The Long Path: the Institutional Roots to Post-Communist Family Policy in the Czech and Slovak Republics

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Recently, scholars have shown that a connection exists between communist family policies and post-communist family policies in Central Europe (Heinen and Wator 2006, Bicksel 2006). Studies have even shown that the main differences in family policies among the Central European countries today reflect similar differences that existed under communist rule (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006, Saxonberg and Szelewa 2007). However, the question remains why the Central European countries enacted such policies in the Communist era. Perhaps the main pillars underlying these policies were already in place before the communist regimes came to power. Since extremely little has been written on the topic, it is necessary to do historical research using available archives. Thus, this article concentrates on one case – Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia is especially interesting, because today’s Czech and Slovak Republics comprised the same country from 1918-1992, which means that during these years they had the same family policies. Since previous studies have already shown that these two countries still today share the most similar family policies in the region, we can be even surer that historical institutional developments have greatly influenced present policies. For example, Poland has a relatively short (4 month) maternity leave (compared to 6 months for Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics) and a means-tested parental leave and Hungary is the only country in the region with a parental leave that is partially paced on the income-replacement principle, both the Czech and Slovak Republics have low, flat rate universal parental leave benefits (although the Czech Republic doubled the benefit level in 2007 to about 270 Euro per month and in 2008 it replaced the lump-sum benefit with a 3-tier system.
that rewards high income families for taking shorter leaves). Except for the recent introduction of the three-tier system in the Czech Republic in 2008, all of the above-mentioned differences existed already during communist rule. Similarly, already during communist rule the percentage of children 3-5 attending kindergartens in Poland was about half the rate of children attending kindergartens in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and this difference remains to this day. The one important relative change that has happened since 1989 is that only Hungary has been able to maintain nursery school levels for 0-2 year olds at levels approaching the communist era, while both the Czech and Slovak Republics have combined high access to kindergartens with the near extinction of nursery schools (Saxonberg 2003, Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006).

Although these examples indicate the importance that institutional trajectories have on today’s policies, it is still necessary to investigate more deeply just how these paths of development arose. This article analyses several “formative moments” that took place both under communist rule and before it (Peters, Pierre & King 2005, Rothstein 1988, 1992). The choices made at these moments set Czechoslovakia on a certain path of family policies, which have encouraged traditional gender roles (which we call “explicitly genderized”), even during the communist era in which nearly all women had to work. We will show why this path dependency has been so strong that even today after the breakup of Czechoslovakia, the two countries still have the most similar policies of any two post-communist countries.

*Institutions, Path Dependency and Formative Movements*

Social science research has increasingly recognized the role of institutions in influencing policy making. Historical research on institutions has emphasized the importance of decisions that are made in certain periods, which set countries on difference trajectories (e.g.
Mahoney 2000, Peters, Pierre & King 2005, Rothstein 1988, 1992). They note that once countries follow a certain path, it becomes difficult to leave this path.

Although it is most common to call these periods “critical junctures,” (e.g. Collier & Collier 1991), we prefer the term “formative moments.” As Rothstein notes (1988, 1992: 17), the term formative moments indicates that actors make choices, which then create institutional frameworks in which future actors must make choices. Theorists often use critical junctures, in contrast, in a functionalist sense, in which they deem even the choices made at these periods to be structurally determined. We want to leave open the possibility that actors have some room to maneuver when making these choices, even if they are, of course, influenced by structural factors, such as culture.

These choices that were made might not at the time have seemed very important; neither are the actors necessarily aware how seemingly small decisions might have great impact at a later date. As many theorists of historical institutionalism have noted, small choices about institutional arrangements can have great impact at a later date (Berman 1998, Pierson 1996). Moreover, as Kenny (2007: 95) notes, “seemingly neutral institutional processes and practices are in fact embedded in hidden norms and values, privileging certain groups over others.” Thus, for example, the division of daycare facilities into nursery schools for children under 3 and kindergartens for children 3-6 might seem to be neutral concerning gender relations, but in the Central European context, at least, it implies that children under 3 do not have social needs for being with other children and they do not have need for pedagogical training. Instead, the system implies that these children are only in daycare because the mother must work. This also implies that actually it would be better for the children to be at home with the mother if she did not need to work. Consequently, it actually reinforces norms about the “proper” role of women being mothers, who stay at home and take care of children.
It is common to focus on one formative moment or critical juncture, but we see institutional development as a continuous process in which several formative moments might arise, but the decisions undertaken at a second formative moment are greatly influenced by the path taken during the first formative moment. Similarly, choices made during the third formative moment are greatly influenced by path chosen during the second formative moment, which in turn is greatly influenced by the path chosen during the first formative moment.

This can be illustrated by diagram 1. At point A policy makers must choose between two possibilities, $B_1$ or $B_2$. Once they choose one of these options, they go down a different path, but at a later stage they once again will face important choices at a new formative moment. If they choose $B_1$ instead of $B_2$, then at some point they will have to choose between $C_1$ and $C_2$ but they will not consider $C_3$ and $C_4$, to be an option. However, if they choose $B_2$ instead of $B_1$ then at a later date they will have to choose between $C_3$ and $C_4$, but they will not consider $C_1$ or $C_2$ to be an option. The same logic applies to formative moment D, etc.

Our analysis focuses on four formative moments and in all four cases, it is extremely doubtful whether the policy makers could have imagined what kind of impact these decisions would have on Czechoslovak society:

1) the incorporation of the two-tier model of separate care for younger and older pre-school children in the 1872,

2) the decision in 1948 which made kindergartens for pre-school children from the age of 3 a fixed part of the national schooling system under the supervision of the Ministry of Education,
3) the decision in the early 1950s to place nursery schools for children under 3 under the supervision of the Ministry of Health,

4) the decision in late 1960s to introduce a paid extended maternity leave.

These four decisions sent Czechoslovakia on a conservative path of family policy that supported traditional gender roles even at a time in which virtually all women were forced to enter the labor market and the two republics have continued down this path even after both the communist regime and the country itself ceased to exist. The incorporation of the French model of separate care for younger and older pre-school children in the 1860s allowed policy makers to divide pre-school children into two age groups, who should be treated differently, and then to set the child’s age of three to be the demarcation line between the two types of treatment. Children younger than three could attend child-caring facilities that have no pedagogical or social-psychological goals, while children older than three could attend kindergartens that have pedagogical goals for training children.

This division, in turn, allowed the communist government to divide responsibility for these two groups, placing the children under three attending nursery schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health and children over three attending kindergartens under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

This decision in turn made it much more difficult to build up support for public childcare facilities for children under three, for suddenly these children became rather connected to “health problems” than to “educational and training problems.” Kindergartens, as part of unified schooling system, were to train and educate older pre-school child and to help to them develop their knowledge, abilities and to support them in cooperative activities. Nurseries, in contrast, were to help working mothers to keep their children under the age of
three healthy while they were at work, and thus could not provide adequate care for children by themselves.¹

A conflict between mothers’ and children’s needs thus became connected to nurseries but not to kindergartens. When it comes to kindergartens, the needs of mothers and children were considered to be harmonious, because children from the age of three were seen as in need of institutionalized training and education as well as learning social skills, while mothers needed to work. Children under the age of three were seen in need of medical care and having a healthy development but not in need for education. As “health problems,” child nurses with medical training took care of these children and children’s doctors checked children in the nurseries once a week.

Ironically, the fact that nursery schools tended to be rather overcrowded made it easy for children to spread their bacteria when they become ill. Consequently, children became sick quite often (Čermákova et al., 2000: 92). As a result of high rate of illness, mothers often had to stay at home to take care of their sick children. Given the communist regime’s genderized policies, it never contemplated the possibility that fathers could stay at home with children. Since mothers quite frequently had to stay at home with their sick children, the regime concluded that it was easy and more efficient to give mothers an additional leave period, so that they could take care of their children until the children were old enough to attend the higher quality and the much more popular kindergartens. As result, nursery school attendance increased only reluctantly and did not exceed 20 % under communist rule and the post-communist governments in Czech Republic and Slovakia closed down most of the nursery schools. This shows that in contrast to Gorges’ (2001: 140) contention that institutionalists seldom “focus on institutional decadence or decay,” our historical-institutional account can in fact explain the decay of childcare institutions for children under three.
Even to this day, the dogma continues that it is best for mothers to stay at home with their children until they reach three or four years of age. Therefore, after the collapse of the communist regime, Czechoslovakia and later the separate Czech and Slovak Republics quickly dismantled their nursery schools and in the Czech Republic the government even extended the eligibility period for parental leave benefits by one year, to allow mothers to stay at home continuously until the children reach the age of four. Thus, each big decision made at separate formative moments set Czechoslovakia further down a genderized path of policies that encourage separate gender roles and both the Czech and Slovak Republics continue down this path even today, nearly two decades after the collapse of the former communist regime.

Peters, Pierre & King (2005: 1277) argue that historical institutionalism cannot provide an adequate explanation of historical developments “without including some dynamic conception of agency….” We agree with this and note that without agency, for example, we cannot explain why the Hungarian communist regime took the step in the early 1980s of introducing a relatively generous income-replacement scheme for the extended mother leaves, which pays 70% of previous income, while the communist regime in Czechoslovakia continued the conservative path of providing lump-sum payments for these extended leaves. The idea for the Hungarian model basically came as the initiative of one ministry official, who later become ministry. Although we will not examine the Hungarian case in detail here, even this choice in Hungary became a formative moment for that country, as the country continues to this day to have the income replacement scheme, even though the socialist government tried to abolish it in 1995 (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006).

Since we clearly argue that institutional decisions have also influenced attitudes, our article also draws on a second tradition of neo-institutionalism, which is commonly called “sociological institutionalism.” In the words of Hall and Taylor (1996: 948), sociological
institutionalists “emphasize the way in which institutions influence behaviour by providing the cognitive scripts, categories and models that are indispensable for action, not least because without them the world and the behavior of others cannot be interpreted.” Furthermore, they add: “In many cases institutions are said to provide the very terms through which meaning is assigned in social life. It follows that institutions do not simply affect the strategic calculations of individuals, as rational choice institutionalists contend, but also their most basic preferences and very identity.”

As Torfing (2001: 287) observes, sociological institutionalism explains “institutional persistence in terms of the actors’ dependence on the cognitive framework that defines the institutional background against which their intentional actions (including blueprints for reforms) are legitimized.” Furthermore, sociological institutionalism “claims that past policy determines how politicians and bureaucrats define and solve policy problems in and through informed learning processes” (Torfing 2001: 292).

Although we take a less deterministic view and find it more appropriate to maintain that past policy influences rather than determines how people define and solve policy problems, we still basically agree with the notion that institutional arrangements have great impact on how policy-makers frame issues as well as on what kinds of arguments find resonance among the populace. Thus, we argue that Czech and Slovak policy makers operate in a framework that accepts as given that children under three should be treated as health issues and attend separate institutions than children 3-5; they also operate in a framework that accepts as a “fact” that children under 3 suffer if they attend publicly run daycare institutions since the discourses on nursery schools under communism were so negative.

Interestingly, Torfing (2001: 306-7) concludes his article by asking the questions “Are we bound to be caught up in the paradox according to which the very possibility of revolutionary change is conditioned by the former policy path from which it radically breaks
away? Is it possible to show that even revolutionary reform strategies in their eager attempt to negate the old policy path reproduce traditional dichotomies and sustain what they aim to reject?” The Czech and Slovak cases show that even when a country is dramatically changed by a mass uprising that brings down a dictatorial regime based on a command economy, the new reformers, who are intent on installing democratic government and a market economy, still are dependent structurally and cognitively on the paths that were chosen under the previous “revolutionary” communist regime; moreover, our analysis shows that even the previous communist regime followed a path that was highly influenced by choices made under the pre-war “bourgeois” regimes. Not even the fact that Czechoslovakia has now split into two separate countries has had much impact on these countries’ family policies, as they both continue to follow similar paths.

1872 and the Adaptation of the Two-Tier Model

The roots of public childcare and pre-school facilities in the territory of contemporary Czech Republic and Slovak Republic date back to the nineteenth century when the territory was part of Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first nurseries and kindergartens were established alongside some other kinds of facilities for children, and they varied according to the age of the children they admitted, and their rules.

In 1832 the first “child protection institutions” (“opatrovna” in Czech and “Bewahrungsanstalt” in German) for children between two and five years of age was established in Prague and in 1854 the first nursery (jesle) for children up to the age of three was established in Prague. Both were established mainly to care for children from poor families. Some preservation institutions focused on teaching children Czech (Mišurcová 1980). In the Austrian Empire, nursery schools originally came about so that poor mothers
could work (Fellner 1884: 15) and poverty was actually a pre-condition for the nursery schools to be able to accept children (Lederer 2001: 31, 35, 37).

In 1869 the first Czech kindergarten (mateřská škola) in today’s Czech Republic was established to care, train and educate two-to-five-years-old children of mainly poor and working parents in basics in mathematics, reading and writing for a maximum period between 5:30 and 18:30. German-language kindergartens, for children 3-5 and based on Fröbel’s pedagogical model also appeared in the Czech and Slovak territories. The German kindergartens differed from Czech not only in their language but also in fees and opening hours. The Czech kindergartens followed the Volkskindergarten model that combined Fröbelian pedagogy with the long open hours of the nursery schools, so that poor mothers could send their children there when they worked (Fellner 1884, Helm 1851, Heckel 1969). Meanwhile, the German-language kindergartens catered more to middle-class parents, because they were opened only 4-5 hours a day (Ficker 1873) and parents had to pay high fees. In the beginning, German kindergartens prevailed in the Czech territory. However, because of the growing support from Czech nationalists, Czech kindergartens that provided education in Czech dominated in the Czech lands by the end of the 19th century (Mišurcová 1980).

The Austro-Hungarian Empire institutionalized the incorporation of two-tier model of nursery schools for children under three and kindergartens for children from 3-6 with the Austro-Hungarian Imperial School Act from 1872. The act was worked out by the Ministry for School and Culture. Kindergartens were supposed to care and educate children under control of School Offices (§17) while nurseries only had to follow basic sanitary guidelines (§27).

During the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918 – 1939), between the two world wars, approximately 20% of children between the ages of three and five attended kindergarten
In contrast, only 81 nurseries with 1,215 places existed in the country in 1930, which amounted to about 4% out of all pre-school facilities compared to 7% for child protection institutions and 89% for kindergartens (Klíma 1969, Bulíř 1990). Opinions on public childcare and pre-school education began to diverge sharply, though, and the government proposed reorganizing the entire system of childcare and pre-school education. This led to a dispute over competences between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Care, at the heart of which laid the question of whether nurseries, kindergartens and child protection institutions were educational and training or social and caring institutions. Although the Ministry of Education was ultimately charged with drafting the legislation necessary for reforming the system, the bill was debated up to start of World War II and when the war started, the bill was yet ready to present to parliament.

In conclusion, the Austro-Hungarian Imperial School Act codified the division of pre-school children into two groups. It ingrained into society the notion that only children over three should be included into kindergartens, thus preventing younger children from being seen as beings in need of pedagogical and social training.

1948 and the Decision divide Authority of Childcare

When the communists came to power in 1948, the main goal of family policy was to induce women to work, both because the leaders thought it would increase production levels, which would benefit the economy and because they thought women would become “liberated” if they worked and became financially independent of their men. For these reasons, the government wanted to quickly build-out both kindergartens for children 3-5 and nursery schools for children under 3. As a result, the number of working women increased from 37% of the total workforce in 1948 to 42% in 1955 (Federální statistický úřad ČSSR 1985). The number of children in the relevant age categories enrolled in nurseries increased over the
years from 3% to 8% between 1950 and 1960 and the percentage of children aged three to five enrolled in kindergartens increased from 26% at the beginning of the 1950s to 37% in 1960, especially in kindergartens with all-day services (about ten hours a day) (Bulíř 1990). Already at the end of the 1950s, 88% of the children in kindergartens attended all-day facilities. However, this “productionist” view allowed for little interest in pedagogical issues in case of nurseries. At the time, the communist regime’s main concern for the small children was to keep them from becoming ill. If the children became ill, mothers had to miss work to stay at home with their children, as the regime did not consider the possibility that fathers could take care of children.

In fact, even before the communists came to power, the first post-war coalition government basically shared this view in its Košice Governmental Program, presented on April 5, 1945. The program promised to help working women with childcare and housework and ensure the provision of necessary social services, from the time of pregnancy and up to and including extra-curricular activities for older children (Uhrová undated a). The state was to assist working mothers in caring for children, but the public debates did not discuss the role of husbands and fathers as women’s partners or at least helpers in care.

Women’s organizations shared this productionist view. Already during the interim period from the end of World War II in 1945 to the Communist takeover in 1948, the Czechoslovak Women’s Council and the National Women’s Front (except for the People’s Party members) agreed that women should have the same right to gainful employment as men and that the state should actively support measures that make it possible for women to work (Uhrová undated a). Thus, they wanted the state to ensure that services would be available that make housework and caring for dependent family members (especially children) easier. In many of their speeches and articles members of these organizations demanded that the state “establish or expand primarily school canteens, factory canteens,
nurseries, children’s asylums, cheap laundries, repair shops and everything that can ease
women’s work” (Uhrová undated b). However, they did not demand that fathers share in the
household tasks, nor did they discuss daycare for young children in terms of fulfilling their
pedagogical, psychological or social needs.

Since only kindergarten employees had organized themselves, published and lobbied
to gain status of teachers and unified school curricula for several decades already, and since
both the government and women’s organizations argued for childcare more to enable women
to work than to see to the needs of children, when the communists took over in 1948 they
saw no need to treat daycare for young children as a pedagogical issue. Thus, they continued
the legacy dating back to the Austro-Hungarian empire of keeping nursery schools separate
from kindergartens. In 1948, the new communist government introduced the Act on Unified
Education (No. 95/1948 Coll.) which made kindergartens a fixed part of the unified
schooling system. Other existing facilities for children, such as nurseries and children’s
homes (dětské útulky)5, were left outside the influence of the Ministry of Education
(Mišurcová 1980). Thus, even though today’s Czech and Slovak Republics had separated
children from the beginning into groups of children under 3, who should attend nursery
schools and groups from 3 to 6, who should attend kindergartens, the two childcaring
institutions were still under the control of the same ministry (Social Care). The law in 1948,
however, more strongly separated kindergartens from nursery schools by putting
kindergartens firmly under the control of the Ministry of Education. If the communist regime
would then have moved responsibility for nursery schools to the Ministry of Education as
well, the separation of age groups would not necessarily have been permanent. Rather, it
would have been possible to merge the two organizations into one.

Or as in Sweden, the regime could have made one of the two organizations open to all
age groups and then simply built this organization out at the expense of the other. In Sweden,
the government in the 1960s and 1970s began to radically build out its crèches until they gradually almost completely replaced kindergartens (Johansson and Åstedt 1993). However, in Sweden, the system was different from the beginning in that the crèches never were limited to children under 3; rather, the dividing line between crèches and kindergartens was that crèches came into being to allow poor mothers to work, while kindergartens came into being for pedagogical reasons, so that middle-class children could receive extra pedagogical training (Nyberg 2000). Thus, crèches were open till all children under 6, while kindergartens were only open for children 3-6. Despite these differences, as long as both institutions came under the same ministry (social affairs) in Sweden, it was relatively easy to build up a unitary childcaring system and since crèches were open all day and kindergartens only a few hours, it was easy to decide to build out the crèches rather than kindergartens. By contrast, in Czechoslovakia one of the institutions (kindergartens) was moved to different ministry (education), the age divisions became more codified and thus, more difficult to change.

1952 and the creation of the Health Problem

While kindergartens came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, in 1950s the Ministry of Health officially took over responsibility for running the nursery schools. Consequently, the state defined nurseries as health-preventive facilities. Rather than hire teachers trained in pedagogy and child psychology, these facilities hired children nurses. Even though the nurses were specialized to care for small children and had courses in pedagogy, child developmental process and practical activities with children (Klíma 1969: 80; Jančíková 1979: 10), their education was primarily medical, rather than pedagogical. Thus, their training did not focus primarily on training in child development, child psychology and other educational issues. Moreover, since the nursery schools then per definition did not have a pedagogical task, they existed mostly to keep children healthy while
mothers worked, even though a study from 1967 showed that children from nurseries were better in some of social activities than children, who stayed at home (Dunovský 1971).

The definition of young children as a health issue was part of the productionist view: if the main goal was to enable women to work and women were the sole childcarers at home, then if their children become sick, mothers must leave their jobs to stay at home and take care of their children. In fact, this argument was used in many studies produced during the communist regime (e.g. Srb, Kučera 1959; Klíma 1969, Jančíková 1979).

Another aspect of this productionist view of child care was that many childcare facilities were established directly at the enterprises and cooperatives. Again, this is especially true of the nursery schools. By contrast, already in 1950, 27% of all nurseries were company or cooperative nurseries, and this figure remained constant until the late 1980s. Since these facilities were established at the mother’s workplace, they still emphasized the mother’s role as a carer, since she would naturally be the one who brought the children there and picked them up. Moreover, this view was not only productionist but clearly gendered, as the childcare facilities were normally placed at the enterprises where mothers rather than fathers worked, because the employers assumed that mothers would have the main responsibility for children.

This productionist view was clearly displayed in a report in 1956 from the State Statistical Office. It emphasized the economic goal of liberating women by allowing them to work, although it did not mention the double burden that arose when mothers still continued to have responsibility for the household tasks. Thus, it reasoned,

It is known that the costs of a single place in a nursery are high and sometimes exceed the contribution of the mother of a child in such a facility. Nevertheless, we continue to build nurseries because they achieve an important political goal: they allow each employed mother to have gainful employment,
and thus help her maintain economic independence, liberate her socially and economically from her dependence on the man, and, therefore, it is not essential that her contribution to society be greater under all circumstances than the costs of her child’s enrolment in a social facility (Srb and Kučera, 1959: 1159) [our emphasis and translation].

Already here one can see the influence of chosen paths on attitudes. Since the goal of nursery schools was to keep children from being sick so that mothers can work, they did not focus on the psychological needs of the children. The state saw nurseries as economic units, and as such they were more “efficient” if the ratio of children per children’s nurse and nursery was rather high. On the average, between thirty and forty children attended each nursery, which was usually opened 10-12 hours a day during the communist regime (Bulíř 1990; Klíma 1969). According to Jančíková (1979) there were about six children per nurse and twenty children per child minder and children were divided into separate groups according their age. Consequently, nurseries received a reputation for being overcrowded as children did not receive the attention they needed and nursery schools gained rather poor reputations for their quality (Heitlinger 1996, Götting 1998: 228). These overcrowded conditions made it easy for illnesses to spread very quickly among the children. So as ironically, even though the communist regime treated infants as health problems, by focusing on the health issue rather than creating smaller groups that would be more conducive to the infants psychological and pedagogical needs, the children became sick quite often (Čermáková et al., 2000: 92,) and the government began to consider the high rate of absentism at the nurseries to be a problem (Klíma 1969, Jančíková 1979).

However, we should also note that it is not clear how much the nurseries really deserved this poor reputation, as one survey showed that 88.7% of mothers who sent their children to nurseries were satisfied with them, which is even slightly higher than the
percentage of those, who were satisfied with kindergartens (87.3%) (Prokopec 1963: 116). Nevertheless, whether deserved or not, the national discourses became rather negative toward nursery schools. Moreover,

Given the prevailing productionist view, even when the regime began examining the quality of nurseries in the 1960s in order to find ways to improve them, it defined “quality” in terms of how often children became ill rather than in terms of socio-psychological or pedagogical improvement of the children. Moreover, its main focus remained the “efficiency” of nurseries, defined in economic terms. Quite simply, large child-carer ratios at nurseries were cost-effective if children did not become ill. If children did get sick and mothers stayed at home or if it is necessary to decrease to group sizes to prevent children from getting sick, then the regime felt it was more efficient to simply encourage mothers to stay at home for longer periods of maternity leave than to pay for smaller nursery groups. For from the regime’s viewpoint the problem was that smaller groups of children were costly and larger groups supported illness to spread among children, which caused that the nurseries were not reaching full capacity (Klíma 1969).

Since children became sick so often at the nursery schools, women started to become negative toward nurseries and hesitated to send their children there, even if mothers who did send their children to nurseries were rather satisfied with them. Thus, the 1956 statistical office’s survey of 11,073 women between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine showed that Czechs and Slovaks were rather skeptical toward nurseries. Only one-third of Czech and Slovak women in gainful employment (including those on caring leaves), who were pregnant or had a child aged below one, answered that they would ever place their children in a nursery even if they had a chance to do so. Among mothers who were in gainful employment before childbirth and who did not place their children in a nursery, more than half of Czech mothers (57%) and more than a third of Slovak mothers (36%) declared that they would
prefer to stay at home rather than placing their children in a nursery (Srb, Kučera 1959: 115-120). Interestingly, the survey from 1956 concluded that the reason for the unpopularity of nurseries was that they were frequently closed due to the outbreak of contagious diseases! Thus, the irony was that although the regime saw children as merely a health issue and the main goal of the nurseries was to keep the children healthy, so that the mothers could work, the nurseries actually failed at their main task.

In summary, just as the decision to incorporate a two-tier system of childcare constituted a formative moment with children under 3 attending nursery schools and children 3-5 attending kindergartens, so did the decision to bring kindergartens under the Ministry of Education and nursery schools under the Ministry of Health. If policy makers had encouraged the development of a unitary form of childcare during the Austro-Hungarian empire, then it is unlikely that the communist regime would have decided to give the Ministry of Health any responsibility for childcare. Instead, the communists would have most likely put the unitary system under the Ministry of Education as they did with the kindergartens. The debates for kindergartens centered around whether they should be under the ministry of social care or the Ministry of Education and since the vast majority of children attending childcare facilities where between 3-5, this group was the main concern for the debates. Moreover, since the communists dissolved the Ministry of Labor and Social Caring in 1951 (Schiller 1971), the kindergartens would have clearly gone under the Ministry of Education anyway. Furthermore, we know that in countries with unitary systems, such as the USA and Sweden, childcare is never under the Ministry of Health, so no reason exists to believe that a unitary Czechoslovak childcare system would have been under the Ministry of Health.

Even though the first formative moment strongly influenced the thinking of the communist regime, since the regime considered itself to be “revolutionary,” it still could have conceivably decided in the second formative moment to combine the two systems into
one. Even the evolutionary, reformist Swedish social democrats succeeded in combining nursery schools and kindergartens into one system, although their task was made easier by the fact that the Swedish nursery schools were never reserved for children under 3 but rather were open for children 0-6 and were never under the Ministry of Health (e.g. Nyberg 2000: 12).

Even if the communist regime had decided to keep the two-tier system, it still did not have to place responsibility for nursery schools under the Ministry of Health. However, once the communists made this decision, forces were set into motion that led to seeing nurseries and care for children under the age of three outside the realm of pedagogical issues but inside the realm of health issues. This then contributed to overcrowded nurseries that actually increased rather than decreased the rate of children’s illness, which caused facilities for children under 3 to become unpopular.

The Introduction of the Extended Maternity Leave

In the 1960s, women continued to increase their labor market participation rate. Between 1960 and 1970, women’s share of the labor force increased from 42.4% to 45.5% (Federální statistický úřad ČSSR 1985). Although the number of nurseries and kindergartens also continued to increase (see diagrams 2 and 3), there was always a shortage of both, nurseries as well as kindergartens (Klíma 1969; Jančíková 1979, Bulří 1981).

By the second half of the 1960s, the policy of promoting childcare services came into question as fertility rates continued to fall in a situation where women increasingly worked, and in a situation in which both nursery school and kindergarten places were not adequate enough to meet demand too. It also became increasingly difficult for grandmothers to take over the childcaring tasks, as an old generation of grandmothers who had been housewives
were replaced by a new generation of women in their 50s and 60s, who were working full-time. Women’s double-burden of having two jobs (one paid on the labor market and one unpaid at home) was exacerbated under the command economy due to the constant shortages and lack of a service sector, which required one to do many things oneself.

One possibility of encouraging women to have more children would have been to make it easier for them to balance work and family life by encouraging fathers to share in the household and childrearing chores. Although the only widely read women’s magazine by Czech women, *Vlasta*, began appealing in late 1960s to its female readers to persuade their husbands to help in the household and with childcare, it stressed encouraging fathers help women in household and childcare activities rather than encouraging fathers to become equal partners with mothers in those activities. In fact, the communist regime never gave fathers the right to take childcare leaves.

Instead of increasing gender equality, the new leaders decided to encourage women to have children by making it easier for them to stay at home with children. As a result, at this third formative moment they introduced paid extended maternity leave in late 1960s that was planned to be eligible to all mothers up to the age of three of each of their children in the future (Klíma 1969). Even though it took several years to extend the paid extended maternity leave to cover all mothers, the country began moving down the path of inducing mothers to care all-day of their children. Although maternity benefits were not as generous as the maternity leave payment which replaced the women’s previous wage (which in 1969 had
been set at 90% of the mother’s previous wage), the extended leave benefits provided a universal lump sum.

The regime presented the extended maternity leave benefit as an “honor for motherhood” (see Dunovský 1971). Given situation of long hours spent by mothers in their two shifts – the one in employment and the one in household – the Czech Union of Women also supported the idea of a three-year paid extended maternity leave to make life easier for women (interview with the head of Czech women’s union from 2006).

At a time in which great hopes of renewal and social rejuvenation were quenched by the invasion that destroyed the “Prague Spring” attempts at building a socialism “with a human face” and people withdrew into their private lives, being at home with children for several years provided an enticing option for women. As Heitlinger (1996:85) notes,

In contrast to the politically tainted public sphere of work and politics, the individual family was a “free sphere” where people could be their “authentic” selves and resist the intrusion of the all-pervasive communist party-state. As a woman’s domain, the family thus provided women with a certain amount of power, authority, and creativity. Women therefore opted for a “cult of motherhood,” and children provided an “excuse” for not joining the communist party.

The extended maternity leave also made economic sense to the conservative leaders, who had replaced the Prague Spring reforms and embarked on a policy of “normalization,” which called for returning to “normalcy” by combining great political and cultural repression with improved social benefits and attempts at pacifying and demobilizing society. Moreover, they had the support of many psychologists and pediatricians.

According to Wagnerová (2007), in the 1960s physicians and psychologists drew attention to the possible psychological deprivation and socialization defects of children growing up in public facilities. Psychologists began publishing studies in scientific as well as
public journals, which brought a psychological dimension to a debate, where economic issues of cost-efficiency and health had previously dominated (e.g. Srb, Kučera 1959; Wynnczuk, Prokopec 1965; Hájková 1965, Wynnnyczuk 1965).

Although the debate picked up in the mid 1960s, the roots to these discussions go back to the end of the previous decade, as some scientists began writing about the alleged psychological deprivation of some of the children living in orphanages and children’s and other forms of institutionialized care (Langmeier and Matějček 1959a 1963, Koch 1961). These studies included a critique of week-long nurseries but did not find much problems with day-time nurseries, as the authors admitted that majority of children attending such facilities did not suffer from psychological deprivation. Nováková (1958) wrote that daytime nurseries were only unsuitable for 6% of the children, while Mečř (1955) concluded that they were unsuitable for 9% of the children. Partially as a result of these discussions, attendance at week-long nurseries radically fell and these institutions almost completely disappeared by the 1980s (Habiňáková et. al. 1985).

Later, psychologists and pediatricians generally believed that also the long hours spent by children in day nurseries was detrimental for their psychological development (Klíma 1969; Habiňáková et. al. 1985). Even though Machonin et al. (1966) noted that no scientific evidence existed on what was “the right” amount of time for the mother to stay at home with her children and the “correct” age for children to attend collective facilities, the question of “the right child’s age” of entering collective facilities became a highly debated issue.

To make matters worse, although psychologists were honest enough to make some distinction between orphanages and nursery schools in their studies, the mass media often blurred this picture. As Heitlinger (1979: 169) notes, the director Kurt Golberger produced a documentary film together with the psychologists Langmeier and Matějček entitled
“Children without Love,” which compared the life of small children in an orphanage with a child from a secure family who spent a few hours a day in a nursery. “It caught the hunger of institutionalized children for affection and physical contact with a sympathetic adult….” The film not only had great impact on the public debate, it also influenced governmental thinking as it was shown in parliament and was seen by the entire government (Scott, 1974: 175-9). Heitlinger (1979: 169) notes that after showing this film the mass media began discussing the “harmfulness of crèches” and “over-employment of women.”

Thus, a dogma arose that children suffer if they attend nursery schools, even though no scientific studies proved this. The question what is “the right age” of placing children into collective facilities was discussed and politicians and the population accepted the notion that it was best for children if the mother stays at home with them for their first three years.

As a result of these discussions and policies, the number of newly built placed in nurseries stopped increasing as quickly as before and at the beginning of 1980s the number of places in nurseries started to stagnate before decreasing during the last years of communist rule (see diagram 2 and 3). During the first years of normalizing the investment in paid extended mother leaves appears to have had some effect, as the number of children born sharply increased. However, the increase in birthrate was partly caused by a large cohort of young people born after the Second World War and as diagram 2 shows, the number of births peaked in 1974 and starting decreasing ever since. Thus, the conservative policies of encouraging mothers to stay at home for long periods rather than providing daycare and encouraging fathers to share in the parental leaves only seems to have worked during the first years of normalization, when postwar babyboom cohort withdrew to the private sphere after the great repression that followed the invasion.

Because of these developments, it started to become entrenched that mothers should stay at home with their children until they are three (Háková 1966, Čákiová 1973; Kreipl
A survey taken in 1979 shows that the largest group of respondents (40%) believed that mothers should stay at home with their children until they were three, while 30% said until they are six (Bauerová and Bártová 1980: 3, 11 cited in Pavlík 1985:108). Thus we see how the artificial cut-off point of 3 years for kindergartens, coupled with the discussions on poor manner of organizing nursery schools for children under three and the introduction of extended maternity leaves all contributed to the creation of the dogma that the mother should stay at home until the child is three years old.

Post-Communist (Non)-Developments

Now we can return to Torfing’s question: “Are we bound to be caught up in the paradox according to which the very possibility of revolutionary change is conditioned by the former policy path from which it radically breaks away? Our answer is that despite the mass uprisings that led to collapse of the former communist regime, the former policies had so influenced the post-communist revolutionary leaders that they did not even contemplate radical departures from communist family policies, such as policies that would aim to increase gender equality by inducing fathers to share in the childraising tasks. Instead their policies amounted to a continuation and even a strengthening of the communist regime’s policies. As already noted the combination of overcrowded nursery schools and a long extended maternity leave, created the belief that it is best for children to stay at home with their mothers until they could begin kindergarten at the age of three.

When the anti-communist coalition of Civic Forum in the Czech lands and Public Against Violence in Slovakia formed the first government, the new leaders were convinced from the communist legacy of overcrowded health-oriented nurseries that young children are better off staying with their mothers than attending daycare that they quickly decided to support women to stay at home with their small children by extending parental benefits up to
three years for all all-day caring mothers (Act. No. 382/1990 – see footnote 7). Even though the government opened up the extended leave benefits for men, it was clear that the policymakers did not expect any men to actually utilize this right (Castle-Kanerova 1992: 113). In fact, until 1996 fathers were not even able to go on paternity leave unless the mothers explicitly gave them official permission! (McClune 1996) Despite the appearance of some amount of legal equality, men still did not enjoy equal rights with women, because although fathers had the right to receive parental leave benefits from the government, they did not have the right to leave their job and return to their jobs in order to receive these benefits. Employers could still deny fathers the right to go on parental leave and fathers did not have the right to return to their job until 2001 when the Czech government succumbed to EU pressure and introduced a new labor code to meet EU standards (Government Decree No 461/2000 to Labor Code). To emphasize the fact that the government did not expect any fathers to go on leave, the government continued to call it an “extended maternity leave” until the amendment No. 155/2000 to Labor Code in 2000.

Since the Czechoslovak government expected mothers to go on the “extended maternity leave” until the children were 3-4 years old, it also cut off subsidies to nursery schools. Moreover, in a legal reform it gave economic responsibility for running childcare facilities to the local governments, while the Ministry of Health continued to have control over licensing nursery schools. Since local governments are not allowed to implement their own taxes, they are completely dependent on the national government for their revenues. Thus, even if some local municipalities would want to support nursery schools, they would have difficulties obtaining the financing since they have no way to raise their revenues. Consequently, the number of nursery schools began to immediately radically decline, so that today in both the Czech and Slovak Republics, hardly any nursery schools at all exist.
Even though the decision to cut off support for nursery schools and to hand over responsibility for running the schools to the local governments came after the collapse of communism, these policies represent a continuation of the trend that took place under the third “formative moment” in which the communist regime decided to give priority to extended maternity leaves rather than either increased access to nursery schools or measures to induce fathers to share in the parental leave.

The country’s path dependency coming from previous decisions even influences the possibilities of private alternatives from arising. Since nursery schools remain under the Ministry of Health and are considered health issues, private initiatives to such alternative pedagogy, such as opening Montessori nursery schools cannot emerge, since such schools would not hire nurses to take care of children and therefore cannot receive approval from the Ministry of Health that sets that care for children under the age of three must be provided by people with medical certificate. Nevertheless, since the demand for childcare remains, parents have tried to get around these regulations by sending their two-year old children to kindergartens. In both countries, kindergartens are allowed to accept such children if they have places, so slightly more than 10% of children 0-2 in the Czech Republic and 5% of such children in Slovakia attend kindergartens (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006).

Even though Czech and Slovak policies continue to follow basic trends from the communist era, path dependency does not completely determine the development. Within institutional arrangements actors still have some room to maneuver. Thus some differences have emerged between the two countries even though their policies are much closer to each other than to any other post-communist countries and most policy makers from all political parties continue to have a very conservative attitude toward gender relations (see for example, Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006). The main difference is in the parental leave schemes.
In the Czech Republic, the parental leave benefits were increased in 1995 so that parents can stay at home as much as four years, while in Slovakia parents can receive benefits for at most three years. Furthermore, in the Czech Republic the Social Democratic-led coalition government increased the parental benefits in January 2007 to nearly double the level by increasing the benefits to 40% of average wage in public sector (Amendment of Act 117/1995 – Act 237/2004), making its parental leave benefits much more generous than in Slovakia, but still not generous enough to encourage fathers to share in taking leaves.

In 2007 the new Center-Right government in the Czech Republic decided to replace the lump-sum benefit with a 3-tier system that rewards parents for taking shorter leaves. The idea was the shorter the leave, the higher the pay per month. In the most recent proposal (MPSV ČR 2007), parents can choose between a) the “quick utilization” of the leave which entitles them to 11,400 crowns until the child reaches 24 months; b) the “classical utilization” which entitles them to basically the same conditions as today but for a shorter period (7,600 crowns per month until the child reaches 3 years); or c) the “slower utilization” in which the parent receives the basic, classical level of support (7,600 crowns) until the child reaches 21 months to be followed by the lower level of 3,800 crowns per month until the child reaches 48 months.

At first glance this might seem like a clear departure from the conservative path, since mothers gain higher benefits per month if they return to work more quickly. However, in reality few mothers are likely to choose this option. First, only families with a certain income level are allowed to receive the higher rate of payment, which means that many families are disqualified from the “fast track” option. Second, since virtually no spaces are available at nursery schools, even if mothers would want to return to work earlier, they have little possibilities of doing so. Part of the problem is simply one of coordination coming from the inherited institutional arrangements. Since the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has
responsibility for paying parental leave schemes, while the Ministry of Health remains responsible for nursery schools, then even if officials at the Ministry of Labor and social affairs would want to induce women to return more quickly at work by combining the “fast track” option with support for daycare, they are unable to do so, since the Ministry of Health must decide to give support to nursery schools. Actually, the Ministry of Health in both countries has been very uninterested in nursery schools and it would be difficult to convince this ministry to give more support to nursery schools. For example, a former employee at the Czech Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs confided to us that when she worked there she was shocked to see that the Ministry of Health had neglected to mention nursery schools at all in its annual report until she demanded that they include it! In the Slovak case, one of us tried to contact the Ministry of Health in Slovakia to interview the person in charge of nurseries. It turns out that the woman in charge of nurseries did not even know that she was in charge of them! She did not want to be interviewed, since she admitted she knew nothing at all about the topic!

Given the lack of access to publicly funded childcare for children parents much turn to private alternatives, but few families can afford to do so. As Čermáková et al (2000: 92) note, a female doctor would have to devote her entire salary to pay for a nanny or babysitter. In Slovakia, one of us recently visited two private nurseries in Bratislava and saw that they charged between 8,000-11,000 Slovak crowns, which is amounts to at least half the average salary. Not surprisingly, at the more expensive nursery about 40% of the children had foreign parents, which means that their parents were likely highly paid executives working for international corporations.

Government officials in both countries are calling on private sector and companies to build new facilities without giving them any incentives to do so. Nevertheless, in Slovakia employees at the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Affairs are working on a suggestion
for applying for EU funding to reimburse parents for a portion of their fees for having private persons and institutions take care of their children (based on interviews with employees of the ministry in March, 2008).

In the Czech Republic, some companies have already started to build company nurseries and kindergartens. However, most gave up as it became too complicated for them because of the inadequate existing legislation for establishing nurseries (panel discussion of representatives of companies on the topic of nurseries and kindergartens at a conference Rodičovská práce nebo dovolená? from 2007). The Czech government shows no signs of rethinking its attitudes toward nurseries and it appears to want them die out completely. Its only initiative so far has been to cancel the requirement of medical education for childminders for children under the age of three if they work alone in a private house or apartment. Thus, the government is trying to promote the development of private nannies and babysitters, which is in accordance with the notion that children under three should be cared for in the home.

*Sociological Institutionalism and Attitudes*

As we have just seen, in accordance with the expectations from sociological institutionalism, politicians in both the Czech and Slovak Republics continue to harbor conservative views toward gender relations. Based on experiences from communist-era policies that encouraged mothers to stay at home for the first three years after a child’s birth, combined with poor evaluation of nursery schools that treated children as health issues, they conclude that mothers should stay at home until the children is at least three or four years old, nursery schools should be allowed to die out and fathers did not have any responsibility for childraising.
Survey data indicates that the populace shares some of these beliefs, but the populace does not necessarily hold these beliefs as strongly as the politicians and its views are becoming more supportive of gender equality. For example, the ISSP surveys on “Gender and Family Roles” from 1994 and 2002 show that Czechs and Slovaks are much more conservative than West Europeans on the issue of whether women should stay at home and leave paid work to men (see diagram 4). Even though Slovakia did not take part in the 1994 survey, the two surveys also show that these conservative views toward gender roles are decreasing in the Czech Republic.

DIAGRAM 4 AND TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Similarly, the poor reputation of communist era nursery schools influences views toward the perceived need for mothers to remain home with children during their first years. We conducted confirmatory factor analysis and found one factor dealing with the issue of how children are influenced by working mothers – which in the Czech and Slovak context implies sending children to nursery schools. As table 1 shows, the percentage of Czechs and Slovaks who disagree that pre-school children suffer if their mothers work is much lower than in Sweden, although the percentage disagreeing with this statement is decreasing in the Czech Republic as a new generation of adults is emerging, who were not exposed to the communist era debates on nursery schools. The table also shows that in 1994 Czechs were still skeptical to the notion that working mothers can have warm relations with their children, but by the time of the 2002 survey, Czechs and Slovaks had actually become more likely than Swedes to believe that working mothers can have warm relations with their children. Thus, it seems like the negative consequences of the communist legacy are starting to wear off. Nevertheless, a large gap continues to exist between the two post-communist countries and the West on the questions “what women really want is a home and kids.”
We can further note that Czechs and Slovaks who are used to having long periods of paid leaves continue to be at least if not more favorable to state family support as westerners. The first factor also shows that Czechs and Slovaks believe that fathers should help out more in the household, which goes against the genderizing policies of the post-communist governments.

Another survey of different Czech target groups shows how the communist era dogma continues, that it is best for mothers to be at home with pre-school children. It gives respondents two choices:

1) families with children mainly need high good quality childcare services so that the mother could work and earn money for family budget

2) families with children should receive financial support from the state so that the mother could stay at home as long as possible and take care of the children

Among residents between 20-30 years old, 64.9% favored alternative b, giving families financial support so that the mother can stay at home as long as possible, while among young families between 20-33 years old, 74.9% favored such policies.\(^\text{10}\)

In another question, respondents were asked to choose between the possible choices:

1) fathers rather help the family by working and earning money than by taking parental leaves

2) fathers should be obliged to take part at least 2-4 months of parental leave instead of mothers.

Again an overwhelming majority chose the conservative response. 73.1% residents between 20-30 years old and 71.5% of young families between 20-33 years old thought it is better for fathers to work and earn money than to force them to spend time at home with their
children. Of course, when asked such a question, the starting point of most respondents is probably today’s situation, in which parents receive a lump-sum payment from the state, rather than a high income replacement level such as in Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Thus, we do not know how the respondents would have reacted if they were offered the possibility of fathers receiving 80-100% of their income for father leave periods. What is likely is that the several decade-long period of discussions on poor-quality nursery schools combined with long maternity leaves continues to influence perceptions about what is “normal” or “proper” for raising children.

Consequently, even though it seems that Czechs and Slovaks are becoming increasingly more positive toward gender equality, the institutional legacy from the communist era continues to influence their attitudes in a conservative direction, in which they feel that children under 3 suffer if they attend childcare and mothers should have the main responsibility for raising children.

CONCLUSION
This study shows the importance of path dependency in influencing current policies. Decisions made at earlier periods of history set the Czech and Slovak Republics down the path of conservative family policies even though the communist regime forced almost all women to work and claimed to support gender equality. However, we have a more complicated understanding of path dependency than those notions that are based on the idea of one critical juncture. Instead we note that several formative moments arose and decisions made at each of these moments sent the Czech and Slovak Republics farther down the conservative path.

Our study relies on sociological institutionalism as well as historical institutionalism by showing that the historical development of institutions in a certain direction influenced the
attitudes of both policy makers and the population. Thus, we have the irony that because the communist regime defined childcare for children under 3 as a healthcare problem by moving the nurseries to the Ministry of Health rather than the Ministry of Education, nursery schools were unable to provide adequate care for the children. People considered nurseries to be overcrowded and illness became widespread. This development in turn created the myth that children under 3 were fundamentally different than children over 3, and that institutions cannot provide adequate care for children under 3. Instead of improving the quality of care for children under 3, the mythology arose that it is necessary for them to stay at home with their mothers.
Diagram 1: Path Dependency
DIAGRAM 2: Children (places) in childcare and pre-school facilities in Czech society (1945-2005)

Sources:

Sources:
Diagram 4: % Disagreeing that men should work and women should stay home (ISSP)

1994 vs 2002
### TABLE 1:
PERCENTAGE OF ALL RESPONDENTS FAVORING GENDER EQUALITY
(ISSP 1994 AND 2004)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1: Household Equality</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Men should do a larger share of the household work (percentage agreeing)</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>60.9</td>
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<td>64.4</td>
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<td>Mean should do a larger share of child caring (percentage agreeing)</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>66.6</td>
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<td><strong>Factor 2: Mother-Child Relations</strong></td>
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<td>Working mother can have warm relations with their children (percentage agreeing)</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>65.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-school children suffer if their mother works (percentage disagreeing)</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>46.1</td>
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<td>What women really want is home &amp; kids (percentage disagreeing)</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>32.8</td>
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<td><strong>Factor 3: State Support to Families</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Working women should be paid maternity leave (percentage agreeing)</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>87.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working parents should receive financial benefits (percentage agreeing)</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>45.4</td>
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Some other facilities for pre-school children were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health too, such as infantile homes for children up to the age of one and children’s homes for children from the age of one up to the age of three. Those facilities were to accommodate and care for children lacking adequate care at home (or having no home). Children were placed there for days as well as nights. Even though *week nurseries* existed too during the communist regime, their percentage was very small in Czechoslovakia. Thus, nurseries provided usually daycare only.

Children’s nurses and child-minders were employed in all these facilities (infantile homes, children’s homes, week nurseries as well as day nurseries), rules by the Ministry of Health were applied in all those facilities and the notion that these facilities are for children lacking adequate care at home (either during day hours only due to mother’s employment or during days as well as nights due to social, hygienic, etc. conditions in the family) was applied.


2 Child protection institutions (*opatrovna*) were dissolved in 1934.

3 From 1948 it was possible to establish an all-day kindergarten only if boarding and a two-hour sleeping break could be arranged in the kindergarten. In the 1940s, up to forty children were allowed to attend one class in a kindergarten. At the beginning of the 1950s, the maximum number of children per class was lowered to thirty. Children from families with ‘inadequate health or moral care, from families with many children and of working mothers’ were prioritized in kindergartens. See the Act on Unified Education no. 95/1948 and Government Act no. 195/1948.

4 The first children’s homes (*dětský útulek*) were established during at the beginning of 20th century for children of workers. Children stayed there the whole day till the end of their parents work hours till 18:00. Children’s homes were dissolved in 1992.

5 See the Act of the Ministry of Health on unified preventive and medical care (No. 130/1951 Coll.) and on organizing of preventive and medical care (No. 24/1952 Coll.). However, in 1947, the Ministry of Social Care was authorized to implement a governmental Act on organization of care for the youth (No. 202/1947 Coll.) that included organization of nurseries and children’s asylums.

6 In the late 1970s, 14 percent of kindergartens were ‘company or cooperative kindergartens’. Till the late 1980s the percentage grew to 28 percent (Bulíř 1990).
In 1952 the communist semi-state Czech Women’s Union took over the publication of *Vlasta*, which was originally published by the Czechoslovak Women’s Council between 1947 and 1951.

An unpaid extended maternity leave up to the child’s age of one was introduced already in 1964 (Act No. 58/1964). Five years later maternity benefits were introduced to be paid up to the child’s age of one to all-day caring mothers with at least two dependent children or to single mothers and mothers with an disabled or a adopted child (Act No. 154/1969). Thus, extended maternity leave started to be paid but to some mothers only. In 1970, the government changed one-year extended maternity leave to two years of extended maternity leave and one year later, both two years of extended maternity leave started to be paid to mothers in the above mentioned situation (Act No. 107/1971). By Act No. 110/1984 all mothers were entitled to one year of paid extended maternity leave and another year of unpaid extended maternity leave. Only mothers in the above mentioned situation (and mothers whose husbands were studying and single fathers) were entitled to two years of paid extended maternity leave. By the Act No. 50/1987 all mothers were entitled to one year of paid extended maternity leave and another two years of unpaid extended maternity leave. Only the mothers (and fathers) in the above mentioned situation were entitled to three years of extended maternity leave. Only in 1990 maternity benefits were renamed to parental benefits and all all-day caring mothers (or fathers) were entitled to receiving them up to the child’s age of three (Act No. 382/1990).

Source: Survey SONDY 2006, Masaryk University, Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, STEM. N = 545 for the first group and n= 500 for the second.