Editorial

Sustainability of Families and Child Welfare

Juha Hämäläinen 1,*, Riitta Vornanen 1 and Kaisa Pihlainen 2

1 Department of Social Sciences, University of Eastern Finland, P.O. Box 1627, 70211 Kuopio, Finland; riitta.h.vornanen@uef.fi
2 School of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Eastern Finland, P.O. Box 111, 80101 Joensuu, Finland; kaisa.pihlainen@uef.fi
* Correspondence: juha.hamalainen@uef.fi

This special issue deals specifically with the sustainability of families and child welfare with respect to sustainable social development. Attention will be paid to the institutional mechanisms and activities of society to promote the well-being of children and support families in their role of care.

The interdependence of social, economic, and ecological aspects of sustainability is emphasized in the original model of sustainable development presented in *Brundtland Report* in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). In the area of social sustainability since then, there may also be talk of the cultural aspect of sustainability, which refers to the values, norms, and customs of the principles and practices of human coexistence. The well-being and appropriate services of children and families, as well as high-quality protection of the rights of the child, are logically seen as an integral part of the mechanisms of socially sustainable society.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has laid the foundations for the promotion of children’s well-being and continues to play a role in building a child-friendly society that supports social sustainability and the well-being of the child.

The social dimension of overall sustainable development is ambiguous and difficult to define, operationalize, and measure. It essentially involves the political governance of society, social structures and cultural practices, and concerns state bodies, activities in civil society, and private life practices. It includes both the maintenance of the continuity of society and the capacity for renewal—both essential prerequisites for sustainable development.

In general, the determinants of social sustainability are social cohesion (as opposed to social fragmentation) and social inclusion (as opposed to social exclusion). Theoretically, the social dimension of sustainable development has been interpreted through the concept of social capital, in which case the mutual trust, cooperation, and communicativeness of people have been seen as its key components. The stability and integrity of human coexistence and community development has been seen as an expression of social sustainability.

Social sustainability is not only defined as an empirical research object—it is also a matter of political will and, more broadly, of moral obligation, which is justified by reason. Thus, it is also something that may not yet empirically exist, but is defined as something that should be, and as such, obliges us to figure out what should be done to achieve it. Thus, social sustainability may be seen as the result of activities that should consciously be done to promote it. Empirically, it is a question of the result of action, but as a normative concept of thought construction and reasoning that guides action.

The articles in this special issue focus on policies and service systems to promote the living conditions and well-being of children and families in different societies. Some articles also examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of children and families, as well as on educational and child protection systems and practices. The perspective of the sustainability of families and childcare is essentially part of reviews of societal policies, systems, and practices to promote the well-being of children and support families, both in general and in the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
The dynamics of sustainable development, or particularly the preconditions for social sustainability as a sub-dimension of overall sustainable development, have not been studied much from the perspective of children and families. In that respect, this special issue reinforces, for its part, a new line of research on both sustainability research and research on child welfare. Admittedly, the link between supporting families, promoting the well-being of children and protecting the rights of the child to sustainable social development is widely understood, although it is not explicitly described through the conceptual framework for sustainable development. In that respect, this special issue provides reasoning and conceptualizations in which this connection is actualized.

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