Abstract:
In both Germany and England a process of re-framing of the political discourses around childcare for infants (0-3) can be analysed in the last 10 years. In this paper, this re-framing process is analysed using the example of the political debates around the introduction of two central pieces of legislation on the expansion of childcare for this age group: the “Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz” (TAG, 2004) in Germany and the “Childcare Bill” (2005) in England. In both countries, childcare was re-framed as a “hard topic” using scientific evidence. However, as the comparison shows, the framing appears in a specific frame of reference, which determines the questions asked and the evidence used. Also, the comparison shows different ways in which evidence is used in policy making.

1. Introduction

As most post-industrial welfare states, England and Germany increasingly face similar challenges which can be described as a sectoral shift from production to services, an ageing population and a changing household structure (Esping-Andersen 1999; Pierson 2001). Theses challenges have been caused – among others – by a growing labour participation of women and changing gender roles, which result in an increasing need for the provision of care-services for the elderly and for children. Those services, which were in the past mostly conducted as unpaid caring work by women in the household, will increasingly need to be “externalised” (Esping-Andersen 2006) and consequently taken over by the welfare state or organised through the market.

Both (West-)Germany and England have 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/Ostner 1994), care for young children was considered as the responsibility of mothers. In the liberal English welfare state, intervention in the family traditionally was low except in case of child neglect and abuse. However, concerning childcare, both countries have experienced dramatic reforms in the last ten years: The first step was the introduction of public childcare for pre-school children (age 3-6 in Germany and age 3-5 in England) throughout the 1990s (Evers et al. 2004) in both countries. The second step is the expansion of early years education and care for children under the age of three.
In this paper this “second step” of the expansion of childcare for children under the age of three is scrutinized. The shifts that occur with the introduction of childcare for children under three in both countries mark significant discontinuities with the institutional and cultural paths of development. The gender and family models embedded within welfare policy can respectively be understood as policy paradigms (Bacchi 1999). The observed changes challenge the underlying norms on gender relations, and the upbringing of children etc. which are deeply rooted in the cultural understanding of the welfare state. How could these changes be explained?

Interestingly, when analysing these recent reforms in the extension of childcare, the main theories that explain policy development fail. Firstly from an institutional perspective, a stronger path dependency would be expected (vgl. Pierson 2001). The public responsibility for the care of infants and young children constitutes a novelty in both countries which breaks with path dependency of non-state-intervention in this field. Secondly, from a theory of gender welfare analysis, 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 the cultural understanding of childhood and education in both countries (Pfau-Effinger 2000; Kremer 2005) linked with the gender ideology which would also hint at stability rather than change. Thirdly, the rapid expansion of family policy coincides with the return of social democracy into office in both countries – consequently a theoretical perspective of “parties matter” (Seeleib-Kaiser 2003) could be considered as a theoretical frame of analysis. However, since in both countries the introduction of childcare for children under three happened only in the second (Germany) respectively the third term in office (England), it cannot be considered as one of the top priorities of both of the social democratic parties in charge. Furthermore, the childcare agenda has been adopted by the conservative party in Germany and England as well, and consequently a more sustainable and thorough policy change is expected which outlives changes in government. Furthermore, from theoretical perspective or power structures, the issue of childcare and family policy has 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 onto the political agenda by the women’s movement in the 1970s. In contrast, in both cases the governments in power introduced these reforms not in response of social movements but as an element within their welfare state modernisation, 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). Therefore it is assumed that within the political sphere, the cultural norms around education and care need to change in order to enable such a significant shift in policy. It will be analysed whether a shift in the political debates around childcare can be found in both countries. The central hypothesis of this study is that the changes can be found which marks a change in meaning of this policy field and which can also explain why the expansion of childcare could become so prominent in the political agenda of both countries. Furthermore, a central argument of the paper is that the use of evidence and research has played a central role in this reframing process. It will be shown that these strong cultural norms and values around gender, the family and the upbringing of children have been changed in the two countries using “objective” evidence and “scientific” knowledge. Along with the reframing of the discourse around childcare an “objectivation” of the arguments can be observed. Especially in the British case, “evidence” is explicitly opposed to values and personal opinions in the political discourse. But also in the German “sustainable family policy”, the evidence base plays a central role.
Consequently, the changes could also be understood as some form of policy learning (Hall 1993) in which the use of evidence is central. The question arising from this which role the use of evidence plays in enabling the changes or the policy learning. Could it be understood in a way that the higher use of “rational” arguments based on scientific evidence makes policy arguments “more objective”, and consequently, more convincing? This would follow the argumentation of the Labour government which claims to base policy on evidence instead of values and beliefs. Or could the opposite be observed, that the evidence is used in a strategic manner in the political discourse in order to realize the political aims and values? In this paper, I will argue for the second hypothesis that the use of evidence stands in the frame of reference of the specific policy discourses and is not “objective” as such. This will be shown via the selectivity of the framing of the national discourses on effectively the same topic.

In this paper I will seek an interpretative explanation of the policy changes. Interpretative approaches mark 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, the agenda setting and policy formulation process is not considered as guided by rational behaviour of the political actors, but as an interpretative process (Schneider/Janning 2006). These interpretative processes are documented in public debates and can be analysed in policy papers, in political debates or interview texts (Nullmeier et al. 2003). In the analysis of theses texts, special attention is paid to the framing and the legitimation of policies (Ullrich 1999; Fischer 2003). The framing refers to the specific understanding of a particular policy field and the meanings attached to it: In this case – are early years services considered as childcare or as education, are they considered to be policy for the children or for the parents? The legitimation of the policies refers to the arguments used for introducing a particular set of policies and the cultural norms and values attached to this.

This study presented is using document analysis of central policy documents and parliamentary debates as well as scientific studies commissioned by the two governments. Furthermore expert interviews have been conducted with central actors in the field – with government officials, members of parliament and key scientific advisors. As a consequence, the policy developments and political debates around the introduction of two central pieces of legislation, the Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz (TAG, 2005) in Germany and the Childcare Act (2006) in England have been analysed.

The following section presents traditions in family and childcare policy in Germany and England (2). Before this background, the recent policy changes in childcare policy are mapped out (3). Following this, the re-framing of childcare is analysed (4). Finally, I will discuss the drivers of the policy changes and the role of research in both countries (5).

---

1 The basis for this paper is the study: “Sustainable growth, social inclusion and family policy – innovative ways of coping with old and new challenges”, Chair: Prof. Dr. Jochen Clasen, University of Edinburgh, sub-project “The gateway of education and family policy” (Dr. Sigrid Leitner/Dr. Anneli Rüling), see also: Rüling (2008) „Paradigmatic shifts in the political discourses on childcare for children under the age of three? A comparative study of recent debates in England and Germany”.

3
2. Traditions in childcare and early years services in Germany and England until 1998

The (West-)German welfare state has been characterized as the archetype of a conservative welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990). The German welfare state typically has high wages and high protection for the core male workforce institutionalized in stable collective agreements and social insurances which guarantee status maintenance in case of unemployment, sickness and old-age. Consequently, social benefits exist mainly for workers, while family members have some derived rights within the social insurance system. Furthermore, in this type of welfare state, the supply of social service which is organised in the welfare triangle of the state, the market and the family, most services are still organized within the family (Esping-Andersen 1999). The growth potential for services is limited, since on the one hand most benefits are paid through social insurances as cash; while the welfare states itself offers only a limited amount of services through the public sector. On the other hand, the level of inequality within the welfare state is moderate and taxation levels are high, leaving little potential for a private demand of services through the market (Hemmerijck 2002). Consequently, a predominant problem for conservative welfare states, and especially West-German welfare state has been high unemployment and low labour market participation of women.

This welfare model presumes a gender division of labour insider the family which is based on a male breadwinner model with a female homemaker and carer. From a feminist perspective, West-Germany has also been characterized as a dual welfare state and a traditional male breadwinner model (Lewis/Ostner 1994). There has been a tradition of high protection for male workers as breadwinners of the family, as well as a support for the male breadwinner model family through family policy and taxation, especially through a tax splitting system for married couples (Berghahn 2004) and through cash payments for care to support mothers who stay at home with their children (Bothfeld 2005). The traditional breadwinner model was institutionalised within the German family policy and other welfare institutions, such as the labour market. Family policy in West-Germany was aimed at supporting the family as an institution; especially compensating for the financial burden of raising children (Familienlastenausgleich), and later on supporting mothers in combing work and family life through the establishment of mother’s leave and care payment. However, the reconciliation model was not a simultaneous reconciliation of work and family, but a “three phases model” which considered women’s employment appropriate before and after, but not during family formation and the upbringing of children (Letablier/Jönsson 2003). Since the 1960s women’s employment rates were rising and the traditional breadwinner model was modernised, allowing however mostly part-time work of mothers (Pfau-Effinger 2000; Klenner 2004).

Apart from this gender division of labour in the household, the cultural norms and values around childhood and childcare are also an important factor. In West-Germany, childcare and social services have generally been considered as obligations of the family, the mother was seen as the primary responsible and the best carer, especially for small children. Mothers who are in gainful employment are considered to be abandoning their children, they were called bad mothers, “Rabenmütter”. This ideal, which dates back to the time of the reformation, has been also culturally enforced by the Nazi government (Vinken 2002). After the war, this norm was continued in the West-German welfare state which supported motherhood and home-based-care through different fiscal and leave policies for mothers of younger children (Ostner 2006). For mothers of schoolchildren, the part-time education system allowed for a part-time employment only, leaving care a private responsibility. 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 young child will suffer if his/her mother is in employment (Statistisches Bundesamt 2007: 522).

Consequently, in congruence with the gender ideals of the female homemaker and carer, the upbringing (Erziehung) of children in West-Germany was considered to be the families’ responsibility. Until recently, a strong institutional division existed between the tasks of education (Bildung), care (Betreuung) and upbringing/socialisation (Erziehung): while education was only the responsibility of the school and the educational system, care and upbringing were considered to be the duty of parents (Deutscher Bundestag 2004: 44). Institutionally, the separation between education and upbringing was established through the separation of the educational system and support for children “Jugendhilfe”, the public care for children in difficult family situations and forster care, as well as the separation of the professions of the teacher and the social worker (Gottschall/Hagemann 2002). This understanding presupposes a self-regulation of the family as an institution of socialization. Education is merely understood in the German context as the responsibility for the cognitive skill development of children, which led to the German system of half-day-schooling, while social skills are to be learned outside of the education system, through education and upbringing in the family (ibid.).

Only in 1992, in the context of German re-unification, a national law (Reform des Kinder und Jugendhilfegesetzes) was established guaranteeing a childcare half-time place for every child from the age of three. The law came into force only in 1999. Although the gap between the established places and full coverage was not great in the Western states and did not exist in the East, its passage created great political upheaval, since the central government does not hold the competence for education which lies within the legislative authority of the federal states (which are also responsible for schools).3 The main point of criticism was, that the local authorities, which have to provide these places, were confronted with a new duty which was not financed through the central government, but at 60% by the municipality and at 20% by the federal states (Evers/Riedel 2002: 15). The local authorities and districts have great discretion on how to implement the national laws, creating large regional differences in the level and the quality of childcare.

Since public childcare for children under the age of three as well as afternoon care for school children was very rarely available (1998 provision rate for school-children: 7% in the West, 52% in the East, Statistisches Bundesamt 2001), parents with both partners in full-time employment or working flexible hours had to rely on private forms of childcare, mostly other family members (grandmothers) or paid carers, mostly childminders or private nannies which were not regulated in most federal states before 2005. Childminders are mostly women who take care of children in their private flat and work as self-employed with no or only minimum social security. Childminders usually have no educational training, although some cities offered minimum training courses. These private forms of education are quite costly, especially compared to the highly subsidized public childcare, furthermore parents complained that they are unreliable since e.g. there is no replacement when the childminder is ill.

---

3 As a consequence, in the recent reform of federalism in Germany, the supreme court ruled that the federal state can no longer issue legal acts on the federal states or local authorities which are connected with a new financial burdens which are not paid by the national government. This setup of federalism in Germany and the division of competences provide a major obstacle for policymaking in the field of education and childcare. However, this issue will not in itself be a subject for analysis.
**England** has been described as a liberal welfare state, which is characterized by low intervention of the state into the market, low levels of de-commodification and low redistribution (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999). In principle, the welfare state is residual, welfare state benefits are highly targeted and means-tested and granted at a minimal level only. However, England also shows a dual welfare state where some social insurances such as the pension system are targeted at workers only. Also, some welfare services such as health care and education are universal and free of charge. In the welfare triangle between state, market and the family, the market plays a dominant role, since many social services are organised through the market.

As a liberal welfare state, England has a very limited tradition of general family policy as such. Instead, poor were supported through different forms of poverty relief. Due to the lacking support for mothers within the welfare state, until the 1990, England and the UK has been characterized as a strong male breadwinner model (Lewis/Ostner 1994). However, in contrast to the West-German welfare state, there was little support for mothers as homemakers comparable to parental leave or payments for care. A tax splitting system which supported the traditional male breadwinner family was abolished in the 1990s (Dingeldey 2000).

Since childcare was not considered to be part of the education system, and following the minimal welfare state intervention, childcare was considered to be a private responsibility of the family (Letablier/Jönsson 2003). However, it was not necessarily combined with a strong mother ideology as in West-Germany. Consequently, the gender model of distribution of labour is ambivalent: on the one hand, there is no or little active support for familialization and for mothers as homemakers. On the other hand, due to lacking public support for childcare beyond school hours and, women were still presupposed to be available as carers and homemakers.

The cultural norms of raising children assumed childcare for preschool children as a primary task for mothers. The state offered “care” only for children of single parents or at risk of harm or mistreatment, thus connecting the notion of “care” with neglect and social deprivation (Lewis 2003; Vincent/Ball 2006). Care for preschool children was not considered as part of the education system; which can be traced back to divided competences: while childcare (for neglected children) was in the responsibility of the Department of Health, “nursery education” as pre-school reception classes were under the responsibility of the Department of Education. Despite rising rates of women’s and mothers’ employment since the 1970s, until 1998 the government did not assume responsibility for the reconciliation of work and family life. There was only childcare for children at risk and some pre-school reception classes, however the supply existed for a few hours per week and was very patchy. The idea of supporting children’s socialisation through childcare was not accepted at the level of government, but remained an idea confined to the middle and upper class (Lewis/Lee 2002: 3f.), who started organising play groups and parent initiatives in the voluntary sector since the 1960s. While day nurseries had existed in the 19th century and before the Second world war, the government after the war decided to close down municipal nurseries in order to make women return to the home and free jobs for unemployed male workers. Consequently, children were again considered to be best cared for by their mothers (ibid.). However, the publicly funded places expanded since the 1960s. In 1972 there was an attempt by the Thatcher government to provide some nursery education for 3 and 4 years-olds, however this was abandoned in 1980. Childcare expanded mostly through private market institutions such as private day nurseries and childminders, as well as parent initiatives and voluntary sector institutions which led to a large regional variety in the offer of childcare.
In contrast to the West-German case however, childcare places in England were hardly subsidized through local authorities or the national level. In the 1990s some government policies to help to cover childcare costs were introduced. In 1990 a tax relief for employers offering childcare was introduced, in 1994 some childcare costs could be received as income support as an element of the working families tax credit for low-income families. In 1996, the conservative government introduced a voucher scheme, which was abandoned again in 1997, when the Labour government came into power (Lewis/Lee 2002: 5ff.).

3. Recent policy trajectories in childcare and early years services

In 2004 in Germany, the “Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz” (TAG), a bill which assigns local authorities the duty to supply sufficient childcare for children under three years of age was introduced and passed in parliament. In the bill, the government stated that a sum of yearly 1.5 billion Euros, which are saved through labour market reforms, has to be invested in childcare by local authorities. The act came into force on 1st January 2005; the first report on local government compliance was published in 2006. The act also stated that childcare for children under the age of three should be regarded within the triad of education, care and socialization, calling for an integrative approach (BMFSFJ 2004: 4). The political debates and legitimations around this piece of legislation will be discussed in the next section. In the act, the government estimates that 230.000 new places until 2010 will be sufficient to fulfil the need of parents in employment, searching for employment, in education and training and for children with special needs. This estimated number of places corresponds to a child-place-ratio of 20% nationally, with 17% in the Western federal states (including Berlin) and 39% in the Eastern federal states (BMFSFJ 2007a).

According to the act, childcare places should be provided at the local level as a mixture of public daycare centres, voluntary sector institutions and about 30% places with private childminders. Furthermore, the TAG stated that childminders, who had been so far mostly non-regulated, working as self-employed with no or little social security (or even informally), should receive more support and higher regulation, such as health and emergency insurance as well as public subsidies and some quality inspection (BMFSFJ 2004; van Santen 2007). Apart from the offer of institutional places in the non-profit-sector, the places in the market (which consists mostly of self-employed childminders in Germany) should be monitored and coordinated by local authorities.

In the election of 2005, the conservative party won the majority and a coalition of the two large parties – the conservatives and the social democrats – came in power. However in family and education policy and especially the extension of childcare, the new government held similar positions to the Red-Green coalition. The coalition treaty of 2005 promises the extension of whole-day education and care for schoolchildren. Furthermore, in the chapter on family policy the aims of the TAG are emphasised and possible sanctions are introduced: If the pace of childcare expansion is too slow and it shows that more than 10% of local authorities will not match the aims of the expansion, a legal right to a childcare place would be introduced from 2010 for children from two years of age (CDU/CSU/SPD 2005: 97). In the meantime, the goal of expanding childcare until 35% for children under the age of three has been established in the coalition and will be financed partly through the national government. In addition, the conservative family minister established the 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.3 The recent plans for expansion of

---

3 For more information, see: www.bmfsfj.de/kompetenzzentrum
childcare are based on calculations of the competence centre (Kompetenzzentrum Familienleistungen 2008a).

The effective expansion of places which can be measured in the last years has been slow but steady. According to national statistics counting only the places in childcare institutions and not at childminders, in 1998 there were 166,927 places for children under the age of three altogether, which corresponds to a child-place-ratio of 7% (although 35% in the Eastern states, 1.9% in the Western rural states and 23% in the city states), in 2002 there were 190,914 places or a child-place-ratio of 8.6% nationally can be decomposed into 4.3% in the Western states and 37% in the Eastern states (BMFSFJ 2006: 11ff.). In the first period of the red-green coalition only a very limited expansion of places can be observed. Between 2002 and 2005 a more rapid expansion could be stated: In 2004 the national child-place ratio had an average of 10.8% (7.7% in the Western states and 37.7% in the Eastern states) (ibid.). These figures show almost a doubling of places for children under three years of age in the Western states. In 2006, the national average for childcare places has risen to 15.5%, with 9.9% in the Western and 41% in the Eastern states (Kompetenzzentrum 2008: 37). The expansion of childcare is no longer a matter of political controversy, but of practical realisation.

In England, the Labour government presented the 10-Years strategy “Choice for parents, the best start for children” (DFES 2004) in 2004, which set up an extensive policy framework for the development of childcare over ten years. The policy targets of the strategy include the reconciliation of family and gainful employment for parents and the enhancement of child development. The programme aims at increasing childcare places and childcare quality over ten years through inspection as well as education and training for the childcare workforce (ibid.). The strategy includes the expansion of universal childcare for 3-4 year old children up to 15 hours per week by 2010 and “20 hours eventually”, but there was no concrete aim of expansion of childcare for younger children. However, the strategy promises the extension of paid maternity leave to nine months from 2007 and to 12 months from 2010. Furthermore, children’s centres should be increased to 3,500 until 2010, which means “one in every community”. Lastly, with the strategy the government increased the childcare element of the tax credits to lower income families up to 175 Pound per week for one child and 300 pound for more children, as well as extended childcare vouchers handed out by employers (Vincent/Ball 2006: 33; DFES 2004).

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 document, the government for the first time assumes the legal responsibility for the provision of childcare places for children of all age groups. Furthermore, the Act draws together several policies on childcare under one framework. First of all, it defines the duty of local authorities to ensure sufficient childcare for children of working parents in their local community. This includes the increase of universal care for the 3-4 year-olds mentioned in the National Childcare Strategy up to 15 hours per week in 2010. Furthermore, also childcare for younger children and school-age children should be provided if the parents are in employment, in training or have special needs – this marks a development from the childcare strategy from 1998, where no childcare places for children under the age of three are mentioned. The local authorities have to assess and monitor the childcare need at the local level and should coordinate the market with the several local providers. However, the municipalities receive no additional funding for this task. Only if there are no private providers the local authorities are allowed to provide childcare facilities themselves. Thirdly, the “Transformation Fund” which subsidizes training of the childcare workforce is introduced as one element in the Childcare Act. Furthermore, the Act establishes a curriculum “Birth to three matters” which is integrated in the Early Years Foundation stage, a national educational curriculum for children from birth
to 18 years, which defines the aims of child development and education. Fifth, it sets up a new framework of regulation and inspection of childcare places. Finally, the Act regulates the extension of Sure Start Children’s Centres which should be extended to 3,500 nationwide until 2010, one in every community, starting with the most disadvantaged areas. (Linsey/McAuliffe 2006: 405).

Both countries, Germany and England, have introduced pieces of legislation in 2004/2005 which assume childcare places for children under the age of three as a political duty. This marks a significant discoursive shift in both countries, since previously childcare for young children under the age of three had been considered as a private responsibility of parents. In both cases, local authorities are responsible for ensuring the sufficiency of places for parents in employment and training as well as for children with special needs. However, the municipalities do not necessarily supply childcare places themselves: In Germany, the local authorities cooperate with the local networks of providers which consist mainly of non-profit organisations (Evers et al. 2004) as well as childminders, and subsidize the places offered by the various providers. In England, the local authorities monitor demand and supply of the local childcare market and cooperate with existing providers, which are mainly market-based, but offer no general subsidy.

This funding mechanism remains a significant difference between the German and the English system of service delivery: In Germany, the statutory right to a childcare place from 2013 is connected with a sustainable and legally binding duty of local authorities to co-fund of the childcare places. In the first years, this will be supported by the federal ministry for family affairs. Through this new duty, the welfare state increases and guarantees its provision of social services – leading to a real expansion of welfare responsibilities, though not necessarily to higher welfare spending, since positive fiscal effects through less unemployment and higher social security contributions might compensate for the childcare spending in medium-term perspective. However, on the short term basis, the local authorities will be reluctant to meet the childcare targets quickly since they are confronted with rising costs (Deutscher Städtetag 2005). Consequently, the main problem in Germany is still the lack of availability of suitable places in most areas in the Western states.

In England, the places are offered mostly by for-profit-providers and are rarely subsidized, since the principle of welfare provision is that services should be financially sustainable at market prices (Evers et al. 2004). The political programmes for increasing childcare are always of limited duration – they should give some help in the kick-off phase, but on the long run the care provision should be self-sustaining. As a consequence, in England parental fees are much higher than in Germany, and the affordability of childcare remains the largest problem for low- and partly also middle-class parents (Ball/Vincent 2005). The availability is also a problem for full-time or flexible hours, but generally speaking the childcare coverage rate is much higher with places for about 35% of children under the age of three, although most of these places are only part time.

For the targeted programmes for deprived communities there are different and ever changing funding programmes. As a consequence this system funding is inherently complex. Apart form the special programmes for childcare in deprived areas there are hardly any general subsidies except for the childcare element in the working tax credit and childcare vouchers issued by employer. Generally, subsidies in England are much lower than in Germany – even for poor families. Consequently, not the lack of availability is the main problem, but the affordability for parents as well as the sustainability.
4. Re-Framing of childcare in Germany and England

The parliamentary debates around the passing of the TAG in 2004 in Germany 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 gained importance. However, in the parliamentary debates only the results of this reframing process are documented, the actual explanation for the shift will be analysed in the following.

Generally speaking however, in the parliamentary debate, all parties argued in favour of the extension of childcare places for children under the age of three. This agreement is surprising since the extension of childcare for children below the age of three was relatively new on the political agenda and definitely not part of the conservative line. The idea that childcare enhances the reconciliation of work and family and could lead to increasing birth rates was often mentioned, also the notion that investment in childcare would be an investment in the future which will foster economic growth (BT-Protokoll, 15. WP, 123. Sitzung). All parties accepted the importance of measures to enhance the reconciliation of work and family life for the economy as well as for the demographic development. Furthermore, the idea of investment in ECEC as pre-emptive social policy was implicitly agreed upon by all parties.

This is surprising insofar, as during the election campaign in 2002, the question of family policy had marked the main division line between social democratic and conservative party. The CDU/CSU had promised a highly paid universal care allowance for all parents with children aged 0-3 and did not mention the extension of childcare or whole-day schooling (Bösch 2002). It can be concluded that the CDU as the main opposition party had changed positions within one year and accepted the new paradigm of the “sustainable family policy” which should enable the reconciliation of work and family life through the extension of childcare and the support of mothers’ employment. Considering the scope of the ideological opposition against childcare and whole-day schooling from a conservative standpoint, this shift in language is quite significant, although there are some different emphases remaining in the wording as well as in the political priorities: The CDU is more prone to call for “enabling choice” of parents rather than “reconciling work and family life”. Furthermore, when calling for an integration of education and care, the conservative party emphasises the importance of the families’ role as educators, which should be supported and enabled by the state (not only through ECEC, but also through educational guidance).

These differences between conservatives and social democrats are marked and persist when looking at the newly developed party manifestos (SPD 2007; CDU 2007): In their general manifesto the SPD calls for a general integration of education and care and for the first time treats education and family policy in one chapter. The aims of introducing free childcare from the age of two in order to create equal life chances for all are very prominently mentioned, similarly the call for an integration of education and care in children’s centres and also through integrated services and early language training (SPD 2007: 61f.). The CDU also calls for the integration of education and care as well as the right to childcare and after-school-care for every child, but is less pronounced in the matter of childcare from the early years. In the CDU manifesto there is more emphasis on the family itself as the most important institution for raising of children (CDU 2007: 21ff.). However, with the introduction in the basic party manifestos the childcare policy achieved further institutionalisation in the political culture within both of the large parties in Germany.

Interestingly however, it was a conservative minister of family affairs 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 target was extended. Under the rule of conservative minister for family affairs, Ursula von der Leyen, the further extension of
750,000 childcare places until 2013 was decided in cabinet, followed by the right to a childcare place after the age of one from the 2013. This ultimate aim can be considered as the result of the cultural change which took place since 2002 and has reached all parties.

However, looking at the political debates, it is clear that the main aim for extending childcare places is to enable a better reconciliation of work and family life, namely the first function of childcare. There is so far hardly any debate on the educational function of childcare and the possible outcomes for children through the improvement of the educational quality of care, e.g. in childminder settings. This is on the one hand due to the fiscal restrictions and the higher funding that would be required to introduce higher quality and more places at the same time. The second issue is the division of competences between the national and the federal state level, in which the federal states are responsible for educational standards and inspection. The interviewed experts mentioned that they consider the general extension of places as a first step which needs to be followed by an initiative on quality in a second step. Some first elements to improve quality can be seen in a recent speech of the minister for family affairs from October 2007 (BMFSFJ 2007), where she calls a coordinated effort in order to promote higher quality for childminder care places as well as a need for better training for childcare staff not experienced in handling children below the age of three. However, the question of quality and the sharing of competences from the federal and state level constitute a major gap in the German debate on childcare. This gap, however, can be explained as one element of continuity of the institutional welfare state layout in which the federal states hold the competencies for education which cannot be overcome easily through national debates.

In England 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 whether parental care or external childcare would be better for child development. Generally speaking, all parties involved were in favour of extending childcare, however with different priorities. There is also a shift in the political discourse, since family policy as such did not exist in the English welfare state and for the first time the state is taking up responsibility for the regulation of this field.

The analysis of the Labour party priorities shows: In the 1997 election, education was the number one priority, although childcare was not mentioned in this context. Generally, there was no explicit reference to childcare for children below the age of three, except for pilots of early excellence centres. The focus, however, in this first term in office was on the welfare-to-work agenda, especially bringing unemployed households and lone parents back into employment (Labour party 1997). In the manifesto for 2001, the Labour party promised to extend universal childcare for children aged 3-4 years, and to extend early excellence centres in the 500 new Sure-Start centres for children 0-5. There is a general aim that childcare places should be extended, but no mention of the quality of childcare places (Labour party 2001).

However, it can also be shown that the priorities of the Blair government in the childcare issue shifted during the three terms in office: In the first years, the question of maternal employment, especially for lone parents, was considered of paramount importance in order to combat child poverty. After some time, however, the issue of the quality of childcare came up on the political agenda. This might be due to results of research which has shown that childcare below the age of three is only beneficial for the emotional and cognitive development of the child if care is provided at high quality (Melhuish 2004; Smith et al. 2007). So firstly, the first function of childcare – helping reconciliation of work and life – was discussed, and some years later the issue of the educational value of childcare was also debated.
There are different possible explanations for the question why the quality of childcare has been a political issue in England, but not in Germany: Firstly, it is possible that given the lower qualification level (about 30% of childcare workers had no specific qualification in 2005; OECD 2006) in most childcare settings and the lacking sustainability of childcare places in England (Evers et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2007), there was a higher need to focus on the issue of quality than in Germany, where the quality is overall average or good (most childcare workers in institutions have a two-to three-year vocational training, although childminders are mostly not qualified). An alternative explanation would be that because childcare from an early age is already frequently used in England since there is a high employment rate for mothers of small children, the issue of quality comes up only after the first problem of the general expansion of places had been solved. This “logical” order of problematising first the overall expansion and quality as second issue has been mentioned by various experts in Germany.

Furthermore, a second shift in family policy can be noted during the Blair government: Given the higher employment rates of mothers with young children in England and a wish of many parents who would like to stay at home longer but cannot afford it, the government extended parental leave entitlements and benefits – parallel to the extension of childcare. This can be seen as a certain counter-movement from a simple welfare-to-work-strategy. In this respect, childcare policy should be considered in context of a general extension of family policy, which also includes giving parents more time with their children, and also more guidance for parenting with a generally a higher public attention on the relationships inside the family (Clarke 2007). Interestingly, also the wording in government papers and speeches changes: Instead of talking about “welfare to work”, the politicians talk about “enable 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.

Thirdly, and most importantly, since the turn of the millennium, childcare and especially integrated services gained a central importance when looking at social exclusion of children from disadvantaged areas. This argument is very prominent in the political justification of the Childcare Bill: According to the Labour speakers, Childcare will be provided in the form of children’s centres and they will receive subsidies in disadvantaged areas in order to close “the gaps between the development of wealthy and disadvantaged children”. The idea is that through access to education, it would be possible to “break the link between people’s incomes and their opportunities” (Kelly). This expression is typical for a third-way perspective which aims at reducing inequality in a life-course perspective (Mahon 2002). Instead of giving social benefits to parents in order to lift children out of poverty immediately (which, as it is known from comparative studies, might prove to be ineffective or very expensive), the idea is to create equal opportunities for the future generation. In this report investment in children is a very long-term social intervention.

To prove this point, several speakers in the House of Commons made reference to scientific studies and evaluations of the impact of ECEC on the child’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.” (Column 61) In order to combat this inequality of life chances, childcare is considered beneficial for the child’s development, if it is at high quality. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be given the “best possible start in life” (Interview Bennet). The argument backing the ECEC is that every month of high quality pre-school education increases school-readiness of children from the age of one. In this light however, the question of quality of childcare is an essential point. In order to increase the quality of childcare, in the Childcare Act, the
The government sets up a special fund ("transformation fund") as subsidy for education and training of the childcare workforce.

It is striking that in research as well as in the political debates, in England the idea that children belong to their parents is still quite present, as well as the results of attachment theory in pedagogy, while the factual situation and everyday reconciliation practice is much more work-centred than in Germany where the argument is rarely used in political debates. There are two possible explanations for this: one would be that the higher employment rate for mothers with small children (60% in England versus around 30% in Germany) is partly involuntary and parents would like to spend some more time with their children. The second explanation is that the quality of childcare is so poor that parents might indeed fear that their child might be harmed due to the difficult conditions. Furthermore, it could be assumed there is a cultural struggle dealing with the culture of upbringing in which opposite pedagogic notions are confronted – private and sheltered upbringing versus a public and institutional childhood – including all the impositions and pressures of a meritocratic educational system on a one- to two year old child.

What is considered as a vital point by all speakers is the legal requirement of local authorities to ensure the sustainable provision of childcare places “as far as reasonably practicable”. This weak formulation in the Act was criticised. The local authorities received the new duty to report the required childcare places in their area and coordinate the market in order to ensure the provision and also set up targets in order to reduce inequality for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although these new duties remain very vague and that there are no sanctions imposed in case of non-compliance, it was also criticised that the local authorities are faced with new duties without receiving additional funding. In the light of tight budgets, some speakers said, these tasks would be difficult to fulfil. However, since the Childcare Act only came into force very recently, it cannot be concluded at this point whether or not local authorities are able to fulfil these new duties sufficiently.

Generally speaking, the analysis of the debates around the Childcare Act as from other policy documents on childcare shows that they present a “one fits all” strategy which should help to solve different problems at the same time: Enhance work-family-reconciliation, extend childcare places, combat child poverty and social exclusion, increase the quality of care and the qualification of the workforce and help to tackle questions of affordability. When looking at the restricted funding, it becomes obvious that some general trade-offs are glossed over within the political debate. Especially the trade-off between quantity, quality and affordability of childcare is mentioned in the interviews. Furthermore it becomes quite clear that despite the efforts to increase the quality of childcare, there is 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 organise ECEC in a public sector setting. However, the idea of service provision in the mixed economy of welfare remains unquestioned in England, despite evaluation results showing that the public sector settings offer the highest quality childcare in England (Smith et al. 2007). In this matter as well as concerning the childcare subsidies, the debate on the extension of childcare remains within the frame of a liberal welfare state which will be reluctant to provide services through the public sector and create sustainable funding for high-quality childcare.

In the English context the issue of quality has a paramount importance in order to justify the extension of childcare places. This is due to the fact that a merely economically driven welfare-to-work agenda was criticised and also research has shown that low-quality childcare could be potentially harmful to children. Since the approach of evidence-based policy making is committed to a “what counts is what works”-paradigm, within the political aim of tackling child poverty, there is a need to increase the quality of care in order to improve the educational outcomes of ECEC for the children. This started with the “Sure start” programme.
which was to be evaluated from the beginning, as well as the “Interdepartmental childcare review” (HMT 1998, Glass 2001), while the treasury in the beginning took up a leading role in the process. As it will be discussed in the next section, the intensive use of evidence in the discourse is guided by the underlying ideas of the welfare state. Generally, the idea of “investment in children”, fits well with a liberal paradigm of tackling social inclusion since poverty should be overcome by enabling social mobility, not by social benefits in the here and now. Especially under the idea of “breaking the cycle of low income and low life chances”, the government is committed to a long-term-strategy of combating child poverty. However, the policies for increasing the quality of childcare settings remain half-hearted. Instead of asking “what works in other countries”, which have the best educational outcomes for children, such as the Nordic countries, there is a focus to improve the workforce qualification within the current system with limited training subsidies and tighter inspection. In this respect, the dealing with childcare remains within a liberal welfare state frame. However, there is a strong cultural debate on the question of how children should be brought up and which role education should play for their early years development.

In Germany, the paradigm of “sustainable family policy” also claims a higher attention on effectiveness, efficiency and goal-orientation of policy as well as a higher attention on its economic effects. It is claimed that for the first time, the effects of family policy are 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 labour market participation and economic growth.

The actual shifts in the policy and the political debates around the introduction of the TAG and the Childcare Act have been described and compared. As a result it can be stated that there are different foci in the provision of childcare for the early years in both countries: while Germany aims at a sustainable, public-sector-like provision at highly subsidized rates for all parents in order to increase the birth rate and foster economic growth, in England childcare subsidies for the early years services are specially targeted at the lower income groups and public childcare aims mainly at combating child poverty and social exclusion through integrated services.

5. The drivers in the extension of childcare and the role of research

This last chapter shows the importance of research evidence in the reframing process in the discourses and legitimations around childcare for children below the age of three in both countries. 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, not “what counts is what works”, but “what counts is what is defined as the problem”. The “objectivity” gained in the political discourses with reference to scientific evidence is, at least in the German case, a tool of political strategy and rhetoric. In the English case, it is interesting that different kinds of evidence are quoted in the discourse and also contradictory evidence is “permitted” as outcomes of the public debates.

Germany

In the German context, a successful re-framing of family policy and childcare from as a „soft“ policy for gender equality to a “hard policy” fostering economic growth can be observed
during the second term of office of the red-green government. As some researchers argue, the main policy driver for family policy reform in Germany has been the demographic change (Auth 2007; Leitner 2007).

The increasing attention on demographic issues has been fuelled 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 for the pension insurance (Berger/Kahlert 2006; Auth 2007). Butterwegge (2006) even constitutes a “demographisation of social problems” in Germany, which means that issue of social distributions of wealth is obscured through a discourse on a “generational conflict” and a polarisation between families and childless citizens. This polarization is reflected in a public debate on “egoistic” career women on one side, who, for the sake of their career, refrain from having children, and mothers on the other side, who pay the price for reproduction of society through career breaks and income loss. Some authors in the debate blame the declining birthrate as one late effect on women’s liberation, indirectly mourning after a traditional division of gender roles (Bolz 2006, Schirrmacher 2006). This discourse was mostly prominent in the public debate between 2004 – 2006 and not so much in policy-making. This conservative and backward oriented argument, however, shows the utmost importance of the demographic debate as a driver in the German discourse on family policy.

In the political sphere, there has been a growing a re-thematisation of pro-natalist policy in the context of family policy since 2002. The issue of pro-natalist policy had been a taboo in post-war family policy due to the racial pro- and anti-natalist policies during the Nazi period and the second world war that the democratic West-Germany wanted to distance itself from (Willenbacher 2007). Since Renate Schmidt became minister for family affairs in 2002, the demographic issue was put on the agenda as new aim of family policy in the social democratic party (Interview Mackroth).

It has been used as an argument for reform, that the “old” family policy supporting the male breadwinner model was based on out-dated gender roles. This was seen to make women refrain from having children, since they have to take a decision between career and family due to lacking reconciliation policies. Consequently, the modernisation of family policy should enable the reconciliation of work and family life according to the life choices of couples and families (Sachverständigenkommission 2005). Reform is considered as necessary, since, as the expert commission on the family notes, the low birth rate can be traced back to the fact that “family policy on the national, Laender- and local level has much too long ignored the fundamental changes of economic, social and cultural patterns in Germany” (Bertram 2006: 8; Translation A.R.).

The foremost aim is raising the birthrate up to the level of “desired children”, which lies around 1.7 per woman (Bomsdorf 2005) and has risen to 2.2 in recent surveys. Through the use of the demographic argument, a re-framing of family policy from a “soft” issue on equal opportunities and enabling women’s labour market participation to a “hard” issue can 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; Interview Mackroth). Instead of “just” enabling mothers’ employment, family policy and childcare specifically is regarded as fostering economic growth, stabilizing the social security systems and thus making the welfare state “sustainable” (Sachverständigenkommission 2005). The recent reforms stand in the context of a new political and normative framework called “sustainable family policy”.

Sustainability in this context means first of all the “effectiveness” of policy through strategic setup and consequent scientific monitoring and policy evaluation. Secondly, it means that the
generally speaking, the commission on the seventh family report maps out the objectives as such: “The aim of sustainable family policy is to create a social, economic and political framework which enables the future generation to invest in the development and education of children, to practise generational solidarity and to interpret care for others as part of their own life perspective.” (Sachverständigenkommission 2005: 427; Translation A.R.). This issue is linked with the economic and social aspects of sustainability – safeguarding human capital and social integration. In this document, the idea of human capital investment is also taken up. The sustainable family policy is measured according to the following indicators (Sachverständigenkommission 2005; Ristau-Winker 2005): a birth rate of at least 1.7 children per women in the medium-term perspective, better reconciliation of work and family, lower poverty rates of children through enabling both parent’s employment, higher levels of education, especially through the improvement of early childhood education and care as well as strengthening competence of parents in upbringing of their children in order to insure a good child development. These aims constitute a clear break with a conservative breadwinner model where the women is mainly responsible for childcare and might be working part time. However, there are some contradictory elements remaining at the policy level which support the male breadwinner family – such as the tax splitting system which subsidizes traditional role models.

The main drivers of this process of re-framing was the Ministry for Family affairs with the unit on family policy, which followed this re-framing as an explicit political campaign using scientific studies to back up the political arguments (Interview Mackroth). During these years, several scientific studies were commissioned by the ministry in order to prove the economic effectiveness of family policy measures in order to enhance the reconciliation of work and family life of men and women and especially the macro-economic efficiency of sustainable family policy and a better reconciliation of work and family life (Rürup/Gruescu 2003; Vester 2004; BMFSFJ 2005; Bomsdorf 2005; Prognos 2005; Bertelsmann 2007, IDW 2007).

Rürup/Gruescu (2003) argue that in order to achieve a sustainable economic development, the state had to ensure higher birth rates as well as higher labour market participation of women. Many of the studies work with international comparisons to other European Countries that show a better economic performance coupled with a higher birthrate and labour market participation of mothers – especially the Nordic countries and France are popular examples. Another study shows through international comparison that other European countries with a good reconciliation policies and a high women’s employment rate have also higher birth rates (Bertram et al. 2005). Even though the Barcelona target did not play a role in expanding childcare places for children under the age of three in Germany, the international comparison and policy learning played an important part in the re-framing process. The message is: “good reconciliation policies ‘work’ elsewhere”. Further studies used econometric modelling to show the short-term impact public of investment in childcare in the economy and at the local level. They argued that childcare would create high rates of return and “save” welfare state expenditure in other areas, since it would create new employment opportunities, leading to higher revenue from taxes and social security contributions (Spiess et al. 2002; BMFSFJ 2005).

Consequently, extending childcare is first of all regarded as a strategy for economic growth and secondly as a social investment strategy beneficial for child development. The argument that spending in family policy should not be regarded as costs but indeed as investments which will pay off in the future, was also taken on in several studies which prove the “effectiveness” of family friendly policies for the whole economy as well as on the firm level (Prognos 2005; IDW 2007). For the “business case” of reconciliation policy, there is also an argument that the human capital of highly qualified women is “lost” through long family
leaves, which leads to a future and already prevailing shortage of highly skilled workers. In this case, the economic aspects of sustainability are highly stressed.

The general argument is 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 labour market at the same time. On the other hand, especially the highly qualified women have less children – through good reconciliation policy they should be encouraged to have children and stay in the labour force. The issue of the safeguarding of human capital is therefore twofold: in the present, highly qualified women are required as workers, and for the future, the children of highly qualified parents are required as human capital. Interestingly in contrast to the English debate, the fertility or the educational achievement of lower educated women is hardly mentioned in the debate.

The question of the educational value of early childhood education and care is rarely mentioned in this context, although there are specialists debates on early years pedagogy, but these cannot be considered to be a policy driver so far. There have been certain steps towards a better integration of education and care for children from three years of age through the establishment of Länderbildungspläne, federal curricula for education from the age of three during this period as well as through the introduction of minimal training for private childminders. However, education for children below the age of three is still not an issue in the general debate and there is hardly any research on it. This might be the next step as some recent studies on the educational value of ECEC show (Bertelsmann 2008).

**England:**

In England the main and first driver for the expansion of childcare was the aim to fight child poverty and enable parents and mothers to return to employment (Ball/Vincent 2005; Sylva/Pugh 2005; Smith 2007). This driver can be seen as a certain continuity of liberal welfare state ideology, since poverty prevention and targeted policies have always been a justification for state intervention in the liberal model (Esping-Andersen 2000; Clasen 2005). In this context, the target of eradicating child poverty is the main driver of the early years services. The political strategy against child poverty works in two dimensions: Firstly, there has been a strong attempt of getting unemployed parents back into work and increasing the female employment rate. As employment has been found to be the most effective poverty prevention (OECD 2005; European Commission 2006), parents’ employment is regarded as the first step towards the eradication of child poverty. Secondly, through social inclusive programmes targeted at disadvantaged children, the poverty and welfare-dependence cycle should be broken over the lifecourse of children.

The expansion of childcare is one element of a welfare-to-work-policy targeting especially low-income parents and getting lone mothers back into employment. The idea to support self-sufficiency of parents instead of welfare-dependency; which presumes the notion of “dependency as evil” and a failure of the individual in the first place (Bacchi 1999). This idea is deeply rooted in the liberal welfare state idea. The target set by the Labour government are ambitious: halving child poverty (on the basis of 1999) and bringing 70% of single parents in employment by 2010. This aim links in with the active labour market policy programme “New Deal for Lone Parents” introduced in 1998. Consequently, the childcare subsidies introduced are targeted mainly at low-income parents (respectively at parents from disadvantaged communities in order to avoid social stigmatization), who are absent from the labour market. One reason for this programme is that the availability and costs for childcare constitute a real barrier to employment.
Public subsidies for childcare for children aged 0-3 are 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 (NNI; children’s centres). The subsidies are targeted at children from disadvantaged backgrounds only. This approach is called “progressive universalism” (DFES 2004): while the government is providing some universal provision – for children from 3-5 only – the public support is aiming at those who need it most. This targeting goes along with a policy tradition of a liberal welfare state which provides support for the poor in the first place, while parents with middle and upper incomes are not considered to be needy. Nevertheless gaps in the affordability of childcare remain for low-income parents since working tax credits only cover one part of the childcare costs. A Study on middle-class parents in London argues that the question of affordability persists an issue even for parents with higher income (Ball/Vincent 2005; Bryson et al. 2007).

The second aspect of the expansion of childcare for the under-threes is the aim of “giving children the best possible start in life” (DFES 2004). In the context of the English policy paradigm considering social inclusion, the connection between education and care is much more relevant than in Germany. By targeting children from disadvantaged backgrounds and the aim of “giving children the best possible start in life”, there is 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 which are cited in the public and scientific debate show that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from ECEC, especially the access to good quality care before the age of three (Feinstein 2003; Sylva et al. 2005). However, and this is also a difference to the German policy discourse, they also show some disagreement and display a greater variety of research results.

As it was argued earlier, the idea follows the logic of childcare policy as social investment in children and especially of children “in need”. The naming of the programmes, e.g. “Sure start” or “Every child matters” is telling: it evokes the image that the state has to rescue children from socially deprived backgrounds and the risk of neglect or abuse. The policy is “pre-emptive” insofar, as the idea is to help parents in difficult life circumstances as well as to invest early in today’s children in order to prevent low labour market attainment, crime and antisocial behaviour in the future. One influential summary report on the effectiveness of early years intervention for disadvantaged children concludes: “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.). Consequently, economic and social sustainability through human capital development and long-term lower welfare state expenditures are the focus of attention.

With this evidence on the long-term effectiveness of the policy, the welfare state intervention is justified in a liberal paradigm. The political aims of the programmes are directly linked to social inclusion outcomes; for example in the Children Act 2004 and in the Childcare Act 2006, local authorities have to work towards closing the gap between children from various backgrounds (House of Commons 2004; 2005). The programmes are aiming at better outcomes for children as well as for their parents (La Valle et al. 2007). Generally speaking, not only in childcare, policy making in England was generally guided by ideas of “new public management” and of “evidence based policy making”, which establishes the idea that political decisions are based on scientific evidence on “what works” (Glass 2001). The idea is to test the effectiveness and efficiency of policies before its wide implementation. Therefore, when
extending childcare with the aim of improving social inclusion, the question is which policies are most effective in tackling social exclusion and fostering child development.

Interestingly, in England no studies that use a European comparison are used; but studies learning from other liberal welfare states, especially the United States and Australia. Policy learning was institutionalised through copying programmes such as Sure Start, which was modelled after the U.S. programme “Headstart” which showed to have very positive effects (Interview Glass). This can be understood in the context of a liberal welfare state which is opposed to public support of social services for the wide population as it is the case in the Scandinavian welfare states. Or, to put it the other way around there is 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 liberal welfare state, the need public intervention as such requires legitimation.

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 needs to be proved. The political and scientific debate relied heavily on a variety of scientific studies which investigated the effect of ECEC on the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds: Firstly, studies on brain development were prominent, secondly, studies which looked at the long-term effect of ECEC on the readiness for school, educational attainment of children and its effect in later life were used (Melhuish 2004; Sylva/Pugh 2005). Especially research results were popular which showed the long-term-effect such as lower unemployment, lower crime rates etc. (Sylva/Pugh 2005: 13). Before this background, the longitudinal EPPE study was commissioned which followed children with and without ECEC until their first school years was issued, which is the most extensive study on the effects of early education throughout the life course in the EU (Smith 2007).

The longitudinal studies (EPPE) showed a positive effect of ECEC from one year of age on the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, however, only if the quality of childcare was good. Studies from the National Education Institute in London showed that performance differences could be detected as early as at 22 months of age (Feinstein 2003). Consequently, the concern on the quality of education received high consideration in the English debate. There is a high concern that low quality childcare has no or a negative effect on child’s development. For example, when the evaluation of the NNI was presented in April 2007; the result taken up by the media was the fact that children with long hours in day care showed higher rates of aggressive behaviour (Interview La Valle; Smith et al. 2007). This marks a shift from a debate which had primarily focused on mothers’ employment and enabling reconciliation of work and family life in the first years to a debate on the quality of education which is required in order to achieve the estimated outcomes. However, it is still argued, that instead of producing “negative” effects on children through day care, children should rather stay longer with their mothers. This argument is used to criticise the “economic pressure” which forces English mothers into employment when their children are still young. Consequently, in the later documents, as the “Ten-Year Strategy for Childcare” (DFES 2004), the government emphasises that the policy should enable “choice” of parents. As a consequence, alongside with the expansion of daycare, the rights to parental leave and the payments are gradually extended.

**Comparison**

In both countries, childcare for the early years has been expanded and this has been justified through a process of reframing of childcare. In both countries, childcare was considered to be merely a “women’s issue” and not as important for the sustainability of the welfare state until
the late 1990s. Since the turn of the millennium, childcare has increasingly been considered as a vital element of welfare state reform in both countries which is considered as a solution to a variety of problems. The first line of argument for the extension of childcare in both countries is the better reconciliation of work and family life and the assumption that mothers will increase their employment participation. This is considered to lead to higher economic growth, lower welfare dependency, higher tax revenue and social security contributions. The new framing considers childcare as a productive factor in social policy, a “one fits-all” strategy which is to solve all kinds of problems in the welfare state.

The difference between the two countries lies in the main target group of the expansion as well as the central aims of the strategies and in the topics discussed. In Germany, mostly higher qualified women have been targeted, since they are missing as “human capital” in the labour market if they have children and they are also the ones that should increase their fertility rate. Furthermore, the expansion of childcare should lead to an increasing economic growth through a higher labour market participation of mothers and the creation of new jobs in childcare. These will be created highly subsidized mostly in the public sector and opened up to private crèches as well, but also with private childminders, and also benefit lower educated women. In England, the fertility is not so much of an issue – probably due to a effectively higher fertility rate of 1.7 children per women. The primary aim in England is to increase mothers’ employment rates in order to eradicate child poverty. Consequently, the childcare policy is mainly targeted at parents from disadvantaged communities. In both cases however, the primary aim of the expansion of childcare is to improve the reconciliation of work and family life, and to promote mothers’ employment which is increasingly considered to be an economic necessity for the economy as a whole and/or for the economic sustainability of the individual households.

The underlying assumption in both countries concerning the “reconciliation” aspect is that if there is enough affordable childcare available, mothers will take it up and increase their employment participation. In both countries it is argued, that there are still gaps of flexibility and appropriateness of the childcare offered. Present studies in Germany, where only about 30% of mothers work when the children are under the age of three (Bothfeld et al. 2006), show that indeed a larger percentage of mothers with young children would like to join the labour force if suitable childcare was available (Beckmann 2002; Stöbe-Blossey 2006). In England, however, the picture is much more complex: Considering that the factual employment of mothers with children under the age of three is much higher – around 60% - some mothers would like to increase their hours, while some would like to reduce their working time.

Considering the aim of the educational aspect of childcare we can see a different framing in the two countries: While the quality of childcare for children under three is less an issue in Germany, it is of high importance in the English policy discourse. The reason is that educational outcomes for disadvantaged children are a high political priority under the liberal paradigm. The discourse is concentrated on social investment in children, especially for those at risk. Results of longitudinal studies show that the quality of childcare is essential for a positive outcome for this group. Consequently, we can see a stronger link between education and family policy in the English childcare debate. One reason why this issue has not been debated prominently in Germany are different pedagogical concepts which claim that children should discover their own world and a reluctance of an “instrumental” educational approach which led to a lacking tradition of research in early child development. Another reason could be that in contrast to the English case, since a large proportion of the childcare is offered through the public sector and the staff is generally qualified, there is a large trust in the competence and discretion of the skilled child care worker. However, there is also a debate in
Germany that up-skilling of the childcare workforce (more university degrees) is required. In contrast to this, in the English case the high emphasis on the lack of quality and the requirements for a national curriculum hint at the fact that there is a huge gap between the required quality of provision and the reality, which has been characterized by low skill of the workforce, high turnover rates in staff as well as a low sustainability of provider.

6. Conclusion

In both countries we can see, however, that the re-framing has been based on a set of scientific studies whose results are used for the political argument. In Germany there is a high emphasis on the increasing fertility and economic growth, in England the scientific studies “prove” the effectiveness of investment through higher employment rates of lone parents and long-term educational benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, in both countries, the “effectiveness” of family policy has been stressed within the two paradigms of “sustainable family policy” as well as “evidence based policy making” which was a general commitment in English policymaking since the Blair government. The increasing role of research hints at the requirement of “hard facts” to back up the reframing of policy issues and the paradigm change involved. In both countries, the emphasis is that the policy shift is not a matter of family values, but of economic and educational “necessity”. In this respect the connected changes of gender models are somehow obscured, which might, if discussed openly, lead to more political upheaval in both countries than it could be observed.

We can also observe different “models” of evidence based policy making. In England, with a longer and explicit programme of evidence based policy making, there is a high use of scientific studies with a range of outcome. Scientific results which are not coherent with the argumentation of the government are nevertheless entering the political debate. The evaluation studies which are commissioned by the government are often long-term and supply differentiated knowledge based on a differentiated design of settings. Generally speaking, there is a lot of evaluation research (especially for the Sure Start programme), and consequently there is also a lot of detailed results. Interestingly, not all of the results have been taken up in the political debate. The selectivity lies within the frame of reference of the liberal welfare state. For example, while the quality of childcare is a major topic in the debate, there is no comparative analysis with Nordic welfare states which have been scoring high on international comparative benchmarking studies on education and ECEC. This can 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 find a very new discourse on evidence based policy making and a new culture of evaluation which is only developing. However, the new paradigm of sustainable family policy has been incredibly successful so far in shaping the political discourse. This was also due to the use of scientific evidence, however only of “useful” scientific studies which were commissioned especially for backing the arguments of the government. In this case, we find a very selective and politicised use of evidence in policy making which is clearly serving the aim to generate a higher legitimacy for the political agenda. However, with the introduction of the Competence Centre for Family benefits, a new culture of evaluation is being introduced which might lead to a better “evidence” base for policymakers and the political debate. It is doubtful whether a similar use of evidence will develop as in Britain. More likely, a specific path of the use of evidence will develop.

To conclude: Not only the kind of evidence used policy making is nationally specific, but also the way in which evidence is used in policy making.
Literature:


Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Hg.) (2004): Bericht über die Auswirkungen der §§ 15 und 16 Bundeserziehungsgeldgesetz (Elternzeit und Teilzeitarbeit während der Elternzeit), Berlin.


Esping-Andersen, G. (2002a): A New Gender Contract. in: Esping-Andersen, Goesta et al. (Hg.): Why We Need a New Welfare State, Oxford, S. 68-95


Her Majesty's Treasury [HMT](2004a) "Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare". London: Her Majesty's Treasury


