

Re-Framing of Childcare in Germany and England: From a Private Responsibility to an Economic Necessity

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Abstract

The expansion of care for children under the age of three in Germany and England constitute clear discontinuities of their welfare state traditions. These changes were justified in the political process through the increased use of scientific evidence which changed the meaning of childcare. The analysis of political discourses in the two countries shows however that although superficially we can see parallel developments around the same time in Germany and England, the meanings attached to childcare and the scientific evidence used to justify it were very different.

Zusammenfassung

Die Ausweitung der Kinderbetreuung für unter Dreijährige in Deutschland und England stellte einen Bruch mit den bestehenden wohlfahrtsstaatlichen Traditionen dar. Dieser Wandel wurde durch eine stärkere Nutzung wissenschaftlichen Wissens im Politikprozess legitimiert, der die Bedeutung der Kinderbetreuung veränderte. Die vorliegende Analyse der politischen Diskurse in den beiden Ländern zeigt, dass in Deutschland und England trotz zunächst paralleler Entwicklungen die Kinderbetreuung mit sehr unterschiedlichen Deutungen verbunden war, die durch unterschiedliches wissenschaftliches Wissen legitimiert wurden.

1 Introduction

Like most post-industrial welfare states, England and Germany increasingly face similar challenges that can be described as a sectoral shift from production to services, an aging population and a changing household structure (Esping-Andersen 1999; Pierson 2001). These challenges—among others—have been caused by growing labor participation of women and changing gender roles, which result in an increasing need for care services for the elderly and for children. These services, which in the past

were mostly unpaid caring work provided by women in the household, increasingly need to be 'externalized' (Esping-Andersen 2006) and are consequently either taken over by the welfare state or organized through the market.

Both West Germany and England had a traditionally low public involvement in early childhood education and care. In the conservative welfare state of Germany with a strong male-breadwinner model (Lewis and Ostner 1994), care for young children was considered the responsibility of mothers. Similarly, in the liberal English welfare state, intervention in the family was traditionally low except in cases of child neglect or abuse. However, both countries have experienced dramatic reforms in the last 10 years in relation to childcare: The first step was the introduction of public childcare for pre-school children (aged 3-6 in Germany and 3-5 in England) throughout the 1990s in both countries (Evers et al. 2005). The second step was the expansion of early childhood education and care for children under 3 years of age.

This paper analyzes this 'second step' of the expansion of childcare for children under the age of three since it is the more recent and—culturally—more contested reform. As it will be shown, in both countries the shifts in the meaning of childcare that occurred with the introduction of care for children under three marked significant discontinuities with their institutional and cultural paths (Rüling 2008). The gender and family models embedded within welfare policy can be understood as policy paradigms (Bacchi 1999). The observed changes challenge the underlying norms on gender relations and the upbringing of children, that are deeply rooted in the cultural understanding of the welfare state. How could these changes be explained?

Interestingly, when analyzing these recent reforms in the extension of childcare, the main theories that explain policy development fail.

- First, from an institutional perspective, a stronger path dependency would have been expected (Pierson 2001). Public responsibility for the care of infants and young children

constitutes a novelty in both countries and breaks away from a policy of non-state intervention in this field.

- Second, from a theory of gender welfare analysis, which would also hint at stability rather than change, these changes in policies and institutions also signify at least a partial modification of the underlying family norms and gender ideologies (Daly 2000; Lewis 2004), as well as of the cultural understanding of childhood and education in both countries (Pfau-Effinger 2000; Kremer 2005).
- Third, the rapid expansion of family policy coincides with the return of social democracy into office in both countries. Consequently, a theoretical perspective that ‘parties matter’ (Seeleib-Kaiser 2003) could be considered as a theoretical frame for this analysis. However, since in both countries childcare for children under three was introduced only in a subsequent term of office (the second in Germany and third in England), it cannot be considered one of the top priorities of either of the social democratic parties in charge. Later on, the childcare agenda was also adopted by the conservative parties in Germany and England indicating a more sustainable and thorough policy change.
- Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective on power structures, it would be difficult to explain how childcare entered the political agenda in the first place. Childcare and family policy have never been high on the agenda of trade unions or other social actors of aggregated interests. The expansion of childcare comes long after it had been put on the political agenda by the women’s movement in the 1970s. In both cases the governments in power introduced these reforms not in response to social movements but as part of their welfare state modernization, in reaction to changes in society and the economy.

In family policy, especially in the field of child-rearing, cultural norms and values are of utmost importance (Bacchi 1999; Kremer 2005). It is therefore assumed that, within the political sphere, the cultural norms around education and care would need to change in order to enable such a significant shift in policy. The

central hypothesis is that the changes found mark a shift in meaning within this policy field, which also explains why childcare climbed high on the political agenda of both countries. In order to explain this policy change, a central argument of the paper is that the use of scientific research had played a central role in this reframing process. It will be shown that cultural norms and values around gender, the family and the upbringing of children have been changed in the two countries using ‘objective’ evidence and ‘economic’ rationality. Along with the reframing of the political discourse on childcare, an ‘objectification’ of the arguments could be observed. Especially in the case of England, ‘evidence’ was explicitly opposed to values and personal opinions in the political discourse. Also in the German ‘sustainable family policy’, the evidence base played an important role. However, it will be shown that the different rationalities prevailing in the two national contexts are themselves culturally embedded; therefore there is no ‘objective’ rationality as such.

The theoretical approach follows an interpretative explanation of the policy change that marks a culturalist turn in policy analysis, looking at policy discourses and normative frames of policy development (Fischer 2003; Nullmeier et al. 2003). In contrast to ‘classic’ approaches, agenda setting and policy formulation processes are not assumed to be the result of political actors’ rational behavior, but of their interpretative process (Schneider and Janning 2006). These interpretative processes documented in public debates are analyzed using policy papers, political debates or interview texts (Nullmeier et al. 2003). When analyzing these texts, special attention is paid to the framing and the legitimation of policies (Ullrich 1999; Fischer 2003).

The empirical findings presented here¹ are based on document analysis of key policy documents and parliamentary debates as well as scientific studies commissioned by the two governments

¹ This study is based on the research project ‘Sustainable growth, social inclusion and family policy—innovative ways of coping with old and new challenges’, sub-project ‘The gateway of education and family policy’, by Prof. Dr. S. Leitner and Dr. A. RÜling, financed through the Anglo-German-Foundation (RÜling 2008).

and expert interviews. In each country 5-10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of parliament, government officials as well as key scientific advisors in the field of childcare policy. The transcribed interviews, parliamentary debates and government texts were scrutinized using content analysis (Mayring 2000) and frame analysis methods (Deutungsmuster-Analyse) (Ullrich 1999).

2 Traditions in childcare and early years' services in Germany and England until 1998

*West Germany*² was characterized as the archetype of a conservative welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990). This welfare model presumed a gender division of labor inside the family that was based on a male breadwinner model with a female homemaker and caregiver. From a feminist perspective, West Germany was also characterized as a dual welfare state with a traditional male breadwinner model (Lewis and Ostner 1994). Since the 1960s, women's employment rates have been rising and the traditional breadwinner model has been modernized, allowing mothers to work, although usually only part-time. (Pfau-Effinger 2000).

Apart from this gender division of labor in the household, cultural norms and values around childhood and childcare were also an important factor. In West Germany, childcare and social services were traditionally considered obligations of the family, with the mother seen as the primary responsible and best caregiver, especially for small children. This norm was institutionalized in the West German welfare state, which supported motherhood and home-based care through various fiscal and leave policies for mothers of younger children (Ostner 2006). In a representative study in the year 1996, 80% of men and 72% of women in West Germany agreed to the statement that an infant or a

² Due to persisting differences in the cultural values around childcare and gender roles, West and East Germany have to be considered separately. The focus lies on the West-German discourse, since it shapes the hegemonic political discourse.

young child would suffer if his/her mother was in employment (Statistisches Bundesamt 2007: 522).

In congruence with the gender ideals of the female homemaker and caregiver, the upbringing (*Erziehung*) of children in West Germany was considered to be the family's responsibility. Until recently, a strong institutional division existed between the tasks of education (*Bildung*), childcare (*Betreuung*) and upbringing and socialization (*Erziehung*): while education was only the responsibility of the school and the educational system, childcare and upbringing were considered to be the duty of parents (Deutscher Bundestag 2005: 44).

The separation of education and upbringing became established with the institutional division between the educational system and the public care for children in difficult family situations and foster care (*Jugendhilfe*), as well as in the differentiation between the professions of the teacher and the social worker (Gottschall and Hagemann 2002). Education was understood in the German context merely as the responsibility for the cognitive development of children. This presumption led to a system of half-day schooling, while social skills were to be learned outside the education system, within the family and civil society (*ibid.*). This allowed only part-time employment of mothers with school-aged children.

Only in 1996, in the context of German re-unification, was a legal right to childcare (Reform des Kinder und Jugendhilfegesetzes) introduced, guaranteeing a part-time place for every child aged three and up. Because public childcare for children under the age of three as well as afternoon care for schoolchildren was rarely available previous to this, parents with both partners in full-time employment or working flexible hours had had to rely on private forms of childcare.

England has been described as a liberal welfare state, characterized by low intervention of the state in the market, low levels of de-commodification and low redistribution (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999). In principle, the welfare state was residual, and welfare state benefits highly targeted, means-tested and granted at a

low level only. The market played a dominant role in social service provision.

As a liberal welfare state, England had a limited tradition of general family policy as such. Instead, the poor were supported through different forms of poverty relief. Due to the lack of support for mothers within the welfare state, until the 1990s, England and the UK were also characterized as having a strong male breadwinner model (Lewis and Ostner 1994). However, in contrast to the West German welfare state, there was little explicit support for mothers as homemakers comparable to parental leave or state payments for parental caregiving. A tax-splitting system, which supported the traditional male breadwinner family, was abolished in the 1990s.

Following the principle of minimal welfare state intervention, childcare was considered to be a private responsibility of the family (Letablier and Jönsson 2003) and not part of the education system. However, this was not necessarily combined with a strong mother ideology as in West Germany. Consequently, the gender model of distribution of labor was ambivalent: on the one hand, there was no or little active support for the founding of a family and for mothers as homemakers. On the other hand, due to the lack of public support for childcare beyond school hours, women were still expected to be available as caregivers and homemakers. The cultural norms of raising children assumed that childcare for pre-school children was primarily the task of mothers. Nevertheless, the lack of social support led to a high pressure on mothers to be active in the labor market.

The state offered 'care' only for children of single parents or for those at risk of harm or mistreatment, thus connecting the notion of external childcare with neglect and social deprivation (Lewis 2003; Vincent and Ball 2006). Childcare for pre-school children was not considered part of the education system. This was reflected in divided competences: while childcare (for neglected children) was the responsibility of the Department of Health, 'nursery education' in the form of pre-school classes was the responsibility of the Department of Education.

Despite the rising rates in the employment of women and mothers since the 1970s, the government did not assume responsibility for the reconciliation of work and family life until 1998. Only childcare for children at risk and some pre-school reception classes existed; however, the supply was patchy and covered only a few hours. The idea of supporting children's socialization through childcare was not part of the educational agenda, but remained an idea confined to the middle and upper classes (Lewis and Lee 2002: 3f.). External childcare expanded mostly through private market institutions such as private daycare and child minders³ as well as through parent initiatives and voluntary sector institutions. This led to a large regional variety in the supply of childcare services. In contrast to Germany, however, England has a long-standing tradition of full-day schooling, which enabled the employment of mothers with schoolchildren.

3 Recent policy trajectories and political debates on childcare and early childcare services

3.1 Germany

In Germany, externalized childcare for children below the age of three came on the political agenda in the election campaign of 2002, where family policy marked one of the major division lines between the two large parties (Rüling 2003). In the coalition treaty of the Social Democratic and Green government, the introduction of 'sufficient' childcare infrastructure was promised. The aim was recorded in the Agenda 2010, the Green paper for welfare state reform of the Social Democratic-Green government.

In 2004 the German parliament passed the TAG, a bill that assigned local authorities with the duty to supply sufficient childcare for children under the age of three. In the bill, the government legislated that each year 1.5 billion euros, which were saved annually through labor market reforms, had to be invested

³ Childminders are institutionalized babysitters which professionally take care of several children in their private home. After the introduction of the TAG, this form of childcare was also eligible for public subsidies.

in childcare by local authorities. The Act came into force on January 1, 2005. The first report on local government compliance was published in 2006.

In the TAG, the government estimated that until 2010 230,000 new childcare spaces would be required to fulfill the needs of parents in employment, searching for employment, in education and training, and for children with special needs. This estimated number of spaces corresponded to an average child-place ratio of 20% nationally, with 17% in the Western federal states and 39% in the Eastern federal states (BMFSFJ 2007). According to the Act, childcare spaces should be provided at the local level as a mixture of public daycare centers, voluntary sector institutions and about 30% in spaces with private childminders. Furthermore, the TAG stated that childminders should receive more state support, some training and higher regulation, such as health and emergency insurance as well as public subsidies and some quality inspection (BMFSFJ 2004).

In the election of 2005, the Conservative party won the majority and a coalition of the Conservatives and the Social Democrats came into power. However, in family policy, and especially the extension of childcare, the new government held similar positions to the Social Democratic-Green coalition. The coalition treaty of 2005 affirmed the aims of the TAG and announced sanctions if the pace of childcare expansion was too slow (CDU/CSU/SPD 2005: 97).

Interestingly, it was a Conservative Minister for Family Affairs, Ursula von der Leyen, who pushed the political and cultural shift of extending childcare for children under the age of three even further. In 2007, two years after the TAG came into force, the childcare target was extended. A further expansion of 750,000 childcare spaces until 2013 was decided upon in the new KIFÖG law, followed by the right to childcare after the age of one from 2013 on (BMFSFJ 2007).

Political debates and controversy in Germany

The parliamentary debates around the passing of the TAG in 2004 can be regarded as the result of a paradigmatic shift in the

meaning of childcare, in which childcare was re-framed in a demographic and economic context and thereby gained importance. Generally speaking, in the parliamentary debates, all parties argued in favor of the extension of childcare for children under the age of three. This agreement was unusual, because the extension of childcare for children below the age of three was relatively new on the political agenda and not typically in line with Conservative policy. The idea that childcare could enhance the reconciliation of work and family and could lead to increasing birth rates was often mentioned, as well as the notion that investment in childcare would be an investment in the future which would foster economic growth (Deutscher Bundestag 2004). All parties pointed out the importance of measures to enhance the reconciliation of work and family life for the economy as well as for demographic development. Furthermore, the idea of investment in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as pre-emptive social policy was implicitly agreed upon by all parties. The main controversy in the political debate lay in the question of financing the expansion of childcare as well as the issue of federal and national competences in education policy (Rüling 2008).

This was surprising insofar as during the election campaign in 2002 the question of family policy had marked the main division between the Social Democratic and Conservative parties. The CDU and CSU had promised a highly paid universal care allowance for all parents staying home with their children aged 0-3 and did not mention the extension of externalized childcare or whole-day schooling (Bösch 2002). As will be shown in the following section, the re-framing took place mainly through the establishment of the new paradigm of 'sustainable family policy' by the Minister for Family Affairs, Renate Schmidt, who made greater use of evidence and especially economic research in policy making.

But also within the SPD the understanding of childcare and family policy was modernized prior to the election 2002. While equal opportunities and education policy had traditionally been topics of interest of the Social Democrats, family policy had been considered a Conservative domain only. In 2001 the Social

Democratic party established a new family policy framework which included the expansion of childcare for the early years (Mackroth and Ristau 2002).

In the parliamentary debate on the TAG, Renate Schmidt stated that the new family policy was guided by a 'paradigm change'. She criticized the previous German family policy as being unsuccessful and expensive, since the high spending for family benefits had led to low fertility rates and low rates of maternal employment. The first pillar of the new, 'sustainable family policy' was to increase infrastructure and supply more childcare for parents with small children (Deutscher Bundestag 2004: 11194).

It could also be seen from the debate on the TAG that the CDU as the main opposition party had changed positions within barely two years and accepted the new paradigm of the 'sustainable family policy' that should enable the reconciliation of work and family life through the expansion of childcare and the support of mothers' employment. Considering the scope of the ideological opposition against childcare from a Conservative standpoint, this shift was quite significant, although there were some different emphases remaining in the wording as well as in the political priorities. The CDU was more prone to call for 'enabling choice' of parents rather than 'reconciling work and family life'. Nevertheless, it was the CDU who expanded the childcare aim in the following legislation—this shows that the cultural shift of childcare had occurred in all parties.⁴

Overall, when looking at the political debates, the main aim of expanding childcare spaces was to enable a better reconciliation of work and family life. In the period analyzed, there was hardly any political debate on the educational function of childcare and the possible outcomes for children through the improvement of the educational quality of care, except in childminder settings.

⁴ The CDU/CSU had also started modernizing their family policy through the introduction of a party committee in 2004 under the lead of the future family minister, Ursula von der Leyen. Their aims were to establish sufficient childcare, to foster the reconciliation of work and family, and to discuss the possibilities and limits of demographic policies (CDU/CSU 2005).

This was firstly due to the higher funding that would be required to introduce higher quality *and* more spaces at the same time. The interviewed experts mentioned that they considered the general extension of spaces as a first step, which needed to be followed by an initiative on quality as a second step. The second and possibly more important issue was the division of competences between the national and the federal state level, whereby the federal states were responsible for educational standards and inspection. The question of quality and the sharing of competences at the federal and state levels constituted a major gap within the German debate on childcare. The quality issue was dealt with on the federal state level with the development of federal educational plans and curricula.

3.2 England

In England, the political strategy towards childcare and children's services was multifaceted and comprised of childcare spaces, education, parental support as well as integrated services. In 2004, the Labour government presented the 10-year strategy 'Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children' (Her Majesty's Treasury 2004), which set up an extensive policy framework for the development of childcare over the next years. The policy targets of the strategy included the reconciliation of family and gainful employment for parents and the enhancement of child development. The program aimed at increasing childcare spaces and childcare quality over 10 years through inspection as well as education and training for the childcare workforce (*ibid.*). The strategy included the expansion of universal childcare for 3 to 4-year-old children for up to 15 hours per week by 2010 and '20 hours eventually', but there was no concrete aim of expansion in childcare for children younger than three. In addition, children's centers should be extended, and the childcare element of the child tax credit should be expanded (Vincent and Ball 2006: 33).

As one element of the 10-year strategy for childcare, the Childcare Act was passed in the House of Commons in 2005 and came into force in 2006 (House of Commons 2005). In this act, the government for the first time assumed the legal responsibility

for the provision of childcare for children of all age groups. Furthermore, the act drew together several policies on childcare under one framework.

Childcare for all children should be provided if their parents were in employment, in training or have special needs. This marked a development from the Childcare Strategy from 1998, where no childcare spaces for children under the age of three were mentioned. The local authorities were to assess and monitor the childcare needs at the local level and should coordinate the market with the various local providers. However, the municipalities received no additional funding for this task. The local authorities were allowed to provide childcare facilities themselves only if there were no private providers. Furthermore, the Act established a curriculum, 'Birth to three matters', which defined the aims and milestones of child development and education. Finally, the Act regulated the development of Sure Start Children's Centers, which should be extended to 3,500 nationwide until 2010—one in every community, starting with the most disadvantaged areas (Linsey and McAuliffe 2006: 405).

In 2008, Gordon Brown announced a further expansion of universal childcare for children aged two, which would mean an expansion of some hours of free childcare, which had thus far been restricted to children from age three (Daily Telegraph 2008).

Political debates and controversy in England

In the political debates during the passing of the Childcare Act in 2005, various topics were discussed, especially the questions of the quality of childcare, the outcomes for children and the effects of external childcare for child development. Generally speaking, also in England, all parties were in favor of expanding and regulating childcare, albeit with different priorities.

In England, too, a shift in the political discourse could be ascertained, since family policy, as such, was not traditionally an issue in the English welfare state. For the first time the state was taking up responsibility for the regulation of this field. However, there had been a debate on childcare and early childcare services for some years previous to this. In the manifesto for 2001, the

Labour party promised to expand universal childcare for children aged 3-4 years, and to extend early excellence centers in the 500 new Sure Start centers for children aged 0-5. There was a general aim that childcare spaces should be extended, but no mention of the quality of their quality (Labour Party 2001).

Nevertheless, it became obvious that the priorities of the Blair government on the childcare issue shifted during its three terms in office (Clarke 2007). In the first years, the question of maternal employment, especially for single mothers, was considered of paramount importance in order to combat child poverty. Following some criticism of an economically driven welfare-to-work agenda, which was considered to force parents into the labor market regardless of their childcare responsibilities, the Labour government changed its perspective on childcare and focused more on the families' needs. In this respect, childcare policy should be considered in the context of a general extension of family policy, which also included giving parents more time with their children, as well as more guidance for parenting with more public attention on the relationships inside the family (Clarke 2007). Interestingly, also the wording in government papers and speeches changed. Instead of talking about "welfare to work", the politicians talked about "enabling parents to make choices about their work-life-balance" (Kelly, House of Commons, 2nd reading of childcare bill, Column 28) through the extension of leave entitlements and flexible working employment. In addition, the quality aspect of childcare was stressed more in Government papers than some years previously.

So, first, childcare was discussed under the aspect of reconciliation of work and life, and some years later the debate focused more on the educational value of childcare. A reason for this might be that the issue of quality and the 'outcomes for children' had gained paramount importance in order to justify the extension of childcare spaces. Especially through the use of evidence-based policy making, and within the political aim of tackling child poverty, there was a need to address the quality of care in order to improve the educational outcomes of ECEC for the children involved. This might have been due to the results of re-

search which had shown that childcare below the age of three would be only beneficial for the emotional and cognitive development of the child if the care provided was of high quality (Melhuish 2004; Smith et al. 2007).

Furthermore, since the turn of the millennium, childcare and especially integrated services had gained a central importance when looking at social exclusion of children from disadvantaged areas. This argument was very prominent in the political justification of the Childcare Bill. According to the Labour speakers, childcare would be provided in the form of children's centers, and the subsidies would be directed to disadvantaged areas in order to close 'the gaps between the development of wealthy and disadvantaged children'. The idea was that through access to education, it would be possible to 'break the link between people's incomes and their opportunities' (Kelly House of Commons, 2nd reading of childcare bill, Column 28).

To prove the point that childcare should be considered a profitable investment, several speakers in the House of Commons made reference to scientific studies and evaluations of the impact of ECEC on children's cognitive development. Helen Goodman stated, 'By the age of three, children of professional families already have vocabularies that are greater than those of adults in the poorest families' (House of Commons, 2nd reading of childcare bill, Column 61). In order to combat this inequality of life chances, childcare was considered beneficial for the child's development, if at high quality. The argument backing the ECEC was that every month of high quality pre-school education would increase school-readiness of children from the age of one. In this light however, the question of quality of childcare was an essential point.

3.3 Comparison

A comparison of the political debates shows that different arguments were used in order to justify the political intervention in childcare. In both countries the child care policy was part of an overall political strategy with explicit aims: the sustainable family policy in Germany and the national childcare strategy in Eng-

land. However, the strategies showed different problem definitions and followed different political aims.

In Germany, the expansion of childcare should facilitate the reconciliation of work and family for parents with small children and enable higher birth rates. The issue of quality was hardly mentioned. In England the focus was put on the overreaching aim of combating child poverty and social exclusion. Generally speaking, the analysis of the English showed that childcare is presented like a ‘one size fits all’ strategy which should help to solve different problems at the same time: to enhance work-family reconciliation, to increase the number of childcare spaces, to combat child poverty and social exclusion, to increase the quality of care and the qualification of the workforce and to help to tackle questions of affordability. When looking at the restricted funding, it became obvious that some general trade-offs were glossed over within the political debate. Especially the trade-off between quantity, quality and affordability of childcare was hardly mentioned in the English debates, whereas in Germany the issue of financing is the central controversy, and the matter of quality was explicitly framed as a ‘feasible compromise at the time’.

There were also different focuses in the provision of early childcare in both countries. While Germany aimed at a sustainable, public sector-like provisions at highly subsidized rates for all parents in order to increase the birth rate and foster economic growth, in England subsidies for early childcare services were specially targeted at the lower income groups, and public childcare aimed mainly to combat child poverty and social exclusion through integrated services.

4 The drivers of the extension of childcare and early childhood services and the role of research

This section analyzes what helped drive the expansion of childcare as well as the role of scientific evidence used in the policy discourse. The question here is not only how governments used research for policy making, but also what kind of problems were

asked, how issues were framed and which kind of evidence was considered to be relevant and helpful.

4.1 Germany

In Germany the government in general had no strong tradition or commitment to evidence-based policy making and had no precise aims within family policy before the establishment of 'sustainable family policy'. The use of scientific knowledge within policy making was concentrated on scientific advisory boards which did not 'intervene' in everyday policy making. The introduction of the new paradigm of 'sustainable family policy' was followed by a greater use of scientific evidence within policy-making. The scientific studies used were commissioned by the Ministry of Family Affairs and tailored toward this ministry's needs.

In this context, a successful re-framing of family policy and childcare from a 'soft' policy for gender equality to a more 'hard' policy fostering economic growth could be observed during the second term of office of the Social Democratic-Green government. As some researchers argued, the main policy driver for family policy reform in Germany was the demographic change (Auth 2007; Leitner 2007).

The increasing attention on demographic issues had been fueled by a dominant public debate on low birth rates, a fear of the 'dying nation', as well as the economic costs involved in the demographic changes, especially through the rising costs of social security pensions (Berger and Kahlert 2006; Auth 2007). In the political sphere, there had been a growing discussion of pro-natalist policy in the context of family policy since 2002. The issue of pro-natalist policy had been a tabu in post-war family policy due to the racist pro- and anti-natalist policies during the Nazi period and World War II, from which the democratic West Germany wanted to distance itself (Willenbacher 2007). When Renate Schmidt became Minister for Family Affairs in 2002, the demographic issue was put on the agenda as a new aim of family policy in the Social Democratic party (Mackroth and Ristau 2002).

This demographic discourse was coupled with the increasing use of research and scientific knowledge in policy making. In Germany, the paradigm of ‘sustainable family policy’ claimed higher attention to its effectiveness, efficiency and goal-orientation of policy as well to its economic effects. It was claimed that for the first time, the effects of family policy were monitored by the government through systematic evaluation of single policies (such as *Elterngeld*), the analysis of the effects of family benefits on the family income and the overall effects on fertility, women’s labor market participation and economic growth.

One example for the higher focus on scientific knowledge in family policy was the fact that the new paradigm of sustainable family policy was developed by the scientific commission for the seventh family report. The scientists used the demographic change as an argument to show that the previous family policy supporting the male breadwinner model was based on out-dated gender roles. This was seen to make women refrain from having children, because they had to make a decision between career and family due to a lack of work-family reconciliation policies. Consequently, the modernization of family policy should enable the reconciliation of work and family life according to the life choices of couples and families (BMFSFJ 2005a).

Through the use of the demographic argument, a re-framing of family policy from a ‘soft’ issue on equal opportunities and enabling women’s labor market participation to a more ‘hard’ issue could be observed between the years 2002 and 2005. This was used as an explicit political strategy in order to increase the political weight of family policy (Ristau 2005). The use of scientific knowledge and especially arguments showing the economic potential of family policy stood against an ideological debate on the role of mothers. This political strategy included the forming of strategic alliances, especially with partners from the economy and civil society who were ‘spreading the word’. Instead of ‘just’ enabling mothers’ employment, family policy and childcare were portrayed as fostering economic growth, stabilizing the social se-

curity systems and thus making the welfare state ‘sustainable’ (BMFSFJ 2005a).

Sustainability in this context meant first of all the ‘effectiveness’ of policy through strategic set-up and consequent scientific monitoring and policy evaluation. Second, it meant that society should be able to sustain and reproduce itself. This issue was linked with the economic and social aspects of sustainability—safeguarding human capital and social integration. Also, the idea of human capital investment was also taken up.

The sustainable family policy was measured according to the following indicators (Ristau 2005; BMFSFJ 2005a): a birth rate of at least 1.7 children per women in the mid-term perspective, better reconciliation of work and family, lower poverty rates of children through enabling both parents’ employment, higher levels of education, especially through the improvement of externalized early childhood education and care as well as strengthening the competences of parents in the upbringing of their children in order to insure good child development. These aims constituted a clear break with a Conservative breadwinner model where the woman was mainly responsible for childcare and might work part time.

The main driver of this process of re-framing was the Ministry for Family Affairs in cooperation with scientific advisors. In order to analyze the (macro-)economic and social effects of work-family reconciliation policies, several scientific studies were commissioned by the Ministry, especially to economists (BMFSFJ 2003; BMFSFJ 2005b; Eichhorst et al. 2007). Some studies used econometric modeling to show the short-term impact of public investment in childcare in the economy and at the local level. It was argued that childcare would create high rates of return and ‘save’ welfare state expenditure in other areas, because it would create new employment opportunities leading to higher revenue from taxes and social security contributions (Spiess et al. 2002; BMFSFJ 2005). Many of the studies used comparisons to other European countries that showed that a better economic performance was coupled with a higher birth rate

and labor market participation of mothers—the Nordic countries and France were popular examples (BMFSFJ 2005c).

Consequently, extending childcare was first of all regarded as a strategy for economic growth and second as a social investment strategy beneficial for child development. The argument that spending on family policy should not be regarded as costs but indeed as investments, which would pay off in the future, was also adopted in several studies that proved the ‘effectiveness’ of family-friendly policies for the whole economy as well as on the company level (BMFSFJ 2005b). For the ‘business side’ of work-family reconciliation policy, there was also an argument that the human capital of highly qualified women would be ‘lost’ through long periods with the family and away from the workplace, which could lead to a shortage of highly skilled workers. In this case, the economic aspects of sustainability were highly stressed.

The general argument was that family policy should enable reconciliation of work and family in order to stabilize human capital. On the one hand, highly qualified women should be retained in the labor market, even if they had children. On the other hand, since especially women with high qualifications had fewer children, through a good work-family reconciliation policy they should be encouraged to have children *and* stay in the labor force. The issue of safeguarding human capital was therefore twofold. In the present, highly qualified women were required as workers and, for the future, the children of highly qualified parents were required as human capital.

All of these studies were widely used in the political communication. Minister Renate Schmidt did not limit herself to political programs and aims, but instead often argued with the economic effectiveness of work-family reconciliation policy. In addition, the Family Minister also created active networks with German businesses and local authorities in order to enhance work-family reconciliation at the local level and at the workplace.

The analysis shows the central role of scientific knowledge within the reframing process in Germany. Research results were

used as part of a political strategy in the public discourse in order to increase the credibility of the new family policy. There were clear limitations to evidence-based policy making in Germany during that time. While scientific experts were mostly well-established professors who enjoyed great credibility within the public and scientific debate, it is striking that no ‘controversial’ evidence entered the public debate in Germany. For example, no arguments against the benefits of childcare for children below the age of three were mentioned in the political and public debate. This is a distinct difference to the English use of evidence in policy making, where both sides used evidence to back their arguments. Furthermore, there were no long-term evaluation projects, the use of scientific evidence was more short-term and ‘on demand’.

Since then, the use of evidence-based policy making has been continued and intensified. It was the Conservative family minister who established a ‘Competence Centre for Family Benefits’ in 2006, which has the task of evaluating family policy according to the aims of the new paradigm of sustainable family policy. The recent plans for expansion of childcare were based on calculations of the Competence Centre (BMFSFJ 2008). Furthermore, in 2009 a comprehensive evaluation was commissioned in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance as a four-year-project which investigates the effects of the system of family benefits (BMFSFJ 2010). Finally, comparable to the British longitudinal studies on child development, a National Education Panel Study (NEPS) was started in 2009 which also addresses the educational effects of childcare.⁵ These developments show that the evidence-based policy making has been developed further since the period analyzed.

In contrast to the English debate, the fertility or the educational achievement of lower educated women was hardly mentioned in the debate. The policy was targeted mainly at middle-class parents. However, it marked a paradigmatic shift from the Conservative idea of the family where the mother was the primary parent responsible for childcare.

⁵ For more details see www.bmfsfj.de/kompetenzzentrum; www.neps.de.

The question of the educational value of early childhood education and care was rarely mentioned in this context. There were certain steps towards a better integration of education and care for children three years of age and older through the establishment of *Länderbildungspläne*, federal curricula for education aged three and older, as well as through the introduction of minimal training for private babysitters. However, education for children below the age of three was still not an issue in the general debate, and there was hardly any research on it. This might be the next step, as some studies on the educational value of ECEC suggest (Bertelsmann-Stiftung 2008).

4.2 England

In England, the Labour government was committed to evidence-based policy-making as a way of ‘modernizing government’ (Cabinet Office 1999). This implied the systematic evaluation of public spending as well as the outcomes of political programs and service delivery. From the end of the 1990s, the government commissioned large and systematic evaluation reviews of early childcare services (such as ‘Sure Start’ and the ‘Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative’) as well as longitudinal studies, e.g. the EPPE-Study on the cognitive development of children in different educational settings (Smith 2010).

This comprehensive and strategic approach implied the development of concise and quantifiable policy targets in the field of childcare which were to be met through the childcare strategy. Within the political aim of tackling child poverty, there was a need to increase the quality of care in order to improve the educational outcomes of ECEC for the children. This started with the ‘Interdepartmental childcare review’ (HMT 1998), in which the treasury took up a leading role in the beginning of the process. Generally speaking, in the English context, evidence and evaluation of policies played a much greater role in the political debate than in Germany.

In the English context the issue of quality had a paramount importance in order to justify the extension of childcare spaces. This was due to the fact that a merely economically-driven wel-

fare-to-work agenda had been criticized and also research had shown that low-quality childcare could be potentially harmful to children. In England the main and first driver for the expansion of childcare was the aim to fight child poverty and to enable parents and mothers to return to employment (Ball and Vincent 2005; Sylva and Pugh 2005; NNI Research Team 2007). This driver could be seen as a continuity in the liberal welfare state ideology, because poverty prevention and targeted policies had always been a justification for state intervention in the liberal model (Mahon 2002; Clasen 2005). In this context, the target of eradicating child poverty was the main driver of the early childhood services. The political strategy against child poverty worked in two dimensions.

First, there had been a strong attempt to get unemployed parents back into work and to increase the female employment rate. As employment was found to be the most effective method of poverty prevention, parents' employment was regarded as the first step towards the eradication of child poverty. Second, through socially inclusive programs targeted at disadvantaged children, the poverty and welfare-dependence cycle should be broken over the life course of children.

The expansion of childcare was one element of a welfare-to-work-policy targeting low-income parents and getting single mothers back into employment. The idea was to support the self-sufficiency of parents instead of welfare dependency, which presumed the notion of 'dependency as evil'. This idea was deeply rooted in the liberal welfare state philosophy (Bacchi 1999). The targets set by the Labour government were ambitious: cutting child poverty by half (compared to 1999) and bringing 70% of single parents into employment by 2010. This aim linked in with the active labor market policy program 'New Deal for Lone Parents' introduced in 1998. Consequently, the childcare subsidies introduced were targeted mainly at low-income parents (and specifically at parents from disadvantaged communities in order to avoid social stigmatization) who were absent from the labour market. One reason for this program was that the availability and costs for childcare constituted a barrier to employment.

Public subsidies for externalized care of children aged 0-3 were granted in the form of the working tax credit for low-income parents and the establishment of subsidized childcare facilities in the most disadvantaged communities (Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative [NNI], children's centers). The subsidies were targeted at children from disadvantaged backgrounds only. This approach was called 'progressive universalism' (Her Majesty's Treasury 2004). While the government provided some universal care—for children from 3-5 only—public support for younger children aimed at those who need it most. This targeting went along with a policy tradition of a liberal welfare state that primarily provided support for the poor, while parents with middle and upper incomes were not perceived as needing state services.

Another aspect of the expansion of childcare for children under three was the aim of 'giving children the best possible start in life' (Her Majesty's Treasury 2004). In the context of the English policy paradigm considering social inclusion, the connection between education and care was much more relevant than in Germany. By targeting children from disadvantaged backgrounds and aiming policy toward 'giving children the best possible start in life', there was a need to legitimate the public policy development through its effectiveness for child development and its outcome for social inclusion over the life course. Consequently, the research studies that were cited in the public and scientific debate analyzed how children from disadvantaged backgrounds could benefit from ECEC, especially from the access to good quality care before the age of three (Sylva and Pugh 2005).

As argued earlier, the idea followed the logic of childcare policy as social investment in children and especially of children 'in need'. The names of the programs—for example, 'Sure Start' or 'Every Child Matters'—were telling: they evoked the image that the state had to rescue children from socially deprived backgrounds and the risk of neglect or abuse. The policy was 'pre-emptive' insofar as the idea was to help parents in difficult life circumstances as well as to invest early in today's children in order to prevent low labor market attainment, crime and antisocial

behavior in the future. One influential summary report on the effectiveness of early years intervention for disadvantaged children concluded:

The evidence on childcare in the first three years for disadvantaged children indicates that high quality childcare can produce benefits for cognitive, language and social development. Low quality childcare produces either no benefit or negative effects. (...) Studies into adulthood indicate that this educational success is followed by increased success in employment, social integration and sometimes reduced criminality.' (Melhuish 2004: 4f.)

In order to justify public intervention in the area of childcare, the effectiveness of this policy for the development of children and for combating social exclusion needed to be proved. The political and scientific debate relied heavily on a variety of scientific studies that investigated the effect of ECEC on the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. First, studies on brain development were prominent. Second, studies which looked at the long-term effect of ECEC on the readiness for school, educational attainment of children and success in later life were used (Melhuish 2004; Sylva and Pugh 2005). Especially widely used were research results that showed long-term effects such as lower unemployment and lower crime rates (Sylva and Pugh 2005: 13).

Consequently, economic and social sustainability through human capital development and long-term lower welfare state expenditures were the focus of attention. Interestingly, in England no studies with European comparison were used—only studies learning from other liberal welfare states, especially the United States and Australia. Policy learning was institutionalized through copying programs such as Sure Start, which was modeled after the US program 'Headstart' that had shown very positive effects. This could be understood in the context of a liberal welfare state that is opposed to public support of social services for the wider population, such as those in Scandinavian welfare states. Or, to put it another way, there was a fear that the people would want 'Swedish childcare places and British taxes' (Glass 2005)—two things that do not go together. In the frame of a lib-

eral welfare state, the need for public intervention as such required legitimation.

This shows the limitations of evidence-based policy making in England. Despite their significant efforts, the questions asked remain within the frame of reference of the liberal welfare state tradition. Despite the efforts to increase the quality of childcare, there was still a huge quality gap in comparison to other European welfare states such as the Nordic countries which spend more money on childcare and often organized ECEC in a public sector setting. However, the idea of service provision in the mixed economy of welfare remained unquestioned in England, despite evaluation results showing that the public sector settings offered the highest quality childcare in England (Smith et al. 2007). Despite contradictory evidence no politician claimed that childcare should best be provided through the public sector; the market was still considered to be the best solution. So implicitly the liberal frame of reference in which the evidence is discussed determined which issues could be raised.

5 Conclusion

In both countries, childcare for the early years was expanded and justified through a process of re-framing childcare as an 'economic' issue. This re-framing has proven very successful politically. In both countries, until the late 1990s, childcare had been considered a 'women's issue', not important for the sustainability of the welfare state. Since the turn of the millennium, childcare has been increasingly considered a vital element of welfare state reform.

The first line of argument for the extension of childcare in both countries was the better reconciliation of work and family life and the assumption that mothers would increase their employment participation. This was considered to lead to higher economic growth, lower welfare dependency and higher tax revenue and social security contributions. The new framing considered childcare a productive factor in social policy, a 'one size fits all'

strategy that was to solve all kinds of problems in the welfare state.

The difference between the two countries was the main target group of the expansion as well as the central aims of the strategies and the topics discussed. In Germany, it was mostly higher qualified women who were targeted, because they were missing as ‘human capital’ in the labor market if they have children, and they were also the ones who should increase their fertility rate. In England, especially families and children from disadvantaged backgrounds were targeted—in order to enable them to live self-sufficiently.

In both countries we could see, however, that the re-framing has been based on a set of scientific studies, the results of which were used for political argumentation. It is striking that although the topics are the same, the questions asked are completely different. Even the use of evidence is almost mutually exclusive. This backs my argument made in the beginning, that the use of evidence is not ‘rational’ per se, but is used within a specific frame of reference which is contingent to the national debate or the welfare state culture. So, to put it in a nutshell, ‘what counts’ in policy-making is not ‘what works’, but rather ‘what is defined as the problem’. In Germany there was a high emphasis on the increasing fertility and economic growth, in England it was on the effectiveness of investment through higher employment rates of single parents and long-term educational benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Furthermore, in both countries, the ‘effectiveness’ of family policy was stressed within the two paradigms of ‘sustainable family policy’ as well as ‘evidence-based policy making’ which was a general commitment in English policy-making since the Blair government. The increasing role of research hints at the requirement of ‘hard facts’ to back up the re-framing of policy issues and the paradigm change involved. In both countries, the emphasis was that the policy shift was not a matter of family values, but of economic and educational ‘necessity’. In this respect the connected changes of gender models were somehow ob-

scured, which might, if discussed openly, have lead to more political upheaval in both countries.

We could also observe different models of evidence-based policy making. In England, with a longer and explicit program of evidence-based policy making, there was a high use of scientific studies with a range of outcome. Scientific results which were not coherent with the argumentation of the government still entered the political debate. The evaluation studies which were commissioned by the government were often long-term and supplied differentiated knowledge based on a differentiated design of settings. Interestingly, not all of the results were taken up in the political debate. The selectivity lied within the frame of reference of the liberal welfare state. For example, while the quality of childcare was a major topic in the debate, there was no comparative analysis with Nordic welfare states which had been scoring high on international comparative studies on education and ECEC. This could be explained as the reluctance to address a stronger role of the state in the childcare regulation, provision and funding.

In Germany, in contrast we found a very new discourse on evidence-based policy making and a new culture of evaluation which was just developing. However, the new paradigm of sustainable family policy was incredibly successful in shaping the political discourse. This was due to the use of scientific evidence, but only that of “useful” scientific studies commissioned especially for backing the arguments of the government. In this case, we found a selective and politicized use of evidence in policy-making which served the aim of generating a higher legitimacy for the political agenda. However a higher use of scientific evidence in family policy-making might be developing (BMFSFJ 2010) which will probably be very different from evidence-based policy making in Britain.

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