

The Costs of Children

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The Care of Young Children in Scandinavia: Parental Responsibilities, Rights and Costs

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During the latter half of the 20th century the gender order of the industrial era was crumbling; in Scandinavia, the gender-differentiated nuclear family gave way to new family forms, and gradually, the arrangement between family, labour market and welfare state was transformed.

This paper outlines the reconceptualisation and redesign of work/family policies that took place in Scandinavia from the 1970s into the early 2000s, giving special attention to the rising involvement of the welfare state in its regulation of the early childhood years. In far-reaching renegotiations of the boundaries between the state and parents, childcare was increasingly being reformulated as a collective concern and responsibility of the welfare state. A series of policy reforms introduced a redistribution of responsibilities and costs of childcare between the state and parents, and within the family, too, between mothers and fathers. The work/family policy discourse shifted to put the care of young children centre stage in policies advocating the dual aim of reconciling work and family and promoting gender equality. Increasingly, work/family policy came to include not just parental responsibilities but also the care-related social rights of parents and children. In legislation, the 'caring father' became the companion parent of the 'working mother'. Based on data from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden the paper examines three sets of policies directed towards working parents – namely the legislation of parental leave, state-sponsoring of childcare services, institution of cash grants for childcare, and the reception of policies among parents. In conclusion the paper discusses the interplay of family change and policy reform and considers to what extent work/family policies have succeeded in reconciling work and family, promoting gender equality and redistributing of the costs of childcare between mothers and fathers.

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Childcare Provision in Hungary

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This paper deals with controversies around childcare provisions – and also a general, even nation-wide reluctance to tackle them, and to question underlying assumptions in a substantial manner.

It introduces the topic by giving a historical background to highlight the rationale of their introduction during the last decades of state socialism (so as to challenge some myths circulating in Western Europe about the traditionally progressive political approaches regarding gender equality in CEE, while also making a point about the relative assets of state socialism in this respect, so often disregarded today in CEE countries). The alteration of left-wing and right-wing agendas in national politics, as well as their common impotence and failure in promoting women's employment and gender equality, characterizing the post-1989 family politics, reveals as its most recent developments desperate attempts to wage an ideological war on the one hand, or save money on the other, instead of concentrating on critical issues (like the daycare of, and adequate provisions for, children, fight against poverty, not to mention work-life balance and gender equality). The heavily ideologized dominant political discourse (stressing the issue of fertility in a nationalistic, even xenophobic context) and the generally conservative public discourse (considering childcare basically as women's responsibility) appear to be detached from the reality of parents' everyday concerns, while it can also be claimed that the rigid views determining the political and discursive contexts inhibit the change of individual attitudes.

In order to show how ideologized discourses and actual provisions affect the choices and desires of men and women in having children and in managing childcare and household duties, the paper draws on interview research prepared for the RECWOWE project in 2008. My aim is to show discrepancies between 'commonsense' statements and actual attitudes regarding childcare, and then ask why related political issues sound so different in Western and Eastern Europe. Is it only a matter of language/discourse/ideologies, or is it because certain provisions (like maternal or parental leave) have very different implications here and there?

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A Market for Child Care Services? Private Provision and Public Finance in the Dutch Child Care Sector

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Throughout Europe, an important policy shift concerns the introduction of market forces in sectors that are traditionally organised as a public responsibility. In line with this overall trend, the Dutch child care sector has been completely re-organised by the introduction of the Childcare Act on 1 January 2005. Financial support is redirected from the local authorities to the parents with the aim to increase parental choice. The explicit objective of the childcare reform is to stimulate the operation of market forces, so that childcare providers will respond to parental wishes in an efficient way. As a result, there is no longer a public provision of child care services in the Netherlands.

In this paper we will analyse the impact of this policy shift, by investigating three different issues, all relating to the possible tension between private provision and public finance. A first issue refers to the costs. After some years of lowering consumer prices, the prices have increased in 2009 and 2010 and are likely to increase rather dramatically in 2011-2013; the basic argument is that children are not a public good and that parents are primarily responsible for their children. This refers to a second issue, which relates to the effectiveness of child care arrangements in terms of labour force participation. Formal child care services are likely to crowd out informal services, as a result of which the effectiveness in terms of labour force participation may in fact be rather limited. This is a major argument in lowering the public investment in child care services. A third issue refers to the effects of 'marketisation' on the quality of child care services. Given the fact that parents have difficulty in assessing the quality of child care, there is some doubt whether the market creates enough transparency to effectively provide quality.

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Childcare as Intergeneration Support

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Working today's demanding labour market is not easy. Especially finding a balance between work and family life within the families with small children can be difficult. Even if public day-care-system is quite well-organized in Finland, need for extra childcare help because of family relations, overtime work, business trips etc. is often outward in the families with (under school-age) children. It is possible to buy extra childcare services from the market, but own parents or respectively spouse's parents are more often those to whom parents of small children turn first to, because of the safety and price aspects. In the wider context of intergenerational change, childcare help is a major element of parental support, and according to studies more than half of grandparents provide some type of childcare help to their adult children. This study took the view of two generation perspective in studying childcare help as intergenerational support. First, a general picture about childcare was portrayed. Then frequency of received/given help was considered. The results suggest that especially parents' ability and willingness to look after grandchildren were important factors to provide help. Also high socio-economic position was positive related both to the given and received childcare help. Results are based on questionnaires obtained from two family generations who were relatives with each other. Baby boomers' sample consisted of 1,115 randomly selected Finns born in 1945–50 and the sample of the baby boomers' adult children consisted of 1,435 young adults. The analysis was done with multinomial logistic regression.

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Costs and Consequences for Carers of Vulnerable Children

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This paper presents findings from an Australian study examining the direct and indirect costs to volunteer foster carers. The study used a budget standards approach and in-depth interviews/focus groups with carers to estimate the direct costs of fostered children in statutory out-of-home care. In relation to indirect costs the study used a multi-method approach providing a monetary value of the opportunity costs (foregone earnings) and time costs (market replacement model) for carers. Research in the UK and European countries where carers receive a wage component as part of their remuneration package provided insights into wage levels and the perceived adequacy of a carer wage. The study found that, due to the profoundly gendered nature of fostering, the compensatory aspects of remuneration (fee/wage or salary) were generally poor.

Complicating the picture of fostering in numerous countries (e.g. Australia, NZ, Canada, USA, UK) is the increasing use of kinship/relative care, reflecting ongoing difficulties in recruiting/retaining volunteer foster carers and an emphasis in national and international child welfare legislation to use the “least intrusive” option (e.g. preferred choice of relative/kin) when placing a child. Kinship carers are predominantly grandparents. Compared to foster carers grandparent carers are older and poorer; in poorer health; less knowledgeable about child development and modern parenting practices; less well-educated and more disadvantaged; and more likely to experience financial hardship and overcrowding. There is increasing evidence that compared to foster carers grandparent carers are likely to receive less financial and non-financial support in their caring role. The presentation will combine national and international studies examining formal and informal supports for formal and informal carers of children to illustrate the disparity between foster and relative/kinship carers and the costs and benefits for vulnerable, elderly grandparents caring for equally vulnerable, traumatised children and young people.

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Households and Social Capital: The Relationship between Cultural Priorities, Financial Resources and Child Care in a Multi-Cultural Suburb of Oslo

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Norway, together with many European countries, has in the last forty years received an increasing number of immigrants from diverse countries. The long periods of social democratic government and influence in the post-war years have resulted in a Norwegian welfare state admired by many inhabitants of countries not that fortunate. However, even though Norway is more egalitarian than the US and other countries, Norway is by no means a “classless” society. Before the financial crisis, Norway saw the biggest rise in standards of living ever in its history, and this rise still prevails for the nation as a whole. Still, the improved standards of living do not likewise include everybody, particularly not first and second generation of immigrants. On this backdrop, this paper presents case studies of immigrant families with young children in a multi-ethnic suburb of Oslo. The focus is on social networks of these families. Data is constructed from six months of ethnographic fieldwork. The paper has particular focus on the everyday day organisation of the lives of women and young children related to social inclusion and integration. By applying “network analysis”, particularly the idea of strong and weak ties, combined with gender, class and ethnicity perspectives, the paper will discuss the following questions: In what ways are parents of young children connected to the labour market? How do households organize the care of young children in the suburb? How are women’s friendship networks regarding quality, expansion and implications for child care? In what ways do cultural priorities shed light on issues of gender and child care?

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How do First-time Mothers Participate and Stay in Employment in the UK?

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Raising employment rates of lone mothers has been a key policy target of recent years in the UK, as it has been in the USA. Despite a significant increase in lone mothers' employment overall, a very low proportion of women who start out as lone mothers works after the birth of their first child. The question answered in this research is how do these mothers, operating under intense constraints, manage to support work and care. The data for the analysis come from the Millennium Cohort Study, a nationally representative survey of families with children born in the UK around the time of the millennium. The paper analyses the factors that enable first time lone mothers to work, paying particular attention to sources of personal support in the form of childcare, gifts and regular financial assistance from the mothers' parents and friends. The analysis pursues this inquiry over time by investigating how lone mothers' childcare strategies change as their children get older and affect the sustainability of lone mothers' employment. Mothers who start out as lone mothers in the UK are less educated and younger than other mothers, thus the amount of money they can make in work is less than for other mothers on average. A consequence is that lone mothers' work is concentrated in precarious and low paid service sector jobs in which employers make little effort to assist. The analysis investigates how the support gap is filled, and which lone mothers access sufficient support to participate in work.

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The impact of childcare costs for Northern Irish Females

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Childcare is recognised as a significant barrier to parental employment and training, particularly for females (McColgan, 2006). The accessibility and affordability of childcare is a problem for working mothers in Northern Ireland. Each year childcare costs surveys are carried out in England, Scotland and Wales. However, to date, no such survey has been undertaken in Northern Ireland. Childcare costs surveys provide an essential measurement tool, calculating the current childcare costs for families and allowing for a detailed yearly comparison.

This survey, the first for Northern Ireland, aimed not only to discover the average costs of childcare across the region, but also to explore parents' experience of using childcare in terms of accessibility, affordability and availability of information. The report illustrates the challenges childcare costs raise for parents, particularly mothers, in Northern Ireland. Given that women remain the primary carers of children, our analysis details the specific challenges the lack of accessible and affordable childcare presents to mothers and the impact this has on their participation in the labour market.

The main driving force behind the expansion of childcare services within the other three regions of the UK has been economic (Campbell, 2003). The employment rate of women in these regions has increased significantly since 1998. Yet Northern Ireland has the highest rate of economic inactivity within the UK, with the largest proportion being working-age females (57%) (DETI, 2010). Economic inactivity is directly influenced by whether women have dependent children, the number of children they have, and the age of the children (DETI, 2010).

The UK Government has taken the view that the best approach to economic recovery is to incentivise people back into employment. Recognition of the importance of accessible and affordable childcare is an essential element. The conundrum for parents, particularly mothers in Northern Ireland, is the lack of a childcare infrastructure to support their employment choices.

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Bearing the Cost of Children: Au-Pairing, Gender and Care Work in Norwegian Families

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Au pairing, despite being a limited phenomenon, is receiving increased public attention in Norway. Au pairs perform care work and cleaning in private homes and participate in the everyday life of the family, thus take on a role as a (female) family member. The scheme and the expectations of hosts to what and who an au pair should be is naturalised through a vocabulary of kinship (host parents, families, pocket money – not salary, etc.). Au pairing, as domestic work, furthermore represents highly gendered forms of both work and migration in regard to who are sought as au pairs, the role of the au pair in the household and the relationship between host(s) and au pair. The majority of families choose female au pairs, and in the Norwegian context, Filipinas and Ukrainian women are most popular. Apart from the specific notions of femininity, nationality and care work of the au pair, there is also the question of why the parents want an au pair. In a recent evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme, commissioned by the Directorate of Immigration, I argued that au pairing should be redefined as work and not cultural exchange. While the intentions of the au pair scheme is the latter, the majority of au pairs and host families alike regard au pairing as work and therefore use the scheme according to this perception.

The rather high participation of Norwegian women in the labour market is enabled by institutionalised child care services. However, while the Norwegian welfare state's investments in kindergartens, education and after-school programmes has been boosted over the last decade, a minority of parents want an au pair to solve the "time squeeze" they experience in everyday life. This squeeze is described in public debates as a conflict between work, family life and leisure time when parents work full-time. Instead of spending their time on house work, and bringing and picking up children to and from school, they opt for having an au pair or a cleaner so that they can spend quality time with their children. Often having an au pair will also solve the gendered division of labour and care work between couples, for as one woman said, "couples don't need those conflicts on top of everything". Critics of the au pair scheme describe the opportunity costs of transnational domestic work as Western women's emancipation on the expense of women from third world countries. In this paper, I discuss how hosts described the value of this additional child care, children's welfare, and the different roles of men and women in these households in the bearing and raising of children.

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High-Qualified Women and the Gendered Division of Domestic Labour: An Exploratory Analysis in Photonics

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Today there are almost as many women participating in the European workforce as men. The Employment in Europe 2009 report that 59,1% of the women and 72,8% of the men were working in 2008 (EC 2009:18). This means that in the majority of the households, women are not available 24/7 to shoulder all the household and caring tasks as they did before they entered the labour force in large numbers. We have shifted from a male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model to a dual-earner model, even though the incidence of part-time work for women is much higher than for men in all European countries (EC 2009:23). Despite this development the gender division of labour within the domestic sphere – household and caring activities – has not become more egalitarian. According to many research, women still undertake a greater share in the division than men (e.g. Bianchi e.a. 2009:193; Schiebinger 2001:92 and EWCS 2007:73).

What about the division in the household labour of highly educated women who have chosen to pursue a high committed career? We investigated this issue for women researchers in Photonics. The following research question was formulated: do women with a career in Photonics have a more equal divided household? Photonics is an interesting domain in science for investigation for different reasons: people in photonics are highly educated, are facing a high work commitment, are part of internationally composed teams and the biggest part of them work full-time. We assume that those female researchers face a more equal division of household work (household activities and caring activities) due to the characteristics of their career. In 2006 we distributed the “Careers in Optics and Photonics Survey” to a worldwide audience of researchers in Photonics. In order to reach this specific audience we worked together with international networks and organisations. The results of our quantitative analyses were sobering. The women in our survey, even though they have high committed career, shoulder the biggest part of the household chores and caring tasks. Women working in countries with a high level of childcare provision face less problems combining work with private life than women working in countries with a low level of childcare provision. Even though these results cannot be generalised due to the small number of respondents, it is an indication that childcare provision is a solution to help women combine their work and family life. In the paper, a lot of other results will be presented and discussed in detail.

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The Norwegian 'Fertility Machine'

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What fertility rationales underpin Norwegian childcare policies? How do childcare policies influence young women and men's fertility decisions? Addressing these questions, our aim is to contribute to a key academic and political debate concerning the interplay of institutional and individual change in the fertility decline of western welfare states. A topic of particular relevance is whether policies could maintain or increase fertility. Studies based on register-/survey-data examining the statistical associations between family policies and fertility patterns have flourished in recent years, including Norway and other Nordic countries with relatively high fertility levels. Findings are not always clear-cut, however, and researchers differ in their opinion on whether and to what extent family policy do have an impact. To better conceptualise how policy arrangements enter the process of getting children, qualitative and interpretative approaches complementing statistical analysis are crucial. In this respect, our contribution is twofold: First, we trace the fertility rationales underlying current Norwegian family policies - what policy approaches prevail? Second, based on qualitative interviews with 90 young individuals in 2010, we examine both women's and men's conceptions of the significance of childcare policies in their fertility choices.

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Contradictory Legal Approaches to the Regulation of Child Costs and Care Work: The Case of Post-Divorce Regulation

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Legal regulation affects the costs of children and of care work for parents and regulates the distribution between 'public' and 'private', society at large, the state, the wider family and between genders. Although two trends seem to be uniform in all European countries – legal norms are formally gender-neutral, with only rare exceptions, and shared parenting and a stronger involvement of fathers even after separation are encouraged by law –, the normative models in different areas of law (family law, social security, welfare law etc) are often contradictory and contain different messages.

The changing regulation of various divorce consequences for parents and children is taken as an example to reflect fragmented legal approaches and normative models as well as their gender implications (post-divorce maintenance, child support, welfare law and employment obligations, financial consequences of fathers' stronger involvement with children after separation). Starting with the German case, the analysis proceeds towards some comparative remarks.

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The European Social Model: The Barcelona Targets and Beyond

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At the level of the European Union, in 2002 the so-called Barcelona targets have been set with regard to childcare. Confirming the goal of full employment, the European council agreed that 'member states should remove disincentives to formal labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age' (European Council 2002).

Taking the Barcelona targets as a starting point, this paper presents an overview of the current state of affairs; the focus is on young families and the way social policies facilitate the combination of paid work and care responsibilities. Relevant topics in this respect are the availability and quality of child care services, and the extent and quality of leave facilities. Perhaps not surprisingly the paper concludes that the availability of child care differs extensively. Some countries make extensive use of formal, centre based arrangements, whereas other countries rely more on informal arrangements (such as child minders and or relatives). Differences in the use of child care provisions are often related to differences in leave provisions. Especially if children are still very young, leave facilities are an important element of reconciliation policy, although also on this dimension the differences between EU member states seems very large. The paper also indicates that there appears to be a debate on the most optimal policy mix between services on the one hand and time related facilities on the other. Policy decisions on this issue may depend on fundamental debates about the most desirable organisation of society or on rather practical considerations about what is feasible for a financial point of view.

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