

COMBINING WORK AND PARENTHOOD IN ESTONIA, SWEDEN AND FINLAND

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The article is based on a study which analysed the participation of women and men in the labour market and birth rate in the current situation of population ageing in the EU. The article disserts the following subthemes: possibilities for women and men to balance work–life situations; women’s and men’s willingness to balance work–life; agents affecting the stances of women and men, and various strategies for combining work and family life.

Study results allege that: women’s active participation in the labour market does not have a negative effect on birth rate if the government provides mothers with social security support for the future; the contentment of Swedish and Finnish respondents’ with their present governments’ family supporting measures affirm that Nordic countries have been successful forerunners in adopting family policy measures to back up mothers.

Keywords: *changing parenthood (motherhood, fatherhood), combining work and family, labour market, ageing society, affecting agents.*

Introduction

A significant number of women who prefer the traditional division of labour, and men who prefer to spend most of their time in paid work without significant participation in family life has been evidenced in article *‘Mothers and Fathers in Employment in Comparison of Welfare States in Scandinavia and Estonia’* (Põdder, 2011). In this article, Estonia is compared with two Nordic countries that serve as a model of welfare society. The so-called Scandinavian (or, primarily, Swedish) welfare model encourages societies all over the world to aspire towards it.

Traditional gender roles still exist in real-life situations. Available data varies from country to country, but the nature of motherhood and fatherhood is changing slowly and men and employers are slow to accept the changes. Arnlaug Leira in her book *Working Parents and the Welfare State* (2002) asked a question in point of the changing labour market conditions – i.e. more and more mothers become engaged in paid work: Which family models should welfare states facilitate, if any? In the same book, Leira (2002) offered three models of family which can be adopted as a basis for political measures:

1. specialisation of the roles of mother and father (model family of industrialism) – “naturally”, mothers are homemakers and carers, while fathers are economic providers (for father as sole provider see Ellingsæter, 1998);
2. the sequential employment of mothers – mothers taking over the responsibilities of the economic provider during periods when paid work does not conflict with motherly duties. This is an early version of a dual-earner family model (for mother as junior providers see Ellingsæter, 1998);

3. ‘shared roles model’ – both mothers and fathers are employees and take care of children (for equal providers see Ellingsæter, 1998).

At the government’s level, Sweden, Finland and Estonia are active supporters of Leira’s third family model (2002). The labour market behaviour of women and men tends toward the third model, but their behaviour on the level of family life, the real situation, belongs to the second family type (Põdder, 2011).

This study addressed the attitudes and wishes of men and women towards balancing work and family and sought to identify the actual operational modes of the combinations in real-life situations. Answers were sought for the following key questions: (1) How does Estonian society compare with the new Scandinavian concept of motherhood and fatherhood in the Scandinavian context?; (2) Which are the main conflicted themes and core values for mothers and fathers in Scandinavia and in Estonia?; (3) Whether, and if so, in which dimensions can the equality of women and men in combining work and family life be viewed as a problem?; (4) Which are the main factors affecting women and men in their choices in family matters?; and (5) How strongly are the attitudes of women and men in Scandinavia and Estonia influenced by their employers.

Men and women: combining work and family life

The EU Member States have to solve the problem of how to manage and survive in the situation of their ageing societies. It is important to take action in two aspects: the need for complementary labour force (to maintain economic stability) and the need to support the birth rate (to relieve

the demographic situation). Two possible models have been proposed for the EU Member States – full employment and a combination of work and family life.

Nordic countries have been successful forerunners in developing family policy measures to back up mothers' active participation in the labour market and to reduce the fathers' assigned role as sole breadwinners, and through this the welfare states in Scandinavia strongly support the new concept of parenthood (Leira, 2002; Ronsen & Skrede, 2010). It turned out that nowadays fertility rates are the highest in those countries where the percentage of women in the workforce is also the highest – in Denmark, Finland and Sweden – because public policies play a supporting and activating role (Thevenon, 2008). Estonia is also included in this group as it is similar to the Nordic countries, although the supportive role of public policies (e.g., child care services) is not so effective there.

The employment rate of women in Estonia (69% in 2012) is one of the highest in the European Union (68%), but it is lower than that of Sweden (77%) and Finland (72%). According to the Eurostat data (Teichgraber, 2013), the employment rate of Estonian women aged 20–64 has been higher than the EU average during the entire past decade, including the years 2009 and 2010, when the employment rate of women in Estonia dropped much faster than the EU average. In 2011, the employment of women increased in Estonia as well as in the EU but the growth was more significant in Estonia (*Eesti statistika aastaraamat*, 2012).

In real life, the phenomenon of combining work and family life has many aspects as:

1. it is an important indicator of the quality of life for men and women;
2. it provides parents a chance to invest time in children, which is a major factor of their wellbeing (Stevens, de Bergeyck & de Liedekerke, 2011), and through this they are encouraged to have more children;
3. it reduces income poverty risks (Schoon et al., 2005; Huerta et al., 2011) and enhances economic independence for each adult (Leira, 2002; *Child poverty and child wellbeing in the European Union*, 2010);
4. paid work offers mothers and fathers an opportunity of self-realisation and a change in daily routine (Hansson, Tillemann & Derman, 2004);
5. it reduces insecurities of, mostly, women regarding their position in the labour market (Hansson, 2000; Hansson, et al., 2004).

At the level of EU organisations (e.g., the European Commission) the family policy was not an issue before the 1980s. However, in Sweden the equality of both women and men in work and family life emerged as an issue in family policy in the 1960s (Björnberg, 2002).

The situation in Estonia resembles that of Scandinavian countries in the 1990s with its changing gender stereotypes and devoting special attention to fatherhood in parenthood policies. Kaie Kerem and Kaire Pöder in their article 'Welfare State' in *Estonian Human Development Report 2012/2013* (2013) have pointed out that Estonia's position in terms of contentment and social security expenses is similar to most of the new EU countries who are characterised by a lower contentment and social security expense level than Western

European countries. In Estonia the same changes are taking place as in Central Europe, albeit with dilatory effect, being delayed for 10–15 years.

Women and men in Nordic countries and in Estonia are eager to participate in paid work. However, in combining work and family life while having paid work, mothers are faced with three problems – working time, alternative forms of working, and conditions for re-entering the labour market after periods of childcare.

A new career model in the EU adapts 'flexicurity' and could provide an individual designing career path with a better balance between flexibility and security. However, this concept is polarised along gender lines, since men continue to have secure career pathways (Jurczak, Hurley, 2008).

Data has shown (Stevens, de Bergeyck & de Liedekerke, 2011) that up to 80% of women (including childless women) prefer to combine paid employment with family care, only up to 30% of women prefer to be only caretakers or only work in paid work. Authors of the survey have pointed out that the key issue is that the preferences of women who are mothers – to be at home as caretakers or combine work and family life – are influenced by their children's age.

The report *Realities of Mothers in Europe* (Stevens, de Bergeyck & de Liedekerke, 2011) clearly demonstrates the need to have a choice of working part-time – 92% of mothers admitted that having working hours coincide with school hours was of high importance, and a large majority of the interviewed mothers expressed their preference for part-time paid employment until the child is 18 years or older. The results of the study *Fewer Mothers Prefer Full-Time Work* (2007) showed that mothers who work full time are hardest on themselves and give themselves low marks as a good mothers (Stevens, de Bergeyck & de Liedekerke, 2011). Full-time mothers' low assessment of themselves as mothers can be related to fatigue; K. Nilsson (2010), for example, has argued that tiredness is an important factor in determining birth rate.

Studies show that among Swedish women's part-time employment exceeds EU-average significantly and of Estonian women's part time employment about three times and of Finnish women about two times (OECD, 2011).

The participation of women and men in the labour market is related to the attitude of employers (Järviste, 2008), who can adjust working time schedules and working conditions to help their employees combine work and family life. Employers appeared to view more favourably mothers staying home with ill children than fathers doing the same (Pödder, 2011). Also, it has been revealed that in Scandinavia and Estonia the most family-friendly working places are state and municipality institutions (Hansson, 2001; Ronsen & Skrede, 2010).

Wim van Lancker and Joris Ghysels (2012) have argued in their article that childcare acts are a precondition for parents to engage in employment. In Europe, two countries – Sweden and the Belgian region of Flanders – are the forerunners regarding public childcare for young children (Lancker & Ghysels, 2012). Childcare acts remain out of the scope of this paper, but the abovementioned fact offers some background information – in Sweden, childcare is a current and topical question. According to Mattias Strandh and Mikael Nordenmark (2006), one reason why childcare is a topical issue is that Swedish couples experience the highest degree of work–family conflict in Europe, but the availability and cost

of childcare are a problem for Estonian parents, too (Roosalu, 2012), so it may be assumed that this conflict is also high in Estonia.

Anu Narusk (1999) and Leeni Hansson (2000) have pointed out that women in Estonia are less satisfied with their footing in the family context than men. Women's lower satisfaction with family life is understandable – gender equality is more visible in the labour market than it is in family life (Olah, Bernardt & Goldscheider, 2002).

Stereotypical gender roles are the main hindrance to changes, as they are determined by the social status, education, the age of parents, the age and the number of children in the family; the model of the family of origin, type of residence (town, countryside) and the prevailing attitudes towards gender roles in the society.

Opportunities and being prepared, as well as investing time and energy, are important moments in taking on parental responsibilities. Absolute gender equality seems utopian: above all, it is the question of the quality of life and family values, which influence the child wellbeing in the same way.

Methodology and field research

Methods

For the current study, a comprehensive research method called Identity Structure Analysis (ISA), created and developed by Professor Peter Weinreich in 1989, was adopted.

The theoretical underpinnings of Identity Structure Analysis (ISA) are a series of conceptualisations of self and identity, the aspects of which are integrated within ISA: the psychodynamic approaches (mainly by E. H. Erikson), symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, personal construct psychology, appraisal theory, and cognitive-affective consistency principles (mainly G. A. Kelly's Personal Construct Theory) (Weinreich, 2003). Two main arenas of interrelated processes guide the presentation of the ISA conceptual framework: 'A person's appraisal of the social world and its significance is an expression of one's identity'; 'appraisal and the current expression of identity' and 'identification and the formation and development of identity' (Weinreich, 2003, p. 21).

Within the framework of the current study the features of ISA enable us to determine similarities and differences in the attitudes of women and men towards combining work and family life which are expressed by the degree to which they identify themselves with 18 instrument agents. Identity instruments – entities (situated selves in various contexts, individuals, groups, institutions) (see Table 1 for domains and entities) and bipolar constructs (see Table 2 (in Appendix)); '*bipolarity of constructs enables assessment of people's favoured and disfavoured elements, as these may vary from person to person*' (Weinreich, 2003, p. 25-26) – were constructed for individuals participating in the study. The constructs represent values and beliefs related to the problem issues which were covered in the first part of this article. The constructed identity instrument is unique and used only in this research, whereas the list of entities and bipolar constructs are designed in the course of research.

Table 1. Domains and entities of the research instrument

Domains	Entities
Political and public representatives	Present government of Estonia/Sweden/Finland
	The opposition to the legislative council
	The media
Wider socio-biographical context	Estonian/Sweden/Finnish people by gender and colleagues at work, friends, neighbours, employer
Family	My mother
	My father
	My partner
	My partner's mother
	My partner's father

The sample

The field research was carried out in the period from February 2012 to June 2013 in Estonia, Sweden and Finland. The subject group included 15 women and 15 men from each country (altogether 90 respondents), who met the following study criteria:

- Must have custody of at least one child under the age of 16;
- Must be in a two-way relationship/partnership;
- Must be currently living in the area.

The age of female respondents varied from 23 to 50, the age of male respondents from 28 to 52; and the number of children varied from 1 to 5. The collected data was analysed with Identity Exploration computer software Ipseus (Weinreich & Ewart, 2007). As a result of data processing, qualitative features of identity were expressed in the form of quantitative estimates of identity parameters.

Data about women and men is shown in parallel with each other in the analysis section of the study. The women's groups (15 from each country) are marked in the study as EW (Estonia), SW (Sweden), and FW (Finland); the men's group (15 from each country) as EM (Estonia), SM (Sweden), and FM (Finland).

Results

Analysis of the data was carried out at both group and individual levels. The data from the six groups of respondents is shown in comparison tables.

Person's appraisal is the central process by which people assess the circumstances of the potential fulfilment of their identity aspirations during any period of their life cycle. Appraisal as a process offers and records experiences of life situations and events, each new experience engenders the potential for both a reappraisal of earlier values and beliefs and an elaboration of identity, which respondents can evaluate through the themes contained in the study instrument's bipolar constructs and entities. The definition of one's appraisal is:

A person's appraisal of a specific situation is made by way of construing, or attributing meaning to, agents and events in context, within the limitations of one's constructs as cued by the situation, and evaluating or judging this construal in relation to one's aspirations (Weinreich, 2003, p. 20-21).

The main affecting agents to women and men in their choices in family matters

Here are presented the respondents' appraisal of different domains (entities).

Patterns of identifications: positive role models – idealistic identification with others; negative role models – contra-identifications with others.

The definition of idealistic identification with others is 'one's idealistic identification with another – the similarity between the qualities one attributes to the other and those one would like to possess as part of one's ideal self-image' (Weinreich, 2003, p. 97).

Table 3 shows the entities which had the highest *idealistic identification* value. As far as respondents of this study are concerned, the influence of the media is present with both women and men. The partner's father being among the three first is a common trait of both women and men in Finland. This is also true for men in Sweden (where it occupies the fourth place). A common trait for women and men in Sweden is the fact that the employer is among the first three.

For men in Estonia, neighbours occupy the fourth place, but unlike women in Finland they do not acknowledge the importance of social network in family matters. The first three entities of the groups of respondents who had the highest *contra-identification* value, are shown in Table 4. The definition of contra-identifications with others is 'one's contra-identification with another—the similarity between the qualities one attributes to the other and those from which one would wish to dissociate' (Weinreich, 2003, p. 97).

Groups EW/EM have the most conflicted identifications with the opposition, groups SW/SM and FW/FM with the government. However, groups SW/SM and FW/FM are the most pleased with government activities during the time of supporting a family. This variance could be explained by the fact, as has been pointed out by Wim van Oorschot and Bart Meuleman (2010), that the social legitimacy of the welfare state is multidimensional—individuals who emphatically endorsed a substantial role for government in the provision of welfare could be, at the same time, critical about specific aspects of such provision.

For Estonian women, government ranks sixth, for Estonian men, ninth. For Finnish men their employer occupies the second place on *contra-identification*, while for Finnish women the employer has one of the lowest values. For all groups of respondents the mother is in the first three, for Swedish men the entity 'mother' ranks fourth.

For all respondents, 'My partner' is among the three first constructs, which seems to conform to the unresolved problem of finding balance in work–family life.

Conflicted identification

Conflicted identification in ISA context does not reflect as much opposition with the entities as it does with agents in the society (in the current instrument), whose values are not known or shared.

Conflicted identification is defined as: 'one's current self-image the extent of one's identification conflict with another—a multiplicative function of one's current empathetic identification and contra-identification with that 'other'' (Weinreich, 2003, p. 100).

For the given data values above 0.60 are considered high and values below 0.40 low. A maximum of three high-value *conflicted identifications* are given in Table 5.

Government occupying the first place for groups SW/FW/SM/FM is a logical outcome; according to Table 5, the data shows that groups SW/SM/FW/FM have the most conflicted identifications with the government.

Evaluation of self in different contexts

Below it is outlined how respondents feel about themselves in different contexts of entities, where *ego-involvement* measures their level of engagement with this particular entity:

a) *Evaluation of the respondent's socio-biographical context: data about current entities is shown in Table 6.*

In a socio-biographical context, ego-involvement for groups EW/EM is the strongest with the partner, the last entity of value is the partner's father. The partner occupying the first place for Estonian respondents may be explained with a stronger inclination towards traditional partnership compared to respondents from Finland or Sweden. For groups SW/SM and FW/FM the strongest ego-involvement is with their father, the last entity of value is the partner's mother.

b) *The wider socio-cultural domain: data about current entities is shown in Table 7*

In terms of current entities, groups EW/EM identify themselves most strongly with women in Estonia, while opposition is the last entity. Groups SW/SM and FW/FM identify themselves most with the government, which confirms Wim van Oorschot's and Bart Meuleman's (2010) notion that the social legitimacy of a welfare state is multidimensional, not simple. SW identifies least with other men in Sweden and SM least with the opposition. Group FW identifies themselves least with employer, FM least with opposition.

c) *The respondent's socio-developmental and biographical processes (change or resistance to change)*

Data on the respondents' socio-developmental and biographical processes is shown in Table 8. All respondent groups identify empathetically more closely with 'Political and public representatives', with the Swedish and Finnish respondents' empathetic identification being especially high with entity 'government' in past/current and future self. This confirms their satisfaction with past/current and future life and the situation in their country.

Estonian respondents identify themselves empathetically more with opposition, under 'Political and public representative', which seems to demonstrate their slight dissatisfaction with their life situation. Estonian respondents are also characterised by the closest empathetic identification with the media.

All women respondents identified empathetically with other people, which confirms that women are more connected with their social context. Of the wider socio-biographical domains, nearly all respondents empathetically identify themselves with colleagues rather than with friends, which is understandable in the light that all respondents were

employed, except for three housewives in Estonia, and that most employed people spend a considerable number of hours at work.

Inside the domain ‘family’, Estonian respondents identify themselves empathetically more closely than other respondents, and they are therefore considered in this research context to be *primordialists* – their attitudes are obviously more strongly influenced by the older generation than those of Swedish and Finnish respondents, who were in this research context considered to be *situationalists*. *Primordialism* and *situationalism* could be defined as follows: Primordialism – a sentiment, or affect-laden set of beliefs and discourses, about a perceived essential continuity from group ancestry to progeny (perceived kith and kin), located symbolically in a specific territory or place (which may or may not be the current place of the people concerned) (Weinreich, Bacova & Rougier, 1997/2003, p. 119). Situationalism – a set of beliefs or discourses about the instrumental and socially constructed nature of the group, in which interpretations and reinterpretations of history provide rationales justifying the legitimacy of a peoplehood (Weinreich, Bacova & Rougier, 1997/2003, p. 119).

The main conflicted themes and core values for respondents

In the process of evaluating entities and bipolar constructs (‘structural pressure’, measure of the compelling and constraining influence of a particular construct, which ranges from -100 to 100), Estonian respondents were much more cautious than respondents from Sweden and Finland, and women in average showed lower rates than men. Therefore, three constructs of the highest value are compared for respondents of each group.

The definition of structural pressure is the overall strength of the excess of compatibilities over incompatibilities between the evaluative connotations of attributions one makes to each entity by way of the one construct and one’s overall evaluation of each entity (Weinreich, 2003, p. 103).

The most ‘conflicted evaluative dimension’ of person’s identity (main conflicted themes for respondents)

For Estonian women (EW) the most ‘conflicted evaluative dimension’ of person’s identity was *employer’s attitudes towards employee’s gender* (-26, 02); they seem to be convinced that Estonian employers have gender-based attitudes towards employees.

As to Estonian men (EM), employers’ gender-based attitudes towards employees is also conflicted, although with it has a lower value.

Combining of work and family life is a conflicted theme for EW, while for EM combining of work and family life is a *core value*.

For EM, the source of *the highest conflict* (for EW it is a moderately conflicted identity dimension) is the ageing society – both groups obviously know that population ageing is a problem in the Estonian society and while they seem to feel some responsibility, their willingness to back up to solve this problem is influenced by a high level of concern about coping with real-life situations.

EM aged over 40 with more than three children in the family reported higher conflict in the impossibility of equality of women and men combining work and family life and

through this also to the construct *‘I think that in family life women are responsible for functional combining of work and family life’*.

EM living in the city with at least two children reported higher conflict about the construct *‘both parents have to work in paid work’*.

In this context it is understandable that EM reported a conflict about the idea that family should be managed only by the nuclear family.

It became evident that EM are ready to be the main breadwinners in the family, also that they believe that in family life women are responsible for functional combining of work and family life, which at the same time has *high conflict* for them (for EW this construct also has a high conflict, but with a lower numerical value: women currently being housewives tend to show higher values). In this context it is understandable that for EM evaluative dimension identity is also *highly conflicted* in the construct *‘I think that it’s important that as many people would work’* (-12, 33). For EW being engaged in paid work is important (but not a core value), they are not very satisfied only with the role of housewife.

For SM the *most conflicted* evaluative dimension identity in a construct was *‘I think that when raising a child, most of the responsibility is on the mother’* (-64, 79) (SM with higher education have higher conflict) and *‘combining work and family life isn’t possible’* (-38, 88).

The study revealed that SM with secondary education have conflict in the construct *‘the equality of women/men in combining work and family life isn’t possible’* and *‘ageing isn’t a problem that needs to be solved’*.

For SW the *conflict* of how to manage childcare responsibilities (all SW respondents were working mothers) came first, followed by problems with combining work and family life. For SW the construct of the *conflict ‘having children isn’t compulsory’* (-25, 81) ranked third (for SM it occupied the fifth place).

It was revealed that SW with higher education/living in a city/working part-time have higher conflicts with the following themes: *family should be managed with nuclear resources, the combining of work and family life isn’t possible, and women or men working overtime is a normal situation*.

For FW the *most conflicted* evaluative identity dimension in a construct was re-entering the labour market following periods of childcare. In addition, besides the above-mentioned conflicts, FW support the opinion that the attitudes of Finnish employers towards employees are gender-based.

FM agreed (higher conflict in men living in the countryside and having three children) with FW that it is hard for women to take career breaks, but their *most conflicted* issue was *‘a person who can’t combine work and family life isn’t a good parent/partner’* (-52, 83). It may be assumed that Finnish men are eager to support their children’s mothers, they believe that *‘staying home with children is a women’s responsibility’* (-39, 81), but at the same time the belief was the second *conflicted* theme for them.

It could be pointed out that FW with higher education and men living in the countryside and having three children have higher conflict with the theme *‘the role of fathers in the growth of birth rate isn’t important’*. For women in Finland, the notion of gender equality is clearly understandable – Finnish woman have been and still are pioneers in women’s rights, and this

makes Finnish men's conflict about their traditional view towards childcare responsibilities understandable. It should be pointed out, though, that FW and FM are not really being game for the pari-mutuel 'sharing in the name of sharing'.

Respondents' 'core evaluative dimension' of identity (core values for respondents)

For EW and EM the first 'core evaluative dimension' of identity was '*growth in the state's support towards parenthood is considered important*' (EW + 29.07; EM + 38.81). For the group EW this was followed by '*both parents working, women have more responsibilities at home*'. For the group EM this was followed by '*the role of fathers is not important in the growth of birth rate*' (29, 75), and '*the state should put in action more measures to support parenthood*' (29, 53).

For women in the group EW with secondary education/secondary specialised education the important problems were population ageing and the more highly rated issues of raising a child is the responsibility of both parents and women have more responsibilities at home. The three housewives in the group found that in Estonia women and men are not respected as parents.

For EM with secondary education/secondary specialised education the 'core evaluative dimensions' of identity were '*women are responsible for functional combining of work and family life*'; '*women working overtime is a normal situation*'; '*taking care of children shouldn't be equalled with paid work*'; '*it is important that as many people as possible would work*'; and '*employers are strongly influenced by gender stereotypes*'.

EW and EM have high hopes towards supporting government acts, both financially and through shaping values, but they are not only waiting for support from the state. EW and EM are prepared to work in paid work and fathers are expected to be the main breadwinners, not stay-at-home fathers. EW group are fairly satisfied with their responsibilities at home. It was revealed that Estonian men in the sphere of paid work have a more modern attitude than those in non-paid work, whilst Estonian women are more eager to share responsibilities at home.

For SW the 'core evaluative dimensions' of identity were '*both parents share the responsibility of rising children*' (88.11), '*staying home with children cannot depend on parent's gender*' (84.45), '*the importance of each adult's economic independence*' (81.29) (for group SM it comes second + 84.46, all SM rated it highly). For SM came first '*the maximum number of people participating in the labour market*' (94.54, it is more important to men with higher education and/or for men living in the city and for men with two to four children), and '*both parents working*' (77.94) occupied the third place. For SM men with two to four children the 'core evaluative dimension' of identity was '*a good parent/partner can manage combining work and family life*'.

In sum, SW regard highly equality between genders and their independence and individual freedom (which also involves working in paid work), and so do SM. While SW are worried about coping with combining work and family life, meanwhile SM are sharing childbearing responsibilities in a more traditional manner. This study showed that men with more than two children are willing to manage combining work and family life, so it may be assumed that they feel and accept their responsibilities at home.

For FW the 'core evaluative dimension' of identity was '*respectability of parents*' (46.53, more highly rated by women with higher education), '*a good parent is capable of combining work and family life*' (42.03), '*it's normal to depend on the social network to combine work and family life*' (40.07). Women with higher education also rated highly both parents' shared responsibility in raising a child and working; economic independence; help from an extended circle of friends/family in combining work and family life is considered normal. Women with more than three children rated highly the view '*staying home with children is a biological responsibility of women*'.

For FM the 'core evaluative dimension' of identity included '*the importance of each adult's economic independence*' (67.70); '*both parents share responsibility in raising a child*' (62.86) and '*the maximum number of people participating in the labour market*' (61.59). For FM, the age factor can be clearly seen in the 'core evaluative dimension' of identity: (1) younger men (under 42 years of age) are convinced that '*equality of women/men in combining work and family life is possible*' and (2) older men (over 40) evaluate the view that '*both parents share responsibility in raising a child*'.

Conclusions

The study revealed that women were more concerned about coping with combining work and family life than men, which could be evidence of men's more traditional views towards working in non-paid work (i.e. at home). Fathers wish to play an important role in the labour market, but are less satisfied with being 'walking money bags', which clearly demonstrate the changed attitudes in work and family matters. Still, mothers are in this point slightly more 'modern' than fathers.

The group SW holds the most negative view towards working overtime, while SM regard working overtime positively. Swedish women find combining family and children with career strongly problematic. This situation adds stress to men as well. K. Nilsson (2010) showed in her research that women are more likely to feel fatigue than men in Sweden, and she saw tiredness as a large factor in determining birth rate. SM saw mothers as the main caretakers of children (other groups of respondents found that both parents are responsible for raising children and it is one of the core values), but at the same time it was the highest source of conflict for them. So, they want to be "new", modern fathers, but combining work and life is difficult because of work overload in paid job (as it is for FM). Swedish respondents are trying combine work and family life in the situation in which paid work and economic and social independence are highly respected. And both groups find that birth rate is negatively affected by women's active participation in the job market.

The group EM valued their role as a provider, being positively minded about working overtime. While they found that women should also work as long as it does not interfere with being mothers, for EM their wish that women worked as well is highly conflicted.

Groups SW/FM/EM/SM believed that a family has to get by with its own resources and SW/FW/FM agreed that having children is not compulsory. Of all the respondents, FW seem to regard most highly social networks to help combine work

and family life (reliance on social network was lightly valued also by EW).

Women returning to the labour market after career breaks is problematic for groups FW/FM/EW; for groups FW and EW gender stereotypes imposed by employers proved a problem. Employers' gender-based attitudes concern women with two or more children more than others, which makes sense since more children demand more attention and devotion at home, but so do employers in paid work. For mothers in Estonia it seems to be an unresolved problem; at the same time, all female respondents reported working in state or municipality institutions which, as stated above, are regarded by researchers as being more family-friendly than working places in the private sector.

The group EW does not see that their role as a parent is valued, while other groups of respondents are satisfied with their position as a parent as viewed in the society.

Equalling taking care of a child with paid work is important for men in Estonia (who acknowledge taking care of a child at home); all respondent groups find that the government should support motherhood. The majority of the respondents feel that supporting fatherhood is not very relevant in raising birth rate.

While the group EM does not feel that solving the problem of population ageing is very important, groups EW/SW/FM feel strongly that it is important, and also groups SW/FW find that population ageing is a problem in the society.

The attitudes of respondents were affected by gender differences and the following aspects – to some extent education, the number of children in the family, the respondents' place of residence, the level of participation in the labour market, and age.

In terms of the wider socio-cultural domain, Estonian respondents were more affected by other women in Estonia, respondents from Sweden and Finland by the government and employer.

All respondent groups identify themselves empathetically quite closely, which means that employers with their attitudes are one of the *critical agents* in managing everyday life.

Based on the results of the study it can be said that the media plays a major role in the respondents' *idealistic identification* for both men and women.

Estonian respondents identify themselves empathetically more closely with family than other respondents and their attitudes are obviously more strongly affected by the older generation than is the case with Swedish and Finnish respondents – this could be the reason why birth rate in Estonia is similar to those in Scandinavian countries, while the country's general welfare is not yet on the Nordic level.

The study allows us to make the following arguments:

1. In their attitudes all female respondents are prepared to represent a 'shared roles model', but in real-life situations they represent an early version of a 'dual-earner family model' (Leira, 2002; Ellingsæter, 1998, junior provider).
2. Men in their attitudes are in the early version of a 'dual-earner family model' (Leira, 2002), as one of their core values was both parents working, while they still consider motherhood as the natural role of women in caring situations.

3. In sharing family responsibilities, women and men in Estonia are operating in a more traditional way.
4. In Estonia women and men (especially the latter) expect the state to offer supportive measures that would help combining work and family life. Women and men in Sweden and Finland were satisfied with the current situation about supportive measures.

These inferences help to answer the question about the changing labour market conditions – which family models should welfare states facilitate (Leira, 2010)? Women are out of home and are content with the situation, so this process is irreversible in the countries under observation.

On the basis of current research it can be suggested that with the changing values of work and family life, the media could be employed to make changes by strengthening women's and men's core values. At the state level it would be a good idea to support coping with work and career by trying to offer solutions to the conflicted issues identified for women and men.

The study, unfortunately, does not allow drawing generalisations about all mothers and fathers in Estonia, Sweden and Finland. It was possible, however, to identify major problem areas in combining work and family life in the compared countries. Further study of this issue with a larger sample could provide a basis for planning concrete social acts.

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Appendix

Table 2. The bipolar constructs

	Left	Right
1	...believes that the normal situation is for women to stay at home and men to have the role of a breadwinner	...believes that both parents have to be in paid work
2	...believes that women and men are equal in both instances of fulfilling responsibilities at home and having paid work	...believes that in family-life women are responsible for functional combining of work and family life
3	...believes that staying home in the case of need (young children, child sickness, etc.) can't depend on parent's gender	...believes that staying home in the case of need (young children, child sickness, etc.) is a biological responsibility of women
4	...believes that both parents are responsible for raising a child	...believes that when raising a child most of the responsibility is with the mother
5	...knows that for each adult, regardless of gender, economic independence is important	...recognises that it is natural for women to be economically dependent on their partner
6	...believes that the equality of women and men in combining work and family life is possible	...believes that the equality of women and men in combining work and family life is impossible
7	...views women as having greater responsibility at home	...views men as having greater responsibility at home
8	...believes that in Estonia/Swedish/Finland women and men are respected as parents	...believes that in Estonia/Swedish/Finland women and men are not respected as parents
9	...believes that a good partner and parent can manage with combining work and family life	...believes that a person who can't combine work and family life is not a good partner/parent
10	...believes that for Estonian/Sweden/Finnish society it is important to find a solution to the problem of population ageing	...believes that for Estonian/Sweden/Finnish society it is not important to find a solution to the problem of population ageing
11	...believes that it is important to Estonia that as many people of working age as possible are working, regardless of their gender	...believes that women of working age shouldn't necessarily work, at least not full time. It is more important for women to focus on raising children
12	...believes that birth rate is positively affected by women actively participating in the job market	...believes that birth rate is negatively affected by women actively participating in the job market
13	...thinks that the birth rate is higher in countries where fatherhood is benefited by the State (by way of father's quota and other measures that support the participation of fathers in raising children)	...thinks that for raising the birth rate it is not important to pay attention to fathers, but it is important to make sure that mothers are insured by the state (by way of maternity leave, help when returning to the job market and so on)
14	...believes that Estonian/Swedish/Finnish employers are strongly affected by gender stereotypes (e.g. they are more understanding when female employees are at home with sick children)	...believes that Estonian/Swedish/Finnish employers do not consider gender important (e.g. they are also understanding when male employees stay at home with sick children)
15	...believes that when it doesn't interfere with the role of being a mother, it is normal that women take the role of a breadwinner along with men	...believes that it is hard for women to stay on parental leave because after the period of leave it is difficult for them to re-enter the labour market – thus they have to work constantly
16	...thinks that working overtime is not a normal part of the modern working culture	...thinks that women working overtime is a normal part of the modern working culture
17	...thinks that working overtime is not a normal part of the modern working culture	...thinks that men working overtime is a normal part of the modern working culture
18	...thinks that the state should take more supportive measures (financial support + different services) towards families with children	...thinks that the state is already taking enough supportive measures towards families with children
19	...believes that families with children should not expect help from the state, they should manage on their own	...believes that the state should support parenthood through shaping values and legislation, providing different services and financial means
20	...believes that it is normal that an extended circle of friends and family also takes part in combining work and family life	...believes that different chores in work and family life should be managed only by the nuclear family itself
21	...believes that taking care of children should be equalled with paid work because women can't participate in paid work at every life period (the birth of a child, taking care of the infant)	...believes that having children is not compulsory, therefore taking care of children shouldn't be equalled with paid work
22	...believes that work and family life could be better combined by more efficient division of time and chores in family	...believes that combining work and family life isn't possible because of the big workload in paid job

Table 3. Respondent's idealistic identification with others

No.	Groups of respondents					
	EW	SW	FW	EM	SM	FM
1	Media (0.71)	Media (0.59)	Media (0.70)	Media (0.67)	Media (0.80)	Media (0.87)
2	Friends; Other women in Estonia (0.61)	My father; Friends (0.58)	Other women in Finland (0.63)	Other men in Estonia (0.59)	Employer (0.75)	Partner's father (0.74)
3	My partner (0.58)	Employer (0.54)	Partner's father (0.61)	Women in Estonia (0.57)	My mother; Friends (0.74)	Friends (0.70)
4	Men in Estonia (0.56)	My mother (0.52)	My mother (0.60)	Neighbours (0.54)	Partner's father (0.70)	My mother (0.69)
5	Colleges (0.55)	Partner's father (0.48)	My Friends; Neighbours (0.58)	Friends; Partner's mother (0.52)	Other men in Sweden; Colleges (0.69)	Colleges (0.64)
6	My mother (0.54)	Other women in Sweden (0.47)	My partner; Colleagues at work (0.54)	Colleagues (0.51)	My father (0.68)	My father (0.59)

Note: The range of values for person's idealistic identification is from 0.00 to 1.00.

Table 4. Respondent's contra-identification with others

No.	Groups of respondents					
	EW	SW	FW	EM	SM	FM
1	My partner (0.40)	Government (0.53)	Government (0.47)	My partner (0.41)	Government (0.55)	Government (0.58)
2	My mother (0.36)	My partner; Father (0.27)	My father (0.30)	Friends (0.39)	My partner (0.23)	My partner; Employer (0.33)
3	Friends (0.34)	My mother (0.24)	My partner (0.24)	My mother (0.37)	Women in Sweden (0.22)	My mother (0.30)

Note: The range of values for person's *contra-identification* is from 0.00 to 1.00.

Table 5. Respondents conflicted identification

No.	Groups of respondents					
	EW	SW	FW	EM	SM	FM
1	Opposition (0.73)	Government (0.90)	Government (0.88)	Opposition (0.71)	Government (0.84)	Government (0.84)
2	Government (0.69)	Partner's mother (0.63)	Partner's mother (0.67)	Government (0.65)		
3	Partner's father (0.66)		Employer (0.62)	Media (0.62)		

Note: The range of values for a person's *conflict in identification* with another is from 0.00 to 1.00.

Table 6. Evaluation of the socio-biographical context for groups of respondents

Entity	Groups of respondents					
	EW	SW	FW	EM	SM	FM
Partner	4.04	3.38	3.19	4.45	3.15	3.15
Mother	3.42	3.77	3.37	3.90	3.88	3.24
Father	2.36	4.69	4.02	3.43	4.19	4.28
Friends	3.58	3.02	2.62	3.66	3.27	3.00
Colleagues at work	3.08	3.00	2.42	3.58	3.47	3.10
Partner's mother	3.06	2.16	2.21	3.58	2.89	2.84
Partner's father	2.29	2.67	3.10	2.98	3.40	3.44
Neighbours	2.60	3.24	3.43	3.17	3.38	2.87

Note: The range of values for a person's *evaluation of self in socio-biographical context* is from 0.00 to 5.00.

Table 7. Evaluation of the wider socio-cultural domain for groups of respondents.

Entity	Groups of respondents					
	EW	SW	FW	EM	SM	FM
Government	2.98	4.30	4.23	3.00	4.82	4.94
Employer	2.51	2.98	1.83	2.65	3.53	2.66
Opposition	1.88	2.45	2.67	2.08	2.64	2.62
Other women	3.62	2.39	2.82	4.16	2.89	2.70
Other men	3.09	1.90	2.00	3.82	3.20	2.24
Neighbours	2.60	3.24	3.43	3.17	3.38	2.87
Media	2.50	2.48	2.47	2.48	3.14	2.78

Table 8. The respondent's socio-developmental and biographical processes.

Domain	Entity	Empathetic identification with respect to past self (Me, before I came parent)	Empathetic identification with respect to current self (Me, as I am now)	Empathetic identification with respect to future self (Me, as I would like to be)
		Respondent's groups		
		EW/SW/FW EM/SM/FM	EW/SW/FW EM/SM/FM	EW/SW/FW EM/SM/FM
Political and public representatives	Present government	0.70/0.87/0.89 0.71/0.81/0.78	0.69/0.90/0.88 0.65/0.84/0.84	0.73/0.90/0.88 0.66/0.83/0.88
	The opposition	0.73/0.55/0.55 0.73/0.34/0.44	0.73/0.57/0.57 0.71/0.35/0.48	0.74/0.56/0.58 0.76/0.40/0.54
	Media	0.60/0.52/0.44 0.60/0.45/0.51	0.61/0.53/0.44 0.62/0.40/0.46	0.67/0.54/0.50 0.63/0.43/0.49
Wider socio-biographic domains	Other women	0.51/0.51/0.43 0.47/0.36/0.42	0.41/0.51/0.43 0.40/0.33/0.44	0.65/0.55/0.47 0.45/0.35/0.48
	Other men	0.63/0.62/0.55 0.46/0.34/0.54	0.55/0.58/0.56 0.34/0.33/0.59	0.70/0.63/0.58 0.46/0.33/0.62
	Colleagues	0.58/0.41/0.49 0.49/0.41/0.61	0.42/0.45/0.50 0.22/0.30/0.52	0.56/0.47/0.51 0.38/0.28/0.51
	Friends	0.48/0.41/0.50 0.46/0.46/0.62	0.29/0.44/0.50 0.19/0.33/0.54	0.43/0.47/0.52 0.37/0.33/0.52
	Neighbours	0.54/0.42/0.39 0.46/0.29/0.46	0.44/0.40/0.39 0.39/0.35/0.49	0.57/0.41/0.41 0.51/0.33/0.41
	Employer	0.67/0.48/0.64 0.62/0.55/0.66	0.62/0.48/0.62 0.50/0.47/0.58	0.69/0.51/0.65 0.57/0.48/0.69

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