicing partici-pation does children's ability and habit to express their opinions and stand up for their well-being grow, along with the courage to undertake challenging activities.

The present dissertation showed that children are reliable data sources for providing information about their lives (see rather similar results in the narratives of young adults if to take them as a test-group). Therefore, **it is meaningful to apply children's perspectives to regularly explore their well-being and realisation of rights because children's views help to highlight deficiencies in their (school) lives.**

In sum, children's subjective well-being is relational and related to the level of realisation of children's rights. The better co-agency functions in children's relationships at school, the higher they evaluate their well-being in this environment and in life. Considering children as active agents in addition to persons in need of care and protection and giving them a voice is crucial for their well-being. However, this expects adults/teachers to be more aware of children's rights. The results confirm the importance of following the fulfilment of children's rights as cornerstones in the school setting to create a positive school climate and enhance children's sense of belonging and meaningfulness of education.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Kool lapse subjektiivse heaolu allikana laste õiguste raamistikus: laste ja noorte täiskasvanute vaade

ÜRO lapse õiguste konventsioon sätestab iga lapse õiguse haridusele ja enda arendamisele. Hariduse visioonidokumentides (OECD, 2018; Valk, 2019) rõhutatakse, et lisaks mitmekülgsele haridusele on oluline tagada lastele koolis heaolu ja toimevõimekus, mis on õnneliku lapsepõlve ja jätkusuutliku arengu võtmetegurid. Layard ja Hagell (2015) täheldavad kriitiliselt, et osades riikides pööratakse akadeemilise tulemuslikkuse kõrval liiga vähe tähelepanu lapse heaolule. Mõistega "heaolu loov kool" viitavad nad soovituslikule olukorrale, kus lapsed, õpetajad ja vanemad panustavad ühiselt hooliva, turvalise ja toetava õpikeskkonna kujundamisse.

Eesti laste kõrged kohad PISA testides (OECD, 2019a) on märk Eesti koolihariduse heast kvaliteedist. Ent akadeemiline edukus ei peegeldu alati laste subjektiivsetes heaoluhinnangutes. Teiste riikidega võrreldes, sh PISA testis tagasihoidlikumaid tulemusi saanutega, on Eesti lapsed koolis vähem õnnelikud (OECD, 2013), tunnevad enam koolitööga seotud pinget (Inchley et al., 2016) ning nende koolimeeldivuse langus on vanuse kasvades üks suuremaid (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017). Täiskasvanute loodud dokumentides (nt Põhikooli riiklik õppekava, 2018) ja täiskasvanute arvamustes (nt rahvusvaheline õpetajate uuring TALIS; Taimalu et al., 2020) ehk 'ülevalt-alla' vaates on lapse heaolu koolis küll prioriteet, aga laste kogemustes, n.ö alt-üles vaate järgi, see alati nii ei teostu. Seda, mis kujundab laste heaolutunnet koolis, on mõttekas uurida eelkõige lastelt, sest nemad oskavad kõige paremini anda hinnanguid ja selgitusi oma kogemuste kohta.

Käesoleva doktoritöö fookuses on laste subjektiivne heaolu peamiselt koolikeskkonnas laste ja noorte täiskasvanute (tagasivaatelistes) hinnangutes. Dissertatsiooni eesmärk on välja selgitada laste subjektiivset heaolu suurendavad ja kahandavad aspektid võttes aluseks ÜRO lapse õiguste konventsiooni kui normatiivse raamistiku. Esmalt testin töös lapse õiguste realiseerumise kajastumist 8-aastaste laste subjektiivses heaolus nende kahes lähikeskkonnas – kodus ja koolis. Laste hinnanguid kodule analüüsin seetõttu, et perekonnal on tähtis roll lapse kooliskäimise toetamisel, eriti just väiksemate laste puhul. Seejärel keskendun koolile, kus lapsed veedavad olulise osa oma lapsepõlvest, ja vaatlen 12-aastaste ning noorte täiskasvanute (retrospektiivseid) tõlgendusi koolikogemustest.

Väitekirjas otsin vastuseid järgmistele uurimisküsimustele.

1. Millisel määral on laste õigused täidetud 8-aastaste laste igapäevaelus? Kuidas on õiguste täidetus seotud laste nõustumisega väitega „mul on hea elu"? (Uurimus I)

2. Mida tähendab 12-aastaste laste jaoks „heaolu" üldiselt ning koolikeskkonnas? Millised koolikliima sotsiaalse, akadeemilise ja füüsilise dimensiooniga seotud aspektid loovad positiivseid või negatiivseid tundeid laste jaoks? Milline

on õpetajate ja kaasõpilaste roll laste subjektiivse heaolu loomisel koolis? (Uurimus II)

3. Millised inimesed ja olukorrad seoses koolis käimisega seostuvad noortele täiskasvanutele positiivsete ja negatiivsete tunnetega? Kuidas (taas)loovad noored täiskasvanud koolikogemuste mõju oma elule ja heaolule? (Uurimus III)

Väitekirjas lähtun uue lapsepõlvesotsioloogia kesksetest ideedest (James & Prout, 2015; Qvortrup, 1994), mille kohaselt on laps aktiivne ja oma vanusele vastava sotsiaalse kompetentsusega sotsiaalne toimija (ingl. k *agent*), kellel on omad õigused ning kes on parim ekspert avaldama arvamust oma elu kohta (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fattore & Mason, 2017). Lapse toimevõimekuse (*agency*) avaldumisel mängivad olulist rolli vanemad, sõbrad ja õpetajad kui kaastoimijad (*co-agents*), aga ka laiem sotsiaalne ja materiaalne keskkond (Glăveanu, 2015; OECD, 2018). Subjektiivset heaolu määratlen väitekirjas kui meeldivate tundmuste domineerimist ebameeldivate üle ja hinnanguid oma elule üldiselt või selle eri aspektidele (heaolu emotsionaalne ja kognitiivne komponent; Diener, 2006). Kõrge subjektiivne heaolu (nimetatud ka kui psühholoogiline heaolu) väljendub veel enese aktsepteerimises, autonoomsuses, sihikindluses ja oma potentsiaalide teostamises (Ryff, 1989; Vittersø, 2016). Laste subjektiivse heaolu mõistmisel tuginen mitmetasandilisele lähenemisele (UNICEF, 2020). Selle järgi on heaolu kujunemine sotsiaalne protsess, mida mõjutab nii laps ise kui ka tema lähimad (kodu ja kool) ja kaugemad elukeskkonnad (nt ühiskonna majanduslik olukord ja hariduspoliitikad). Väitekirjas lähtun kooliga seotud heaoluallikate uurimisel kooliklima käsitusest (Cohen et al., 2009; Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015), tuues välja selle akadeemilise, sotsiaalse ja füüsilise mõõtme.

Doktoritöö põhineb kolmel uurimusel, mis on avaldatud artiklitena rahvusvahelistes eelretsenseeritavates ajakirjades. Järgnevalt annan ülevaate neist uurimustest, peamistest tulemustest ja järeldustest.

Uurimuse I ülesandeks oli luua operatsionaalne mudel, et analüüsida laste õiguste realiseerituse taset ja selle seoseid laste subjektiivse heaolu hinnanguga. Ülesanne põhines autoritel (nt Ben-Arieh, 2010; Kosher et al., 2014), kes tähtsustasid laste õiguste normatiivse raamistiku arvestamist laste heaolu mõistmisel ja mõõtmisel. Mudeli tegemisel võtsime aluseks ÜRO lapse õiguste konventsioonis sätestatud õiguste 3P klassifikatsiooni (lühend tuleneb ingliskeelsetest nimetustest *provision*, *protection* ja *participation* ehk õigus hoolitsusele, kaitsusele ja osalusele; Verhellen, 2015) ja mittediskrimineerimise printsiibi ning sidusime need lapse heaolu kirjeldavate lastele hindamiseks esitatud väidetega. Uurimuses kasutasime rahvusvahelise laste subjektiivse heaolu uuringu (ISCWeB, Children's Worlds) II küsitluslaine andmeid ning analüüsisime, kuivõrd on 8-aastaste Euroopa laste hinnangul õigused täidetud nende elus ning kuidas õiguste täidetus seostub nende arvamusega „mul on hea elu" – nimetatud väide esindab üldist heaolu hinnangut.

Enamik Eesti lastest (75%) oli täiesti veendunud, et nende elu on hea. Selle tulemuse järgi olid nad teiste riikide seas keskmisel positsioonil. Samas õiguste

täidetuse tase ei olnud Eestis teiste riikidega võrreldes nii hea. Laste heaolu-hinnangutele tuginedes võib väita, et Eesti laste elus on enim täidetud õigus hoolitsusele ja kaitstusele. See tähendab, et suur osa lastest tundis end koolis ning eriti kodus hästi ja turvaliselt. Osalusõigus – ankeedis sõnastatud kui laste arva-muse kuulamine ja sellega arvestamine – oli 8-aastaste elus kõige vähem täidetud õigus. Ka varasemates uuringud on täheldatud laste osalusõiguse madalat täide-tust võrreldes teiste õigustega (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017; Pećnik, Matić, & Milaković, 2016), seda eriti koolis (Soo & Kutsar, 2020, 2019b).

Tulemused Eesti laste kohta näitasid, et head suhted pereliikmete ja sõpradega olid kõige enam seotud arvamusega „mul on hea elu". Järgmine oluline heaolu mõjutav tegur oli turvalisus koolis. Teisiti öeldes, kui on täidetud õigus hoolitsusele ja kaitstusele, siis on ka laste subjektiivne heaolu kõrge. Positiivselt hindasid oma elu ka need Eesti lapsed, kelle vanemad arvestasid nende arvamustega ja õpetajad kohtlesid koolis õiglaselt (täidetud õigus diskrimineerimisvabale elule). Kokku-võtvalt näitas uurimus seose esinemist lapse õiguste täidetuse ja subjektiivse hea-olu vahel kodus ning koolis. Seega kinnitasid tulemused Ben-Arieh' (2010) ning Kosheri ja ta kolleegide (2014) seisukoha asjakohasust tugineda laste heaolu hindamisel õiguste normatiivsele raamistikule.

Lastega läbiviidud kvantitatiivsetes uuringutes (nagu ka Uurimuses I) on uuritavateks subjektideks küll lapsed ('alt üles' vaade), ent neis kasutatakse täis-kasvanute välja töötatud mõõtmisinstrumente ja mõisteid (n.ö ülalt alla lähene-mine), mis jätavad vähe võimalusi laste enda arusaamade ja mõtete teada saamiseks (Mason & Watson, 2014; Wilmes & Andresen, 2015). Sellest piirangust ajen-datuna valisime Uurimuses II kvalitatiivse uurimismeetodi, et välja selgitada, kuidas lapsed mõtestavad heaolu ja tõlgendavad enda koolikogemusi. Uurimuse koostamisel lähtusime rahvusvahelise laste heaolu kvalitatiivse uuringu (Chil-dren's Understandings of Well-Being in Global and Local Context; Fattore et al., 2019) protokollist. Empiirilise materjalina kasutasime poolstruktureeritud rühma-intervjuusid 12-aastaste Eesti lastega. Teiseks lähtusime selles uurimuses varase-matest leidudest, mille järgi õpilaste subjektiivne heaolu ja koolimeeldivus vähe-nevad vanusega (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017; Rees & Main, 2015), ning soovisime kuulda laste arvamusi heaolu kahandavate aspektide kohta.

Uurimus III lisab doktoritööle põlvkondliku perspektiivi. Selles uurimuses läksime kaugemale kooliaastatest ning analüüsisime kvalitatiivselt noorte täis-kasvanute tagasivaateid subjektiivsele heaolule koolis, et hinnata heaoluallikate püsimist põlvkondlikus vaates. Uurimuse andmestik koosnes Tartu Ülikooli üli-õpilaste õppetöö raames kogutud autobiograafilistest mälestustest kooliaja headest ja halbadest olukordadest. Väitekirjas võtsin kahe viimase uurimuse tulemuste tõlgendamisel aluseks esimeses uurimuses väljatöötatud mudeli ning vaatasin, kuivõrd peegeldub õiguste täidetus 12-aastaste laste ja noorte täiskasvanute kooli-kogemuste kirjeldustes. Samuti uurisin heaoluhinnangute taustal lapse toime-võimekuse avaldumist ja kaastoimivuse (ingl k. *co-agency*) töötamist.

Uurimuse II tulemustest selgus, et lapsed mõistsid heaolu kui hea olemasolu ja halva puudumist oma elus, sh koolis. Laste intervjuudest ja noorte täiskasva-nute mälestuslugudest (Uurimused II ja III) ilmnesid mitmed sarnased heaolu

loovad ja kahandavad olukorrad ja isikud koolis. Lapsed ja noored täiskasvanud seostasid heaoluallikaid eelkõige koolikliima akadeemilise ja sotsiaalse mõõtmega, 12-aastased nimetasid vähesel määral ka füüsilise mõõtmega seotud külgi nagu kooliruumide korrashoid ja turvalisus. Teismeliste ja noorte täiskasvanute lugudes ilmnes enim hoolitsuse ja kaitstuse õiguse (mitte) realiseerumist peegeldavaid olukordi koolis. Mittediskrimineerimise põhimõtte ja osalusõiguse täitetusele viitavaid jutustusi esines märgatavalt vähem.

Mõlemale vanuserühmale valmistasid koolis head meelt põnevad ja inspireerivad õpetamismeetodid, õpetaja personaalne tähelepanu ning abi õpiraskuste korral (õigus hoolitsusele). Liiga kiire õpetamise tempo ja arvukad koduülesanded pigem vähendasid heaolu. Heade hinnete saamine valmistas õpilastele rõõmu, kuid tajutud sotsiaalne surve olla akadeemiliselt edukas mõjus vastupidiselt.

Head suhted kaasõpilastega ning õpetajate hooliv (õigus hoolitsusele), austav ja õiglane kohtlemine (mittediskrimineerimise põhimõte) oli 12-aastastele lastele ja noortele täiskasvanutele oluline emotsionaalse, psühholoogilise ja kognitiivse heaolu allikas suurendades rõõmu, eneseväärikust, õpimotivatsiooni ja kuuluvustunnet koolis. Koolikiusamine ja vähene abi õpetajatelt sel puhul (õigus kaitstusele) kahandas aga enesehinnangut ja koolimeeldivust. Hirmu ja stressi koolis põhjustasid veel õpetaja karm, halvustav ja ebaõiglane käitumine õpilaste suhtes. Uurimuse II ja III tulemustest järeldub, et heaolutunde loomine koolikeskkonnas sõltub kaastoimivuse töötamisest õpilane-õpilane ja õpilane-õpetaja suhetes. Üksteise aktsepteerimine, kaasamine (õppetöös) ja koostöö suurendavad läheduse tajumist, toimevõimekust ning pühendumist õpingutes (vt ka Jang, Kim ja Reeve, 2012; Thapa et al., 2013). Ent vajakajäämine suhete vastastikkuses, domineerimispüüdlused eakaaslaste hulgas (vt Fattore & Mason, 2017) ja õpetaja võimupositsiooni rõhutamine tekitavad lapses ebaturvalisuse tunde ning vähendavad tema võimalust ja julgustust olla toimevõimekas ja vaidlustada täiskasvanute või kaaslaste ebaõiglasena tajutud käitumist. Need tulemused on kooskõlas Greene'i ja Nixoni (2020) ning Sirkko ja ta kolleegide (2019) seisukohaga, et haridusinstitutsioon, konkreetse kooli kultuur ja õpetaja võimu kehtestamise ulatus struktureerivad ja piiritlevad lapse toimevõimekust.

12-aastaste ja noorte täiskasvanute lugudest peegeldus tagasihoidlik võimalus olla autonoomne ja osaleda koolis (osalusõigus). Tuginedes Lansdowni (2010) osaluse tüpoloogiale, võib Uurimuse II ja III põhjal väita, et lapsed panustavad koolis peamiselt madalama taseme osalustegevustes, nagu näiteks tunnis õpitava teema kohta arvamuse avaldamine. Kõrgema taseme osalustegevusi, mis põhinevad lapse ja täiskasvanu koostööl või kus laps on tegevuse algataja, ilmnes väga vähe. Võimalik, et õpetajad ei märka alati olukordi, kus oleks vaja laste arvamust küsida, või võivad vältida seda, sest kardavad, et laste aktiivne osalus ohustab nende autoriteeti (Greene & Nixon, 2020). Ent laste osalemise aktiivsus võib olla tagasihoidlik ka vähese võimaluse ja harjumuse tõttu.

Noorte täiskasvanute rekonstrueeritud mälestuslugudes ilmnes tõendeid subjektiivse heaolu homöostaasi toimimise kohta (vt Cummins, 2014, 2010) koolikiusamisega toimetulekul. Kannatanul aitasid kiusamisjuhtumit lahendada ja heaolu taastada tema sisemised ressursid (nt tahtejõud, halbadest kogemustest õppimine)

ja teiste abi kasutamine, mis oli märk toimevõimekuse arengust ning kaastoimivuse töötamisest keerulistes sotsiaalsetes suhetes.

Kokkuvõtvalt demonstreerisid väitekirja tulemused, et laste subjektiivne heaolu on suhetepõhine (ingl. k *relational*; vt ka White, 2017) ning seotud lapse toimevõimekuse väljendamise võimalustega ja kaastoimivuse funktsioneerimisega. Laste hinnangud oma heaolu erinevatele aspektidele on seotud lapse õiguste täidetuse tasemega. Mida enam on õigused lapse elus täidetud, seda kõrgemalt hindavad lapsed oma subjektiivset heaolu koolis ja elus üldiselt.

Hoolivad ja turvalised suhted kodus ning koolis on oluline eeltingimus hea lapsepõlve kogemiseks. Laste ja noorte täiskasvanute (tagasivaatelistes) hinnangutes näib koolikliima sotsiaalne aspekt olevat tähtsam kui akadeemiline mõõde. See leid tõendab, et laste akadeemiline areng toimub paremini olukorras, kus positiivsed suhted toetavad õpiatmosfääri ning rahulolu koolikogemusega. Tulemuste järgi panustavad ühtehoidvad ja sõbralikud klassikaaslased kooli kuuluvustunde kujunemisse, kuid hoolivatel õpetajatel on märksa suurem roll kvaliteetse koolikliima loomisel ja lapse toimevõimekuse võimaldamisel. Neile tulemustele tuginedes pakun välja soovitused, mis aitavad kaasa eelkõige hoolitsusõiguse paremale realiseerumisele kodus ja koolis. Soovitan tõhustada vanemaharidust, laiendada selle kättesaadavust ning edendada kodu ja kooli koostööd. Samuti teen ettepaneku õpetajatel ja vanematel suhelda lastega kui võrdväärsete isikutega ning edendada hoolivat, usalduslikku ja emotsionaalset tuge pakkuvat suhtekeskkonda. Selline suhtumisviis inspireerib lapsi seda järgima ning hindama õpetajaid ja vanemaid hea sõnaga.

Väitekiri tõi välja mitmeid koolikliimaga seotud positiivseid ja negatiivseid aspekte, mis kordusid eri vanuses osalejate hinnangutes ning viitasid heaoluallikate püsimisele põlvkondlikus vaates, aga ka puudujääkidele haridussüsteemis, õpetamise praktikas ja koolikultuuris. Artiklite tulemused näitasid, et kiusamine on tõsine heaolu ja toimevõimekust ohustav probleem koolis. Eriti siis, kui laps ei saa abi koolist (ega kodust), võib kaduda tema õpihuvi ning katkeda isegi haridustee. Tagamaks lapse õigust kaitstusele, teen järgmise ettepaneku. Soovitan õpetajatel olla tähelepanelik ning märgata abivajajaid või kiusamisohus lapsi, võtta aega laste empaatiliseks ärakuulamiseks, parendada oma sekkumisoskusi, küsides vajadusel nõu või kaasates pädev spetsialist. Õpetaja valmisolek tegeleda (õppetööväliste) keeruliste situatsioonidega ning püüd last mõista, süstib lastesse usaldust täiskasvanute vastu ning õpetab neid ise probleemidega toime tulema.

Tulemused paljastasid vajakajäämise mõningate õpetajate professionaalsuses ja eetilisuses teatud soost, perekondliku tausta või võimetega õpilaste kohtlemisel. Selgus, et (teadlik või teadvustamata) eristav lähenemine õpilasele mitte ainult ei kahandanud lapse õpihimu ega tulemusi aines, vaid mõjus negatiivselt ka heaolutundele. Eelnevast tulenevalt teen ettepaneku õpetajahariduses pöörata rohkem tähelepanu sotsiaalselt, emotsionaalselt ja eetiliselt keeruliste olukordadega toimetuleku arendamisele õppeprotsessis. Lisaks soovitan õpetajatel vaadata endasse ja kriitiliselt hinnata, ega seal esine kalduvust kohelda mõnda last eelarvamusega või tõlgendada tema käitumist kallutatud viisil. Poliitikakujundajatel ja kooli juhtkonnal soovitan aga panustada enam õpetajaameti

väärtustamisse, rakendada mõistlikku tööaega ning pakkuda õpetajatele tuge ja supervisiooni.

Originaalartiklitest ilmnes, et koolikeskkonnas domineerib endiselt paternalistlik lähenemine. See tähendab, et fookuses on lastele hariduse pakkumine ja kaitse, ent laste kui sotsiaalse grupi hääl koolis eriti ei kõla. Laste arvamusega arvestamine ja otsustusprotsessidesse kaasamine näib olevat rohkem retooriline kui igapäevaelus avalduv käitumismuster. Seega soovitan kooli juhtkonnal ja õpetajatel lubada lastel olla koolielus kui partnerid, mitte üksnes õppekavas ettenähtud teadmisi ja oskusi omandavad indiviidid. Partnerlus eeldab mõlema poole – laste ja õpetajate – aktiivset kaasamist erinevatesse tegevustesse ja otsustusprotsessidesse, laste seisukohtade kuulamist ja tõsiselt võtmist. Osalemise harjutamise kaudu kasvab lapse julgus, oskus ja harjumus oma arvamust avaldada ning enda heaolu eest seista.

Väitekirja tulemustest võib järeldada, et laste heaolu tagamine eeldab terviklikku lähenemist laste õiguste täidetusele nende elus. Laste heaolutunde kujunemisel (koolis) on suure tähtsusega laste mõistmine aktiivsete toimijatena, kellel on õigus avaldada arvamust ning olla kuulda võetud. See aga eeldab täiskasvanutelt/õpetajatelt suuremat laste õiguste teadvustamist ja nendega arvestamist, sest õiguste tagamine koolikeskkonnas panustab positiivse koolikliima loomisse, tõstab laste heaolutunnet, koolikuuluvust ning hariduse mõttekust laste silmis.

PUBLICATIONS

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education
2006–2014   University of Tartu, PhD studies in sociology
2002–2006   University of Tartu, Master studies in sociology
1997–2002   University of Tartu, Bachelor studies in sociology

Work Experience
Since 2021   Junior Lecturer of Social Policy, Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu
2018–2020   Assistant of Social Policy, Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu
2014–2017   Lecturer of Gender, Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu
2010–2013   Research Fellow, Institute of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Tartu
2006–2009   Research Fellow extraordinarius, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Tartu

Research Interests
Child well-being and children's rights, violence against children and young people, gender-based violence and gender inequality

Participation in Relevant Research and Development Projects
Since 2020   Grant (PRG700) "Vulnerability in childhood and vulnerable subjectivity: interdisciplinary comparative perspective; University of Tartu.
2017–2019   Grant (PUT1530) "Children's subjective well-being in comparative perspective: methodological challenges and practical contributions"; University of Tartu.
2018   Project "EU Kids Online Survey in Estonia", University of Tartu.
2015   Project "Sexual abuse of children and young people in Estonia". University of Tartu, Ministry of Justice.
2011–2013   Project "Eradication of the use of physical punishment on children within family and institutions"; Association Altea España, University of Tartu.

2010–2012	Project "Risktaking Online Behaviour Empowerment Through Research and Training – ROBERT"; CBSS Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at risk, University of Tartu.
2008–2009	Project "Ways of Implementing the EU directives on Violence against Children, Young People and Women: Good Practices and Recommendations"; University of Ljubljana, University of Tartu.
2008–2009	Project "Treatment and collaboration in the case of child abuse"; University of Tartu, Ministry of Social Affairs.
2006–2009	Grant (ETF6672) "Violence and child abuse: specialist's perspective"; University of Tartu.
2003–2004	Project "The Baltic Sea regional study on adolescents' sexuality"; NOVA, University of Tartu.
1999–2000	Project "Epidemiological survey for the prevention of child abuse in Estonia"; Tartu Child Support Centre.

Selected Publications

Soo, K. & Kutsar, D. (2022). "Negative and positive experiences form the backbone of my understanding of myself and other people": School life recollections of young adults. *International journal of Emotional Education, 14*(1), 53–68.

Beilmann, M., Soo, K., & Kutsar, D. (2022). Jagatud mure on pool muret: Rahulolu kaasõpilaste ja koolieluga koolikiusamist kogenud õpilaste seas. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri = Estonian Journal of Education, 10*(1), 61–89. https://doi.org/ 10.12697/eha.2022.10.1.04.

Kalmus, V., Sukk, M., & Soo, K. (2022). Towards more active parenting: Trends in parental mediation of children's internet use in European countries. *Children & Society*, 36(5), 1026–1042. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12553.

Lippus, H., Soo, K., Laanpere, M., Yount, K.M., Part, K., Ringmets, I., Ainsaar, M., & Karro, H. (2020). The prevalence and patterns of exposure to interpersonal violence among men and women in Estonia. *PLoS ONE, 15*(8), ARTNe0237562. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237562.

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Ainsaar, M., Soo, K., & Toomla, R. (2020). Do women in power avoid making cuts to child welfare during an economic recession. *Journal of East European Management Studies*, 116–130.

Kutsar, D., Soo, K., Strózik, T., Strózik, D., Grigoraș, B., & Bălțătescu, S. (2019). Does the realisation of children's rights determine a good life in eight-year-olds' perspectives? A comparison of eight European countries. *Child Indicators Research*, 12, 161–183.

Kutsar, D., Soo, K., & Mandel, L.-M. (2019). Schools for well-being? Critical discussions with schoolchildren. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 11, 49–66.

Strömpl, J., Ilves, K., & Soo, K. (2009). Violence in Focus: Narrative Analysis of the Role of Violence in Teenagers' Life. In J., Mikk, M., Veisson, & P. Luik (Eds.), *Teenagers in Estonia: Values and Behaviour* (pp. 87–102). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften. (Estonian Studies in Education; 1).

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Soo, K., Ainsaar, M., & Kalmus, V. (2012). Behind the Curtains of e-State: Determinants of Online Sexual Harassment among Estonian Children. *Studies of Transition States and Societies, 4*(2), 35–48. https://doi.org/10.58036/stss.v4i2.95.

Membership in Professional Organisations

International Society for child Indicators (ISCI) – member

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Haridustee
2006–2014   Tartu Ülikool, doktoriõpe sotsioloogia erialal
2002–2006   Tartu Ülikool, magistri kraad sotsioloogia erialal
1997–2002   Tartu Ülikool, bakalaureuse kraad sotsioloogia erialal

Teenistuskäik
Alates 2021   Sotsiaalpoliitika nooremlektor, Tartu Ülikooli ühiskonnateaduste instituut
2018–2020   Sotsiaalpoliitika assistent, Tartu Ülikooli ühiskonnateaduste instituut
2014–2017   Soouuringute lektor, Tartu Ülikooli ühiskonnateaduste instituut
2010–2013   Teadur, Tartu Ülikooli sotsioloogia ja sotsiaalpoliitika instituut
2006–2009   Erakorraline teadur, Tartu Ülikooli sotsioloogia ja sotsiaalpoliitika osakond

Peamised uurimisvaldkonnad
Laste heaolu ja õigused, laste ja noorte vastane vägivald, sooline vägivald ja ebavõrdsus

Osalemine olulisemates uurimis- ja arendusprojektides
Alates 2020   Grant (PRG700) "Lapsepõlve haavatavus ja haavatav subjektiivsus: interdistsiplinaarne võrdlev vaade"; Tartu Ülikool.
2017–2019   Grant (PUT1530) "Laste subjektiivne heaolu võrdlevas perspektiivis: metodoloogilised väljakutsed ja panus praktikasse"; Tartu Ülikool.
2018   "Rahvusvahelise projekti EU Kids Online raames laste internetikasutuse Eesti uuringu elluviimine"; Tartu Ülikool.
2015   Projekt "Laste ja noorte seksuaalse väärkohtlemise leviku uuring", Tartu Ülikool, Justiitsministeerium.
2011–2013   Projekt "Laste füüsiline karistamine peredes ja institutsioonides"; Association Altea España, Tartu Ülikool.
2010–2012   Projekt "ROBERT – Riskeeriva online käitumise jõutamine läbi teadusuuringute ja ennetuse"; Läänemeremaade Nõukogu riskilaste ekspertgrupp (CBSS), Tartu Ülikool.

2008–2009	Projekt "EL direktiivide rakendamine naiste, laste ja noorte vastu suunatud vägivalla puhul: head praktikad ja soovitused"; Ljubljana Ülikool; Tartu Ülikool.
2008–2009	Projekt "Laste väärkohtlemise juhtumite menetlusprotsessi ja võrgustikutööd kaardistav uuring"; Tartu Ülikool, Sotsiaalministeerium.
2006–2009	Grant (ETF6672) "Vägivald ja väärkohtlemine: spetsialistide perspektiiv". Tartu Ülikool.
2003–2004	Projekt "Läänemere riikide uuring noorte seksuaalsusest"; NOVA, Tartu Ülikool.
1999–2000	Projekt "Epidemioloogiline uuring laste väärkohtlemise preventsiooniks Eestis"; Tartu Laste Tugikeskus.

Olulisemad publikatsioonid

Soo, K. & Kutsar, D. (2022). "Negative and positive experiences form the backbone of my understanding of myself and other people": School life recollections of young adults. *International journal of Emotional Education, 14*(1), 53–68.

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Erialased organisatsioonid

Rahvusvahelise laste indikaatorite ühingu (ISCI) liige
SÜLEM (Sotsioloogia Üliõpilaste Liit Eestimaal) liige

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