

# Representation of Children's Views in Finnish Newspaper Media Across Three Decades

Marleena Mustola, Eija Sevón, and Maarit Alasuutari

## Abstract

As the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) celebrates its thirtieth anniversary, it is relevant to explore how understandings of children's rights have appeared during these three decades. As a key public actor in society, the media provides an interesting field in which to study the salience of children's rights in societal and public discussions. Thus, in this article, we examine how children's views are represented in *«Helsingin Sanomat»*, the main national newspaper of Finland, in 1997, 2007, and 2017. This examination is based on articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC, where it is stated that children have the right to express themselves in all matters affecting them. The data collection for this article was based on a systematic random sampling method of these issues in the years mentioned above, and a systematic content analysis was also applied. The results show that, somewhat surprisingly, in 2017, less than a third of news stories concerning childhood and children reported children's views on the matter, while in 2007, almost half of news stories reported on children's views. Based on the data, it appears that macro-level issues remained within adults' sphere of discussion during these years.

## Introduction

According to articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and they have the right to impart these views orally, in writing, or in print. Despite the rise of social media, traditional media has occupied and still occupies the central forum for democracy (Mughan and Gunther 2000). However, what remains unclear is whether it serves similar functions among children and whether children can have their say in media rhetoric. This question remains particularly topical with regard to numerous current phenomena, including the climate activism of youths such as Greta Thunberg and their representation in the media (see Ursin 2019).

In 2019, as the UNCRC marks its thirtieth anniversary, it can be assumed that the rights presented in the convention have been ce-

mented. While Finland ratified the UNCRC in 1991, there has been insufficient research conducted into how the rights of the child have been implemented in Finnish society. The Child Barometer implemented by the Finnish Ombudsman for Children (see Tuukkanen 2018) revealed that methodological knowhow regarding research into children and children's issues is lacking. This may explain the paucity of data on children's own experiences in relation to the implementation of their rights. In addition, understandings of how children's rights and views are presented and represented in Nordic societies is scarce. Thus, to address these gaps in the research, we explore children's representation in Finnish media.

Studies and reports have shown that the media is failing to engage children and represent them in a manner that does not negatively label them or indulge in victimization.

Moreover, the majority of issues dealt with in the media seem to be reserved for adults (e.g., Andersson & Lundström 2007; Hammarberg 1997; Gordon, McAlister, & Scraton 2015; Kaziaj & Van Bauwel 2016; Ponte 2007.) In this article, our starting point is an exploration of children's right to express their views freely, where we examine how children's views are represented in *Helsingin Sanomat (HS)*, the main national newspaper in Finland. We are interested in investigating the potential differences in representations of children's views in the three decades following the ratification of the UNCRC. To fulfill this purpose, we collected data from *HS* articles published in 1997, 2007, and 2017. Based on this data, we were able to explore how and concerning what topics—related to both children and childhood—*HS* represented the views of children. Furthermore, it is relevant to disclose the topics and contexts that children do not have a say in, as this disclosure highlights the areas of society in which the rights granted to children in the UNCRC have not been actualized.

## Children's views and participatory rights

In this article, we made the conceptual decision to speak about the *views* of children, rather than their participation, agency, or voice (see e.g., Carpentier 2012; Sevón 2015), as it is a term and concept used in the UNCRC. For many, children's rights signify participation. However, the UNCRC is much more specific with its use of the term «views,» and the term's specificity is greater than the complex concepts of participation and participatory rights (Lansdown 2010: 11–12). Because of the complexity of both participation and agency, we decided to act in coherence with the UNCRC, even though a «view» remains quite a complicated conceptual choice. Carpentier (2012) claims that children's views and participation do not merely mean access, presence, or social interaction—the terms also denote power in decision-making processes. It should

be noted that if children's views are asked and reported on, it is not guaranteed that the process is done in a manner that respects children's rights. It is also impossible to conclude, based on written newspaper articles, if children have truly expressed the views in question, since the text is produced—or at least edited—by journalists. Due to these reasons, we speak of the *representation* of children's views. Overall, research in childhood studies has highlighted how listening to children and addressing their views in society is a multifaceted and challenging issue (e.g., Alasuutari 2014; Kjørholt 2002; Lundy & McEvoy 2011; Noppari, Uusitalo, & Kupiainen 2017; Spyrou 2011; Wyness 2009).

The UNCRC, which consists of 54 articles, is the most widely ratified international treaty in history (O'Neill & Zinga 2008: 3) and the most quickly ratified United Nations' (UN) human rights treaty (Taylor 2006). These superlatives suggest that children's rights comprise a globally shared issue that is widely promoted. Children's rights have positive associations and have been presented as unthreatening, inclusive, and positive (Tisdall 2011). Children's rights fall under the umbrella of human rights and are concerned with the political, social, economic, cultural, and citizenship rights of children. Historically, children's rights have developed in relation to two major changes—the new concept of children and the notion of systematic rights (Stearns 2016). Linked with the concept of individualization within Western society, Reynaert, Bouverne-de Bie, and Vandeveldel state that «the emphasis on the individual rights of children with a conception of childhood as the autonomous child is not as groundbreaking as it might at first seem» (2009: 529). Thus, children's rights strictly belong to the broader individualistic paradigm of our culture and society.

Despite the enthusiasm, active research contributions, and the increasing number of academic journals that have been established based on this specific topic, such as «*The*

*International Journal of Children's Rights*» in 1993 and «*The Canadian Journal of Children's Rights*» in 2014, the notion of the universal rights of the child has been criticized within academia. There are worries among scholars that «rights» is too vague a concept that allows for manipulation and that the individualistic hegemony related to rights neglects the responsibilities of subjects (see Freeman 2000). Barry Percy-Smith claims that «the honeymoon period of young people's participation and the celebration of their voices has now passed» (2006: 172) and recommends that more attention be paid to the wider social and organizational systems in which children participate. Kay Tisdall (2011) states that theorizations of children's participation and rights have been too child-focused. Stuart Aitken (2018a) has remarked that child rights are removed from local contexts and that the notion of individual and universal rights is in many ways flawed. Leaning toward post-human philosophy, he suggests that children should be perceived relationally, in an unromantic way, and references the desire to «push the more-than-human postchild perspective as an alternative to liberal ethics, which leave children alone and impotent in the center of world that is not of their making» (2018b: 710). In this article, even though our perspective is not precisely post-human, we do not artificially detach children from societal contexts but instead examine their being in relation to material objects, such as the newspaper, and broader societal discussions visible in the media.

When considering children's rights with respect to the media, article 17 of the UNCRC is the most prominent in this regard. It urges States Parties to «recognize the important function performed by the mass media and [...] ensure that the child has access to information.» However, this article does not advise on children's active role as not merely receivers of but contributors to media content. Articles 12 and 13 refer to freedom of expression, and they «place clear obligations on States to cre-

ate the time, space and opportunity for children to be heard, and to take the necessary action in response to their views» (Lansdown 2014: 172). Article 12 has been regarded as quite progressive, as it insists that children be provided with the opportunity to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings and in all matters affecting them. This specification has placed demands on governments, professionals, and civil society organizations to work *with* and not merely *for* children (Lansdown 2014). However, article 12 is slightly problematic, as is the UNCRC as a whole, in its focus on the tension between two conflicting views: Paternalistically, children should be protected; however, they should also be viewed as autonomous individuals with full rights (see Stahl 2007). Though articles 12 and 13 neither specify the media nor other explicit institutions in relation to how children should express their views, they emphasize that children's opinions should be heard in all matters affecting them. In this regard, it is clear that the media plays a central role in determining whose opinions are aired in society.

## The media as a mediator of children's views

The relationship between the media and children is complex, mainly due to the fact that currently, globalized and digitized media has an extensive impact on society. There is also a growing interest in and body of research on children, childhood, and the media (see Mulari 2019). Since the field of media is extremely broad and is comprised of various communication tools and mediums, such as print media, news media, television, and social media, so is the research area concerning it. For instance, in Finland, there is a significant interest in children's activities and views related to the media (e.g., Mustola, Koivula, Turja, & Laakso 2018; Ruckenstein 2010; Ylönen 2010), media education (e.g., Kupiainen 2009; Koivula & Mustola 2017; Vilmilä 2015), and children and young people's media use (e.g., Merikivi, Myllyniemi,

& Salasuo 2016; Suoninen 2014). Finnish research has also addressed some specific issues, such as ethics concerning research on the representation of childhood on social media (Mustola & Kiili 2019) and the execution of more-than-representational media studies of children (Noppari et al. 2017).

There is scant information regarding children's relationships with newspaper media in the Finnish context. We know that reading print media is rare for small children in Finland: 51% of children under the age of eight do not read newspapers (Suoninen 2014), and only 34% of Finnish children aged between seven and nine children follow news from different media sources (Merikivi et al. 2016: 20). As children get older, newspapers play a more important role in their everyday lives: 81% of individuals aged between 10 and 29 read newspapers at least once a week (Merikivi et al. 2016: 21). Information regarding how children are represented in Finnish print media is even more scant. However, there have been some practical projects conducted in Finland to support the participation of children and youths in news media. For instance, the Yle News Class project, conducted by the public service broadcasting company Yleisradio, aimed to bring «voices of the young to a wider audience and help them understand the world» (*Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28* 2016: 180–181).

While the media has the potential to assist the implementation of the UNCRC, children are often shunned by the media and «used» by it in order to serve commercial objectives in a way that compromises their welfare and rights (Tobin 2004: 140–141). In 1996, the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child held a meeting dedicated to children and the media, where three themes were discussed—namely, how to support children's participation in the media, how to protect children against harmful influences, and how to respect the integrity of children in media reporting (Williams 1997). Now, over two decades since this meeting,

the same questions remain topical. Besides the broader question of supporting children's participation in general, interest also lies in the participation of minority groups and children from different social backgrounds. In Finnish society overall, children do not have equal participation opportunities. The Finnish Youth Barometer (Pekkarinen & Myllyniemi 2018: 36) revealed in 2018 that, in relation to political activity, female children and youths who lived in cities and were older had more opportunities to have an impact on society in a political sense.

The media contributes to the implementation of the UNCRC in three major ways. First, it can refer to the UNCRC; second, it has the capacity to construct images of children and childhoods; and third, it can support or prevent children's participation in the media (e.g., Hammarberg 1997; Tobin 2004). There are also more indirect issues that affect the relationship between media and children's rights, including the ethical codes of journalists and media education. In a study entitled «Identifying and challenging the negative media representation of children and young people in Northern Ireland (Gordon et al. 2015), children and young people participated in workshops to explore their understandings of mass media and experiences of different media outlets. The participants stated that the media fails to engage with children and young people and that it should do more to involve children, rather than merely talking about them (Gordon et al. 2015).

Examinations of how children's *views* are represented in the media is, to the best of our knowledge, scarce. However, an example of this type of research is Sheela Warriar and Marjory Ebbeck's (2014) study, where the authors analyzed children's rights as portrayed on Singaporean television broadcasting. The authors evidenced that the cases in which children were active participants in society (15.1%) and adopted age-appropriate responsibilities (4.9%) were limited in Singaporean television broadcasting. In contrast, there is a moderate

body of research on how children and childhoods are portrayed in the media. However, this type of research is more media-centric and focuses on representations and youths only. Studies concerning young children and infants (e.g., Lupton 2014) are rare.

Existing studies show that the children who are represented in the media are constructed ambivalently, either as innocent and dependent victims of wars and catastrophes or as demons and black sheep who rebel against the laws of societies (e.g., Andersson & Lundström 2007; Denov 2012; Kaziaj 2016; Kaziaj & Van Bauwel 2017; Moeller 2002; Ponte 2007). The study conducted by Kaziaj and Van Bauwel (2017) shows that Albanian television news rarely broadcasts topics that concern children or children's issues. Ponte (2007) points out that children themselves are not *heard* in the news; rather, they are portrayed as objects of risky situations, parental control, or delinquency. The themes of the news concerning children focuses most often on conflicts, accidents, polemics, advice for parents, and education (Ponte 2007). When examining the research concerning children represented in the media, it is worth noticing that often the focus is on specific minority groups (see Jordan & Prendella 2019), such as subjects of gender-variant minorities (Kelso 2015) and victims and perpetrators of wars and catastrophes, including asylum-seekers and child soldiers (Denov 2012; McLaughlin 2018). This is explained by the fact that children are often considered to be the future of the nation: as subjects whose future should be protected (Moeller 2002; Ponte 2007). Further, Moeller (2002) claims that the portrayal of children in the media forms a double bind between the compulsion to protect children and the compulsion to attract attention.

Portraying children as «perfect» victims presents a position of non-participation, where they become dependent actors; when they are represented as demons, children are paralleled with adults (Moeller 2002). Kaziaj (2016)

holds that children are pictured through the «adult gaze» (i.e., through adults' perspectives) in the media news, while Such, Walker, and Walker (2005: 322) emphasize that the politically active competencies of young people are often questioned in news coverage because society is used to non-threatening child-adult dichotomies. Moreover, children are not often considered competent users of the media due to their lack of maturity, critical thinking, and prior knowledge (Kaziaj & Van Bauwel 2017). It is also argued that the media does not account for the UNCRC and excludes children as both active participants and citizens who are capable of expressing their views (Kaziaj & Van Bauwel 2017; Ponte 2007). Keeping in mind these dichotomies, contradictions, and positions reserved for children who are represented in the media, it is intriguing to explore how *HS* deals with the representation of children's views.

## Data and methods

In order to examine how children's views are represented in Finnish news articles, we collected data from *HS*, the main national print newspaper in Finland. We selected three volumes from three different decades—1997, 2007, and 2017. We wanted to include a recent volume, and since the data were collected in 2018, the most recent full volume was 2017.

Although the data of this article come from three different decades, we do not assume that the news stories and articles of the selected years demonstrate the specific trends or phenomena of newspaper media in these decades. Neither do we aim to examine changes in the representation of children's views in the three decades. Instead, the selection of three volumes, each of them 10 years apart, is done to increase the chronological variance of the data, and thus the generalizability of the results over time in the case of the identification of recurring characteristics or patterns in the data (see Gobo 2004). Moreover, an intensive data collection process based on a small num-

ber of volumes makes it easier to consider the findings in relation to the topical events and historical contexts of each year.

The research data we gathered comprise editorials, feature articles, and news stories published in the years 1997, 2007, and 2017 in *HS*. The method of data collection was based on systematic random sampling conducted within the issues of *HS* in the years mentioned above. We randomly selected every tenth newspaper published in the appropriate year, thus numbering 36 newspapers each year. This was done to avoid researcher bias in the selection of news (see Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy 2015). From these numbers, all of the editorials, articles, etc. concerning children and young people (i.e., all those under the age of 18), were included. In the first phase of sampling, the selection criterion used was the mention of an individual child or children. In the second phase of sampling, we excluded any writing that comprised public opinion pieces or short news stories (e.g., crime news) from the data, because we wanted to focus on the articles that were written by the editors and journalists of *HS*. Altogether, the final sample was comprised of 220 articles.

We then began a systematic thematic and inductive content analysis of the data (see Alasuutari 2011; Braun, Clarke, & Terry 2015) by independently analyzing the selected writings from each decade in order to form a concept of the topic categories in the news that concerned children, childhood, and youth. Each member of the research group was responsible for classifying the news of one decade, and each member also conducted a tentative categorization. Following this, we discussed the tentative categorizations, determined the final categorizations, and decided on the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each category. In this phase, we combined many of the tentative categorizations, such as health and crises, tragedies, and violence into the broader category of *safety and health*. Another category was early childhood education and care (ECEC), which was

placed within the broader category of *education*. There were no large variations in the tentative categorizations of the three authors, and we all agreed on the titles and definitions of the final categories. A mark of our success in the categorization process was the rare need to use the category «other,» which we decided to use to represent other topics of the news that did not fit in the seven named categories. We used this category just three times in our analysis.

The newspaper articles were typified into seven separate categories, with *other* as the eighth category. The first category of *politics and decision-making* included the news articles that dealt with public power, decision-making, legislation, administrative steering, related economic questions, political elections, and international, national, and municipal political activities. The second category of *culture and leisure* was comprised of news articles that addressed cultural characteristics, national cultures, cultural values, art, cultural artefacts (e.g., books, toys), consumption of culture, media and communication, leisure activities, travelling, hobbies, and child and youth culture. The third category of *education* consisted of the news articles that targeted institutionalized education and upbringing in ECEC and primary or secondary education. Familial upbringing (see category 5) and leisure education in courses, camps, or hobbies (see category 2) were excluded from this category. The fourth category of *work and economic activity* was comprised of news articles regarding children's and adolescents' employment, work, entrepreneurship, and other economic activity. The fifth category of *family and parenting* included all news articles that focused on family relationships, family formation, family life, and parenting. The sixth category of *safety and health* focused on health, safety, and security or threats to these elements, such as violence or the use of alcohol. The seventh category of *housing and environment* consisted of news articles that explored children's housing, living environments, and living conditions. We quantified the

data to determine the number of news stories within each category for each year.

After conducting the systematic content analysis, we focused on examining how children's views were addressed in these news articles, and the quantification was also conducted for these cases. We analyzed whether children were plainly a target of adult actions or whether their views were represented in a particular way. Further, the representation of children's views was divided into three different areas. First, children's point of view could be reported indirectly, where adults spoke on behalf of their children or children served as participants in surveys that were reported in the news. Second, the views of children (or an individual child) were presented through interviews, in which direct quotes or indirect reporting were used in the writing. Third, children were the authors of the news articles. In the news articles in which children's views were represented, we excluded childhood memoirs where adults recalled their own childhoods, because it was not the child who was speaking. Nevertheless, childhood memoirs fulfilled their own functions as definers of childhoods in our data, and they usually dealt with uneasy topics, such as extreme violence and sexual abuse.

### Representation of children's views in 1997, 2007, and 2017

The number of newspaper articles concerning children and youths is quite similar for each year, with a slight increase as the years go by (see Figure 1). However, this increase may be due to the increasing size of the newspaper: If the number of pages has increased as the years pass, then there is more space for news concerning children and childhood. In 1997, children's views were presented in 22 news articles out of 66—a third of cases. In 2007, the presence of children's views was significant, as children had their say in 35 news articles out of 76—almost half of cases. In 2017, children's views were considerably less salient. They appeared in only 22 stories out of 78—not even a third of cases. This is a notable finding, es-

pecially when one considers how researchers and advocates of children's rights have spoken increasingly of the importance of children's rights and the salience of hearing them in matters that concern their everyday lives. Of course, a possible explanation for this might be that our sampling procedure was not successful in amassing enough news stories.

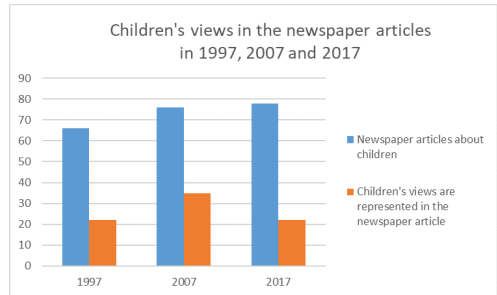


Figure 1. The number of *HS* newspaper articles concerning children, and the number of said articles in which children's views are represented in 1997, 2007, and 2017.

In 1997, *education* (N = 22) was the largest category in the news where children or childhoods were mentioned (see Figure 2). The second-largest category was *safety and health* (N = 17), and the third-largest was *culture and leisure* (N = 8). Children's views were represented in these news articles seven, six, and three times, respectively, meaning that children's views were represented in 34% of cases. The presence of children's views was quite even within all categories in 1997, but *work and economic activity* represented a topic in which children's views were introduced most seldomly, in just one case out of seven.

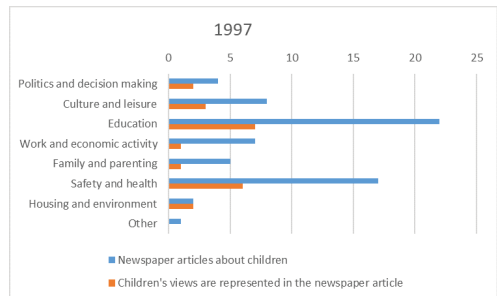


Figure 2. Thematic coverage of *HS* newspaper articles on children and newspaper articles that represented children's views in 1997.

The articles of 2007, in turn, differed from those of 1997. Although the first three categories, *education* (N = 20), *culture and leisure* (N = 17), and *safety and health* (N = 17) were the largest, similar to 1997, children's views were represented more often—in 44% of cases. Figure 3 reveals that 2007 diverged from 1997 in respect to its coverage of *education*: Children's views were represented in this area in only five cases out of 20. Children's views were most often represented in the news concerning *housing and environment* (three out of four cases), *family and parenting* (five out of seven cases), and *culture and leisure* (12 out of 17 cases). *Work and economic activity* were not widely discussed, and neither were children's views in these categories.

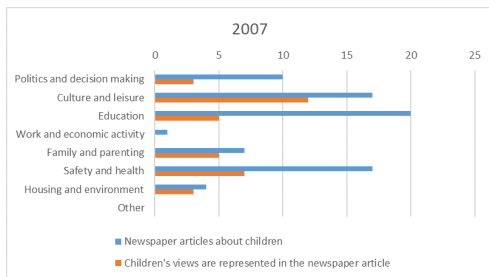


Figure 3. Thematic coverage of *HS* newspaper articles about children and newspaper articles that represented children's views in 2007.

In 2017, as shown in Figure 4, *education* (N = 18) was again the chief category of interest in relation to the presence of children. The second-largest category was *politics and decision-making* (N = 16), and the third was *safety and health* (N = 15). Despite the large number of news articles within the category of *politics and decision-making*, children's views were not present in any of these articles (0 cases out of 16). In opposition to this was the situation concerning *work and economic activity*. In these articles, children's views were reported in almost every single piece (five out of six cases). Children's views were represented in almost half of the articles concerning *culture and leisure* (six out of 13 cases) and in almost a third of news articles regarding *education* (five

out of 18 cases). Within the category of *safety and health*, the representation of children's views was scarce (three out of 15 cases).

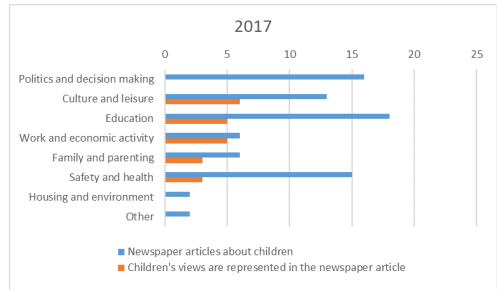


Figure 4. Thematic coverage of *HS* newspaper articles about children and newspaper articles that represented children's views in 2017.

When analyzing the origins of the views of children in *HS*, it is obvious that children were not always directly heard. The views of children in print seemed to originate from diverse sources and not from discussions between children and journalists/editors. Instead, children were listened to in more indirect ways in *HS*. For instance, children's views were drawn from a survey of a certain demographic of children and youths. What was also common was the tendency for adults, such as parents and teachers, to speak on behalf of children, thus leading to the reporting of their *assumed* views. There were also articles in which children themselves were the authors, but these were often located in *HS's* pages and columns that were reserved for children's «own» issues and that solely targeted children.

### Concluding discussion

In this article, we conducted an exploratory examination of the representation of children's views in the news stories of a mainstream Finnish print newspaper. The findings suggest an upward trend in the frequency of news stories that concern children and childhood, as the number increased with each year. However, children's own views were not represented as often. The most prominent year, if one considers the number of representations



of children's views, was 2007, when almost half of the articles in question reported children's views. In 1997 and 2017, the proportion of news stories that embodied the views of children was roughly third of cases—or less, as in 2017.

Typically, the news concerning children and childhood focused on education, culture, and leisure as well as safety and health during 1997, 2007, and 2017 (cf. Ponte 2007). A reason for this trend may be due to the fact that Finland's economic recession from the 1990s onwards led to financial cuts to children and family services, and these cuts were especially visible as topics in the areas mentioned above. Nevertheless, it appears that the political decisions themselves were debated and questioned in the media more often in 2007 and 2017 than in 1997. Another reason for the recurrent categories that address children's views could be due to the fact that these themes can be easily related to the micro-level aspects of the lives of children.

Children's views were welcomed in categories that were smaller in scale, «softer,» and that resonated well with the typical micro-level activities of children, including playing and going to school. An important finding of our study is that children's views were not often represented in *HS* in relation to macro-level issues such as politics and decision-making. What is salient in this regard is that in the topics of politics, safety, and health, children still abide without a voice of their own in 2017. These areas of life seem to be considered macro-level activities that are arenas of adulthood and adult power. Article 12 of the UNCRC stipulates that children should be able to express their views in *all matters affecting them*; however, the media coverage explored in this study reveals that this is not happening in Finnish media discussions in 2017, almost 30 years after the UNCRC was adopted.

Our finding coincides with those of Ruckenstein (2012), who argues that in Finnish public discussions, children are supposed to be interested in «children's matters,» which are relegated to micro or everyday politics. In

macro-level decision-making, children's voices remain absent. This finding also corresponds with earlier international studies on the representation of children and their views in media (Kaziaj 2016; Kaziaj & Van Bauwel 2017; Moeller 2002; Ponte 2007; Warrier & Ebbeck 2014). Perhaps, as Barry Percy-Smith (2006) warned over 10 years ago, the honeymoon period of children's participation is over. It is not often that one group belonging to a specific social category can determine the direction of politics, which is a field known for its distinct and intersecting agendas. However, it is still concerning that in 2017, children's views were absent in political news coverage. Kay Tisdall (2011) believes that a child-focused theorization of children's participation would lead to the improved representation of children with respect to macro-level issues. However, based on our data, this does not appear to be happening in Finnish media discussions. Tisdall (2008: 82) also refers to micro- and macro-level issues and recalls that the broad umbrella of «participation» may need to be put away and replaced by more nuanced terms in order to reveal the tensions and possibilities of children and young people as public actors. Our analysis supports this belief, as it is clear that there is a strong divide between the participation of children in micro-level topics and their participation in macro-level topics.

However, children's participation does not always mean that children have an influence on issues affecting them, not even in their daily contexts. As Niemi, Kumpulainen, and Lipponen (2016) argue in the context of educational research, although children's right to participation is institutionalized in educational settings, their voice remains without real influence if said participation does not penetrate pedagogical practices and result in changed courses of action (see also Lundy 2007). The recent report by the Finnish government (2019), entitled «Child's Time: Towards a National Strategy for Children 2040», also states that evidencing the influence, evaluation, and fol-

low-up of children's participation is often insufficient. The report holds that children's ideas, views, and opinions remain invisible in Finnish organizational structures and decision-making processes. Thus, the Finnish context of children's participation demands improved efforts from adults within the fields of policymaking, institutions, organizations, and the media. Furthermore, Stenvall (2018: 102–104) points out that children might not receive enough information about macro-level politics to build their opinions and participate in discussions. Media, in this sense, could play a crucial role in taking children's perspectives into account and offering knowledge not only *about* children, but also *for* children.

The representation of children's views in the media is a complex and multilayered phenomenon. Although it is admirable that newspapers consider children's right to express their views and offer space for children's pages, their participation should be understood in a broader sense so as not to produce generational differences between adult (actual)–child (apparent) news (cf. Kaziaj & Van Bauwel 2016). There is a danger that children's opinions are inevitably conceived of as tokens that have no real impact on society.

This study has limitations that need to be taken into account when evaluating the findings. The sample, although random, was small-scale, meaning that an exhaustive picture of the news stories of the chosen years is not provided. Despite this, the news stories can be categorized along the same themes

for all decades. Additionally, we have described the sampling and coding procedures with inclusion and exclusion criteria in a detailed manner, thus enabling the evaluation and replication of the analysis (see Lacy et al. 2015).

In the future, we want to develop our analysis. This article offers a broad representation of children's views, but as well as this, it would be interesting to examine the discourses used in displaying children's views. This examination is likely to reveal what purposes the presence of children's views serve: Do they bring something «fun» to the newspaper article? Do they lighten the topic? Do they provoke emotions? Or do they engage certain kinds of audiences? Furthermore, it is relevant to contemplate the vast differences and oppositional positioning visible in our data: The news stories were constructed through dichotomies, such as children–adults, victims–perpetrators, girls–boys, normal children–special children. Further inquiry should also focus, in a more nuanced way, on the different participatory roles and positionings of children in newspaper discussions and explore whether they are objects of adults' actions, active subjects, or active participants in decision-making processes (see Carpentier 2012). To conclude, further inquiries should focus on the different aspects of participation, including children's participation at the micro vs. macro level as well as in private vs. public issues. In a broader sense, the means of, purposes behind, and possible consequences of representing children's views in the media should be explored.

## References

- Aitken, S. C. 2018a. *Young People, Rights and Place: Era-  
sure, Neoliberal Politics and Postchild Ethics*. London  
and New York: Routledge.
- Aitken, S. C. 2018b. Rethinking child rights through  
post-child ethics. *Educ. Foco Juiz de Fora* 23(3):  
705–714.
- Alasuutari, M. 2014. Voicing the child? A case study  
in Finnish early childhood education. *Childhood*  
21(2): 242–259.
- Alasuutari, P. 2011. Mielikuvien muutos ja pysyvyys:  
Maaseutukäsite suomalaislehdissä 2000- luvulla.  
*Maaseudun uusi aika* 19(1): 17–32.
- Andersson, G. and Lundström, T. 2007. Teenagers  
as victims in the press. *Children & Society* 21(3):  
175–188.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. and Terry, G. 2015. Thematic analy-  
sis. In: P. Rohleder and A. C. Lyons, eds. *Qualitative  
Research in Clinical and Health Psychology*. London:  
Palgrave Macmillan: 95–113.
- Carpentier, N. 2012. The concept of participation. If  
they have access and interact, do they really  
participate? *Fronteiras – estudos midiáticos* 14(2):  
164–177.
- Child's Time. Towards a National Strategy for Children  
2040*. 2019. Finnish Government Publication  
Series 2019: 4. Available at: [http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161441/VN\\_2019\\_4\\_Lapsen\\_ajka.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y](http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161441/VN_2019_4_Lapsen_ajka.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y)
- Denov, M. 2012. Child soldier and iconography: Por-  
trays and (mis)representations. *Children & Soci-  
ety* 26(4): 280–292.
- Freeman, M. 2000. The future of children's rights.  
*Children & Society* 14(4): 277–293.
- Gobo, G. 2004. Sampling, representativeness and  
generalizability. In: C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium  
et al., eds. *Qualitative Research Practice*. London:  
SAGE Publications: 435– 456.
- Gordon, F., McAlister, S. and Scraton, P. 2015. *Behind  
the Headlines: Media Representation of Children and  
Young People in Northern Ireland: Summary of Re-  
search Findings*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.
- Hammarberg, T. 1997. Children, the UN convention  
and the media. *The International Journal of Chil-  
dren's Rights* 5(2): 243–261.
- Jordan, A. and Prendella, K. 2019. The invisible children  
of media research. *Journal of Children and Media*  
13(2): 235–240.
- Kaziaj, E. 2016. «The adult gaze»: Exploring the repre-  
sentation of children in television news  
in Albania. *Journal of Children and Media* 10(4):  
426–442.
- Kaziaj, E. and Van Bauwel, S. 2017. The ignored audi-  
ence: A multi-method reception study  
on children and television news in Albania. *Childhood*  
24(2): 230–244.
- Kelso, T. 2015. Still trapped in the U.S. media's closet:  
Representations of gender-variant, pre- ado-  
lescent children. *Journal of Homosexuality* 62(8):  
1058–1097.
- Kjørholt, A. T. 2002. Small is powerful. Discourses on  
«children and participation» in Norway. *Childhood*  
9(1): 63–82.
- Koivula, M. and Mustola, M. 2017. Varhaiskasvatuksen  
digiloikka ja muuttuva sukupolvijärjestys? Jännit-  
teitä lastentarhanopettajien ja lasten kohtaamisis-  
sa digitaalisen teknologian äärellä. *Kasvatus & Aika*  
11(3): 37–50.
- Kupiainen, R. 2009. Lasten mediasuhteet mediakasva-  
tuksen kysymyksenä. In: S. Kotilainen, ed. *Suhteis-  
sa mediaan*. Jyväskylä: Nykykulttuurin tutkimuskes-  
kus: 167–183.
- Lacy, S., Watson, B., Riffe, D., and Lovejoy, J. 2015.  
Issues and best practices in content analysis.  
*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 92(4):  
791–811.
- Lansdown, G. 2014. 25 years of UNCRC: Lessons  
learned in children's participation. *Canadian Jour-  
nal of Children's Rights* 1(1): 172–190.
- Lansdown, G. 2010. The realisation of children's partici-  
pation rights: Critical reflections. In: B. Percy-Smith  
and N. Thomas, eds. *A Handbook of Children and  
Young People's Participation: Perspectives from  
Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Rout-  
ledge: 11–23.
- Lundy, L. 2007. 'Voice' is not enough: Conceptualising  
article 12 of the United Nations Convention on  
the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research  
Journal* 33(6): 927– 942.

- Lundy, L. and McEvoy, L. 2011. Children's rights and research processes: Assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood* 19(1): 129–144.
- Lupton, D. 2014. Precious, pure, uncivilized, vulnerable: Infant embodiment in Australian popular media. *Children & Society* 28(5): 341–351.
- Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28*. 2016. Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory.
- McLaughlin, C. 2018. 'They don't look like children': Child asylum-seekers, the Dubs amendment and the politics of childhood. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(11): 1757–1773.
- Merikivi, J., Myllyniemi, S., and Salasuo, M., eds. 2016. *Media hanskassa: Lasten ja nuorten vapaa-aikatuutkimus 2016 mediasta ja liikunnasta*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusseura.
- Moeller, S. 2002. A hierarchy of innocence: The media's use of children in the telling of international news. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 7(1): 36–56.
- Mughan, A. and Gunther, R. 2000. The media in democratic and nondemocratic regimes: A multilevel perspective. In: R. Gunther and A. Mughan, eds. *Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1–27.
- Mulari, H. 2019. Perspectives on research into children's media culture. In: H. Mulari, ed. *Media in Everyday Life: Insights into Children's and Young People's Media Cultures*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusseura: 9–16.
- Mustola, M. and Kiili, J. 2019. Lähikuvassa itkevä, räkäinen lapsi: Voiko blogeissa esitettyjä lapsuuksia tutkia eettisesti kestäväällä tavalla? In: K. Vehkalahti and N. Rutanen, eds. *Tutkimuseettisestä sääntelystä elettyyn kohtaamiseen: Lasten ja nuorten tutkimuksen etiikka II*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusseura: 122–135.
- Mustola, M., Koivula, M., Turja, L., and Laakso, M. L. 2018. Reconsidering passivity and activity in children's digital play. *New Media & Society* 20(1): 237–254.
- Niemi, R., Kumpulainen, K., and Lipponen, L. 2016. Pupils' participation in the Finnish classroom: Turning the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into pedagogical practices. In: J. Gillett-Swan and V. Coppock, eds. *Children's Rights, Educational Research and the UNCRC: Past, Present and Future*. Oxford: Symposium Books: 81–100.
- Noppari, E., Uusitalo, N. and Kupiainen, R. 2017. Talk to me! Possibilities of constructing children's voices in the domestic research context. *Childhood* 24(1): 68–83.
- O'Neill, T. and Zinga, D. 2008. Introduction. In: T. O'Neill and D. Zinga, eds. *Children's Rights: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Participation and Protection*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press: 3–19.
- Opetushallitus 2018. Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet. Määräykset ja ohjeet 3a. Available at: [https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman\\_perusteet.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman_perusteet.pdf)
- Pekkarinen, E. and Myllyniemi, S., eds. 2018. *Vaikutusvaltaa Euroopan laidalla: Nuorisobarometri 2018*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusseura.
- Percy-Smith, B. 2006. From consultation to social learning in community participation with young people. *Children, Youth and Environments* 16(2): 153–179.
- Ponte, C. 2007. Mapping news on children in the mainstream press. *European Societies* 9(5): 735–754.
- Reynaert, D., Bouverne-de Bie, M. and Vandeveld, S. 2009. A review of children's rights literature since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Childhood* 16(4): 518–534.
- Ruckenstein, M. 2010. Toying with the world: Children, virtual pets and value of mobility. *Childhood* 17(4): 500–513.
- Ruckenstein, M. 2012. Kouluruokailun vaikuttajat. Kansalaiskasvatuksesta kulutuskulttuuriin. In: E. Pekkarinen, K. Vehkalahti, and S. Myllyniemi, eds. *Lapset ja nuoret instituutioiden kehyksissä. Nuorten elinolot vuosikirja 2012*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusseura: 156–170.

- Sevón, E. 2015. Who's got the power? Young children's power and agency in child-parent relationships. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 6(4–1): 622–645.
- Spyrou, S. 2011. The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood* 18(2): 151–65.
- Stahl, R. M. 2007. «Don't forget about me»: Implementing article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law* 24(3): 803–842.
- Stearns, P. N. 2016. History of children's rights. In: M. D. Ruck, M. Peterson-Badali, and M. Freeman, eds. *Handbook of Children's Rights: Global and Multi-disciplinary Perspective*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stenvall, E. 2018. Yhteiskunnallinen osallisuus ja toimijuus: Lasten osallistuminen, kansalaisuus ja poliittisuus arjen käytäntöinä. Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 2407. Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Such, E., Walker, O. and Walker, R. 2005. Anti-war children: Representation of youth protests against the Second Iraq War in the British national press. *Childhood* 12(3): 301–326.
- Suoninen, A. 2014. *Lasten mediabarometri 2013: 0-8-vuotiaiden mediankäyttö ja sen muutokset vuodesta 2010*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusseura.
- Taylor, N. 2006. What do we know about involving children and young people in family law decision making? A research update. *Australian Journal of Family Law* 20(2): 154–178.
- Tisdall, K. 2011. Is the honeymoon over? Children and young people's participation in public decision-making. In: D. A. M. Freeman, ed. *Children's Rights: Progress and Perspectives. Essays from the International Journal of Children's Rights*. Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers: 72–84.
- Tobin, J. 2004. Partners worth counting: The relationship between the media and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 12: 139–167.
- Tuukkanen, T., ed. 2018. *Lapsibarometri 2018: Lasten kokemustiedon keräämisen metodologisia kysymyksiä*. Available at: [http://lapsiasia.fi/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/LA\\_lapsibarometri2018\\_221118.pdf](http://lapsiasia.fi/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/LA_lapsibarometri2018_221118.pdf)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>
- Ursin, M. 2019. Fra redaksjonen: Miljøaktivisme - det nye generasjonsopprøret? *Barn* 37(1): 5– 10.
- Warrier, S. and Ebbeck, M. 2014. Children's rights: Television programmes aired in Singapore. *Early Child Development and Care* 184(1): 138–148.
- Varhaiskasvatustilastus 2018/540. Read in June 15, 2019. Available at: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2018/20180540?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=Varhaiskasvatustilastus>
- Williams, N. 1997. The theme day of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on «Children and the media». Practice and implementation. *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 5(2): 263–266.
- Wyness, M. G. 2009. Adult's involvement in children's participation: Juggling children's places and spaces. *Children & Society* 23(6): 395–406.
- Vilmilä, F. 2015. *Media + lapsi + kasvatustilastus. Mediakasvatustutkimuksellinen kehittäminen*. Verkkojulkaisuja 80. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusseura.
- Ylönen, S. 2012. Sallittua, salaista vai kiellettyä? Lasten medialeikkilatasta käydyt neuvottelut päiväkodissa. In: H. Strandell, L. Haikkola, and K. Kullman, eds. *Lapsuuden muuttuvat tilat*. Tampere: Vastapaino: 85–115.

## Author Presentation

Marleena Mustola  
marleena.mustola@juu.fi

Eija Sevón  
eija.sevon@juu.fi

Maarit Alasuutari  
maarit.alasuutari@juu.fi

