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**From mother care to shared parental and daycare:
a discursive-institutionalist study of the driving factors behind
childcare policy developments in the Netherlands**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Care for dependants, and childcare in particular, resides at the core of the gender relations in society. After the end of the Second World War the predominant ‘gender contract’ in West European societies displayed the characteristics of the so-called male-breadwinner model. According to the arrangements of this model, the care for the children is considered a female job that takes place within the family. The families, in turn, rely for income on the male breadwinner, who engages in paid work and earns a ‘family wage’ (Fraser, 1994: 591). Conversely, the female - the wife, the daughter or the sister – is active in the private realm of the family home, and is primarily occupied with the (unpaid) work of care for the children, the elderly, the sick, etc. The public realm (i.e. the one of visible, paid and recognised work) was dominated by men, the private – unpaid and hardly praised – by women.

This clear-cut gendered division of labour began to progressively erode since the 1970s. The boundaries between the private and the public spheres were blurred due to emancipation, modern life-style choices and feminist ideology. As Selma Sevenhuijsen points out there has been a relocation of care from women to men, from inside to the outside, from the private to the public (Sevenhuijsen, 2003: 15-16). From the 1970s onwards, it was not exclusively the “family father who extracted an income from the labour market” (Bonoli, 2007: 495). On a different scale and with different magnitude in the particular countries, European women embraced a career different from the so-called ‘marriage career’ (Hakim, 2000) i.e. the one of housewives, home-makers and child-rearers. One of the main issues that arose consequently was the question of how to continue to provide and organise (child)care under the changed socio-economic circumstances. The issue of care irrevocably entered the public realm, climbed to the political agenda in most member states of the European Union, and everywhere public authorities developed accordingly “measures to reconcile work and private life”. The typical policy instruments included in the ‘reconciliation packages’ were (Gerhard et al., 2005: 1):

- Regulation of part-time work, maternity and parental leave (time instruments)
- Provision and management of childcare facilities (services instruments)
- Taxation system, provision of allowances and social transfers (money instruments)

Naturally, different states have devised different policy mixes from these policy instruments, and have thus placed greater emphasis at one or another mode to reconcile private life and work. These choices were dependent on cultural characteristics and previous policy decisions, and were therefore very much influenced by the welfare regime type. Time instruments are characteristic for the Continental model. Money instruments are predominant in the Anglo-Saxon model, and the Social-Democratic model emphasizes money instruments. Without a doubt, the welfare state as a social institution plays a significant role (by its impact on resource levels) in reproducing or altering traditional family structures and gender relations, on the division of roles, and on power relations between women and men (Korpi, 2000; Orloff, 1996). However, it is up to agents, and up to politically active agents in particular, to maintain and perpetuate the existing welfare redistribution, or, conversely, to reform the chosen course of action. Political actors – the ones in office and in

opposition - propose and execute a policy and it is through this policy line that welfare regimes get adapted, amended or remain the same.

The aim of this paper is to examine the evolution in the position of the main Dutch policy-making actors on formal childcare (i.e. childcare outside the home) since the 1970s (via interviews, documentary and policy frame analysis). On this basis, it elaborates on the coalition building dynamics and suggests an explanation about the dynamics of the policy outputs and outcomes observed in the Netherlands. The aim is to reveal – this time from the perspective of actors - **the driving factors behind the childcare policy developments in the Netherlands** since the end of the WWII to present.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

In this study a version of constructivist neo-institutionalist theorizing is applied, namely discursive institutionalism (DI). DI is a relatively new and not very elaborated approach in political science and public administration studies. Nevertheless, there is consensus between scholars about two basic premises of discursive studies (Feindt and Oels, 2005: 161): “struggles about concepts, knowledge and meaning are an essential element of the political process”; and “political discourse has material and power effects as well as being the effect of material practices and power relations”. The starting point for DI is the assumption that a certain assembly of ideas articulated in the public space over time turns into a rule-based system of concepts and categories. These ‘systems of meaning that order the production of conceptions and interpretations of the social world in a particular context’ (Kjær and Pedersen 2001: 220) are denoted as public discourses. The set of rules governing a discourse are referred to as institutions when these rules have attained some degree of authority and have been linked to sanctions and rewards (Andersen 1995 quoted in Lynggaard, 2007). From this perspective institutions, being authorized and sanctioned discourses (Lynggaard, 2007: 294), provide agents with an understanding of their interests and identities. On the other hand, agents produce and reproduce institutions through maintenance of or deviation from the existing discursive structures. Thus, the interaction between agents and structures could be conceptualised as a process of mutual constitution. Accordingly, political change appears (1) as new ideas are turned into discourse and (2) as discourse is turned into an institution (Lynggaard, 2007: 294) through the mobilisation (and restructuring) of discourse coalitions. According to Lynggaard (2007: 295) the process of ideas being turned into discourse is one of articulation, and the process of discourse being turned into institutions is one of institutionalization. Hegemonic articulations (i.e. those that have achieved authority) are most often linked to sanctions and thus become social institutions. These are, in short, the ontological foundations of discursive institutionalism (DI).

What makes discursive institutionalism particularly useful in studies of policy processes is that it stresses the mutual constitutiveness of agents and structures. It points namely to the dynamic interdependence between agents (as sources of experimentation and hence of new ideas), discourses (as the mechanisms for production of meaning), and institutions (as reflections of the dominant meaning structures at a given moment of time). Most importantly, DI shows the dynamics not only through the changes (or continuity) of ideas but also in the discursive interactions among policy actors, political actors, and publics: who speaks to whom about what when, how, and where (Schmidt, Vivien 2005:). This very dynamic, however, makes the job of the analyst difficult from a methodological perspective. The reflexivity of discourse constituting institutions, institutions constituting actors, and

actors choosing whether to produce new or stick to old discourses, etc., excludes the conventional approach of singling out variables and constructing a neat causal story of what led to what. Nevertheless, this complexity is compensated methodologically by the fact that communication processes and public discourses are more tangible (leave clearer traces in policy documents, speeches, reports) than do actor's preferences and/ or normative beliefs.

Against the background of the general political assumptions of DI, a study of policy-making processes requires an analytic tool which enables to illuminate (deconstruct) the processes through which social conditions and phenomena are initially perceived and depicted as 'problematic' and in need of public intervention. Put differently, the analyst has to investigate the process of selecting, emphasizing and organizing aspects of complex issues, a process often referred to as "framing". A frame is a selective representation of a social phenomenon. Similarly to a photo frame it represents a social issue in a certain light and within certain borders. Frames direct attention toward some elements while simultaneously diverting attention from other elements. They "highlight and contain at the same time that they exclude" (Yanow, 2000: 11). The discovery and exposition of frames then is the primary undertaking of the policy analyst, and frames are the basic units of analysis in policy studies. But what is a policy frame exactly? What is it made of? How could one recognise a frame in policy documents?

According to van Gorp (2001:5) cited in Fischer (2003: 144) a frame is an "organizing principle that transforms fragmentary information into a structured and meaningful whole". Such frames, similarly to metaphors, select out some parts of reality at the expense of others, and in doing so, shape perceptions and understandings (Yanow, 2000: 12). Contending frames entail not just different policy discourses – different language, understandings, and perceptions – and potentially different courses of action, but also different values and different meanings (Yanow, 2000: 12). Verloo and Lombardo (2007: 33) assert that policy frames have two key dimensions: the "diagnosis" (what is the problem?) and the "prognosis" of a problem (what is the solution?). Thus, the diagnosis points out and defines the public problem, while the prognosis outlines a package of policy measures how to solve the identified public problem.

If a single conception is to be distilled from all of the above quotations, then policy frames could be defined as performing three main functions. Based on a set of normative values and cognitive beliefs they:

- name (point out) a social condition as problematic based on the perspective of certain normative belief system;
- offer an explanation about the problem and the relevant phenomena;
- propose a specific policy action/ non-action.

The process of problematizing a policy field always departs from a set of normative values. Nothing can be labelled 'problematic' or 'not problematic', 'good' or 'bad' without a clear moral standpoint from which the analyst is able to observe, compare, and establish departure from or coincidence with the expected normative standard. Passing a judgement as to what is problematic or not requires a normative standpoint. According to Kingdon "Conditions become defined as problems when we come to believe that we should do something about them" (2003: 109) and this is precisely what the constitutive function of the policy frame refers to, namely the process of pointing at, identifying, naming the conditions and social phenomena as unacceptable, and in need of a remedy. It

is the policy actors who are the carriers of a particular ideological load and normative system of beliefs, and it is they who suggest that certain social conditions and phenomena are to be considered problematic.

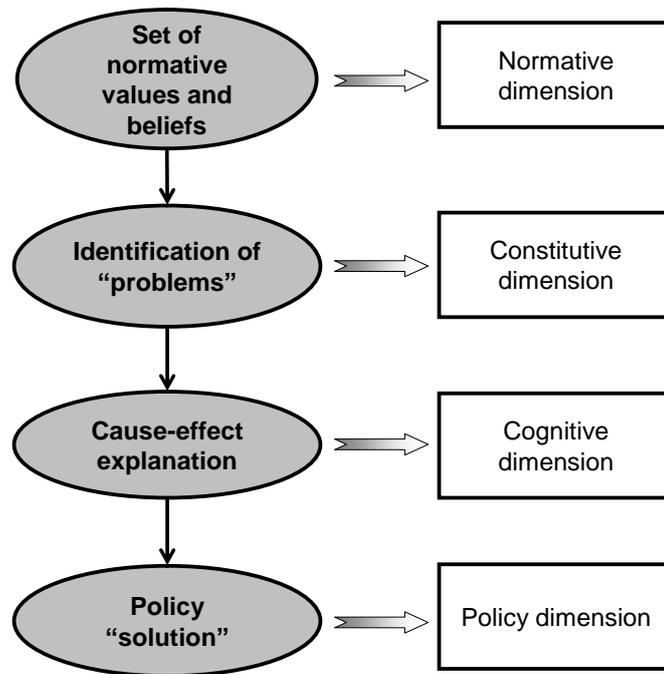
Having identified a 'problem' the policy actor usually provides a story about cause-effect relations i.e. presents a narrative that links the problem with a 'solution' (for example a package of policy measures). This process of rationalization weaves into a coherent fabric the story about the unacceptable social condition with the story about the measures and actors that could remedy the situation.

On the basis of this analysis it could be concluded that a policy frame comprises the following four dimensions (see Fig 1):

1. Normative dimension - pertains to the function of the frame to judge and attach values to phenomena from the social reality
2. Constitutive dimension - pertains to the function of the frame to label and identify various social phenomena as problems
3. Cognitive dimension - pertains to the function of the frame to narrate about what has led to the problem and thus to present social reality in terms of cause-effect relations
4. Policy dimension - pertains to the function of the frame to outline a course of public actions that would remedy the problem.

Public policies are typically based on policy frames that implicitly or explicitly contain the four dimensions described above. Subsequently, the deconstruction of the constitutive, normative, cognitive and policy underpinnings of governmental programmes, actions and measures becomes the primary activity of the policy analyst.

Figure 1. Policy frames and their four dimensions



3. CHILDCARE AS A PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTION AND CHILDCARE RELATED POLICY FRAMES

Public support for non-home based childcare is a relatively recent phenomenon in the public policies of Western Europe. Well into the 1980s – and in some cases until much later (Weishaupt, 2009) – most Continental countries were designing and applying policy measures to keep mothers at home to care for their children. Until the beginning of the 1970s, anywhere out of Scandinavia childcare facilities were mainly considered places for children from “problem” and/or poor families. These were places which a child would visit exceptionally rather than habitually. This rather negative general public image of childcare gradually began to change after the onset of female emancipation in the late 1960s.

In the public debates since the 1980s, childcare services have been associated with various public policy problems. Rubio (2007) identifies the following public 'problems' that available and affordable childcare facilities could allegedly remedy: gender inequality, decreasing economic growth and/ or competitiveness, low fertility and demographic stagnation, social exclusion and child poverty, and/or early education (see also Bacchi 1999; Lewis 2006; CEC, 2008). All of these perceived public problems (or rather problematizations) have, at different times and by different political and social actors (e.g. trade unions, political parties, interest groups) been linked to childcare provision as a feasible policy solution. These frames and their presence in policy documents will be the aim of the ensuing empirical analysis. Therefore, Table 1 and the rest of this section presents them in detail stating their normative, constitutive, cognitive and policy dimensions.

To summarise, childcare is often presented in national public policy debates as a remedy to three major “problematic” social conditions (Bacchi 1999; Lewis 2006; Lombardo and Meier 2006; Rubio 2007): gender inequality – frame one (F1), decreasing effectiveness of the welfare state and declining national economic competitiveness – frame two (F2); the demographic crisis, in particular low fertility in the context of graying population – frame three (F3); social exclusion, poverty and disability – frame four (F4); and early education – frame five (F5).

Table 1. Policy frames related to childcare provision

Frames	Female labour market participation (Gender equality) – F1	Female labour market participation (Economic competitiveness) – F2	Demographic problems (fertility, greying population) – F3	Early education and socialisation – F4	Poverty and social exclusion – F5
Constitutive dimension (need for public intervention) - What is the problem?	Women are oppressed, genders are unequal	Economic growth is slow, relative competitive position not strong enough	Demographic crisis (low number of births, greying population, pension gap, shrinking labour force)	Education needs to start as early as possible	Marginalisation of poor children, high welfare expenditures (single moms – main beneficiaries of allowances and welfare transfers)
Cognitive dimension (narrative about the phenomenon and cause effect relations) – what has led to the problem?	Women are restricted to activities within the private sphere, do not have access to paid work, participation in public life, education which leads to their dependence, lack of dignity and equality. Women live in an androcentric (man-made and man-focused) world.	Women's labour market non-participation represents untapped potential. The more women enter the labour market, the greater the labour force, the larger the GDP, the higher the economic growth and competitiveness.	Women bare less children later in their lives (if at all) because of individualisation processes, career demands, economic difficulties, state does not support sufficiently families to have as many children as possible.	The earlier one starts with education, the better the educational results, the more holistic the approach to public education; the better the education the higher the human capital value.	Single moms take too much of the social pot, their children live on the margins of society (criminality, drug abuse, etc.) Lack of socialisation, education and work lead to social exclusion

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Frames	Female labour market participation (Gender equality) – F1	Female labour market participation (Economic competitiveness) – F2	Demographic problems (fertility, greying population) – F3	Early education and socialisation – F4	Poverty and social exclusion – F5
Normative dimension (values, moral beliefs) – why does the problem exist? What sort of values you need in order to see this as a problem?	Human rights, equality among people regardless of gender, right to personal growth and self-improvement, equal rights and responsibilities within the family, sharing	Economic efficiency and growth, material wellbeing	Social reproduction and cohesion, economic efficiency	Knowledge society, knowledge economy	Solidarity, equal life chances, social cohesion
Policy dimension (public actions) – what can be done about it?	Provision of accessible and economically affordable childcare facilities.	Provision of accessible and economically affordable childcare facilities.	Provision of accessible and economically affordable childcare facilities.	Provision of pedagogically and qualitatively sound childcare facilities	Provision of pedagogically and qualitatively sound childcare facilities

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Next to the academic analyses, the European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment Issues (EGGE) has issued a report on the provision of childcare services in the EU where the same 5 policy frames are reported, and childcare is seen as a remedy to gender equality (F1), decreasing economic growth and effectiveness of the welfare state (F2), demographic crisis (F3), social exclusion (F4) and early child development (F5) (Plantenga and Remery, 2009). Below these five policy problems are discussed in greater detail.

Frame 1: Gender Inequality

If one embraces the normative values of equality among people regardless of gender, equal human rights, right to personal growth and self-improvement and equal rights and responsibilities within the family, the problem of gender inequality is easily discerned. Social reality is viewed as gender-biased from this perspective – more men than women are active in public life, men are more often chosen for representatives in national assemblies, predominantly men sit at the top management seats of big business corporations, men get better pay and have less discontinuous employment careers, etc. Conversely, women are underrepresented in public and corporate top levels, are less present on the labour market (especially once they give birth), and are more often economically dependent on their partners. The cognitive story (cause-effect narrative) is the following: Due to the patriarchal and androcentric organization of society, women are for centuries long restricted to activities within the private sphere, i.e. predominantly perform domestic (unpaid and hardly valued) work, rarely have access to paid work, participation in public life, and education, which leads to their dependence and unequal position in relation to men. It is subsequently argued that if women work, they will become financially independent, advance professionally, reach higher stages in their careers, and ultimately decrease the inequality gap. Clearly, in order to enter paid employment women have to be 'freed' from (parts of) the unpaid work they usually perform. The policy solution is seen in daycare facilities for children and/or in the redistribution of tasks at home between the partners. It is crucial to underline the importance of the concept of sharing and redistribution of tasks in this context, because if gender equality policies are understood narrowly (i.e. only in terms of facilitating the access to paid employment) they would not ameliorate the position of women. To the contrary, it might even aggravate it since paid employment without equal sharing of unpaid responsibilities leads to the so-called "double shift". The notion of the "double shift" describes the everyday reality of most women who have careers and raise families - they hold one job for which they are paid, and another one (at home) for which they are not (Hochschild and Machung 1989; Williams 2000). It is therefore crucial to have a broad interpretation of the concept of gender equality (i.e. as equal sharing of paid and unpaid work), if this problem is to be addressed properly. Therefore, in this study the policy frame of gender equality will be considered present in documents only if next to childcare facilities a reference is made to equal sharing of unpaid work.

Frame 2: Economic competitiveness and welfare state reform

Based on the criteria of economic efficiency, growth, and material prosperity, European economic performance is often considered to be lagging behind compared with the USA and East Asia. Subsequently, the problems of decreasing competitiveness and inefficient welfare regimes emerge (Sapir 2006: 369-374). The cognitive link between these problems of decreasing economic competitiveness and childcare is female labour market participation. It is namely believed that higher availability of quality childcare facilities would lead to higher levels of female employment (and hence GDP). Moreover, women would not burden anymore the welfare state through benefits of various sorts. The reasoning behind this expectation follows a characteristic rationalist account of costs and benefits. It is pointed out that economic theory suggests two approaches to understanding the effects of childcare on women's employment:

1) Value of care work (availability) – childcare arrangements affect the value a woman places on her time at home. Good childcare alternatives reduce the attractiveness/value of full-time care-giving work at home.

2) Childcare costs as a tax on mothers' wages (affordability) – an increase in childcare costs will have the same effect as lowering of the wages, in that it will reduce both the propensity to remain employed and the amount of hours worked. Conversely, the lower the costs, the higher the expected labour market participation of women.

Both approaches predict that improvements in women's childcare options (greater availability and/or lower costs) will be associated with increases in employment, and this prediction is supported by a large body of empirical research (Connelly 1992; Ribar 1995; Van der Lippe 2001 2003). Since from this perspective care responsibilities are viewed to constitute a major obstacle to (full) employment the public provision (or subsidy) of affordable childcare is seen as the policy solution.

Frame 3: Demographic crisis

This frame has its normative grounds in the values of social preservation, reproduction, and cohesion, as well as economic efficiency. From this angle, low levels of fertility constitute a major problem because societies shrink, older people relatively increase in numbers compared to young people, the labour force stagnates and tensions in the pension system occur. The cognitive story with relevance to childcare here is that nowadays women bare less children and relatively late in their lives (if at all) because of the pursuit of a career, which does not fit well with the care responsibilities for a child. Once a baby comes into a woman's life, most often her career plans are put on hold. That is why, in the European societies, where individualisation processes are booming regardless of gender, less and less women decide to have (several) children. Their choice might be different had more childcare facilities been available argue the policy-makers. Once partially freed from their care responsibilities, and thus able to pursue their career plans, women would bare more children – so the

argument goes. The demographic crisis could therefore be partially resolved by the policy solution of rising the number and affordability of childcare facilities.

Frame 4 Social exclusion

This is the oldest policy frame related to childcare. This is the frame that presents childcare as a welfare service/measure that has to be provided for families and parents that cannot take care of the children themselves, but have to rely on the state itself. This type of childcare concerns a small number of children on a regular basis and is rather a temporary measure (while the parents have a medical condition or are disabled, etc.) This is a very different conception of childcare from the one studied in this book, namely of regularized outsourcing of the care for children to formally organized for the purpose childcare facilities.

From the normative basis of solidarity, equal life chances, and social cohesion the phenomenon of social exclusion i.e. individuals living at the margins of society, without a job and in poverty, is a major problem. The cognitive side of this frame develops the narrative that children of socially excluded people do not have the capacity and skills to integrate in society, and are therefore more prone to anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse, school dropout, etc¹. As a policy solution is suggested again childcare provision. It is expected that pedagogically sound childcare could socialise and educate socially excluded children how to behave appropriately in society and thus to foster greater life chances and realisation than their parents.

Frame 5 Early education and socialisation

Early childhood development i.e. socialisation and education could hardly be presented as a problem but rather as a public policy issue that developed countries pursue in their public policies in order to foster social development, cohesion, and long-term material prosperity. Departing from these normative values education is an important manner to foster a culturally cohesive society and economically prosperous labour force, the latter is particularly important in the era of knowledge economies. The cognitive story that reveals the place of childcare in this argument is that the earlier one starts with education, the better the educational results, the more holistic the approach to public education; the higher the value of the human capital and respectively the better the economic performance in the future. Childcare is therefore seen as a means from an early age to socialise and

¹ It should be mentioned that nowadays this frame also comes in the version of handicapped children that have to be integrated i.e. less advantaged children not in terms of income but in terms of physical or mental development (comes several times in the D66 manifestos of the 2000s).

prepare children for their educational path. Respectively, childcare outside the home in a qualitatively and pedagogically sound organisation is considered a policy solution preferable to private care.

All the five problems and policy frames discussed above will in the next section be traced in the Dutch coalition agreements. In a similar study tracing the evolution and predominance of these same five childcare related policy frames in the EU public discourse I found that since the introduction of the European Employment Strategy (which uses the steering mechanism of the open Method of Coordination) the predominant policy frame in the EU childcare discourse is the competitiveness frame (F2) Radulova (2009). Therefore, in what follows the aim will be to establish which is the dominant frame in the Dutch childcare discourse and since when. If this turns out to be F2 and if it had gained dominance after 1998 (the introduction of the EES) then impact of the OMC in the Netherlands could be claimed.

4. CHILDCARE POLICY IN THE NETHERLANDS: FROM MOTHER CARE TO SHARED PARENTAL AND DAYCARE

The Netherlands has a long history of adherence to the so-called ‘housewife model’ (also known as the male breadwinner/ woman homemaker model or only as the male breadwinner model – Lewis, 1992). According to Schama (quoted in Pfau-Efinger, 2004), the housewife model thrived in the Netherlands as early as the 17th century, much earlier than anywhere else in Europe (Schama, 1988). Similarly, Brouns and Zwinkels observe that the family ideal of separation between the public and private sphere and the related responsibilities emerged in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, and was particularly pursued by the city bourgeoisie in their ‘civilizing offensive’ of the 19th century (Brouns and Zwinkels, 1995: 263). The industrialization only confirmed the already ongoing social processes. Subsequently, childcare was already exclusively performed by the mother at home. Only (poor) families where parents worked in the factories, had to send their children to the so-called “bewaarscholen” (surveillance schools).

At the beginning of the 20th century the trade unions were successful in their demands to assure the so-called ‘family wage’ for the (usually) male breadwinner. From then on it was rarely needed that women worked. The housewife model proliferated among all social classes, and became the norm in the Netherlands. It is therefore since the 19th c. that the Dutch society at large embraced two conceptions that would be deeply ingrained in the culture of the Low countries for nearly a century – the male-breadwinner model of the family, and the notion that childcare outside the family is not good for the children. By striving for the housewife ideal and the related mothering ideal the majority of the Dutch followed a firm cultural and behavioural norm that would only begin to crack in the 1980s and 1990s.

After the WWII, with the growth of the welfare state the centres for childcare started to receive subsidies and became part of the welfare policy. Nevertheless, they remained arrangements for the

poor children that were growing up under atypical conditions. Actually, it was the welfare state that was seen as the necessary institutional structure to assure that children are taken care of well i.e. at home by their mothers. It has been a long-standing assumption and a major standpoint of the Dutch welfare state that care activities are performed informally i.e. within the family unit. Moreover, this was an indicator for the proper functioning of the welfare state as it was believed that in a successful welfare state families did not need childcare because the state was rich enough to allow women to stay at home and care.

The heydays of the male breadwinner model were the 1950s. In this decade it was not conceivable for a woman to be anywhere else but at home taking care for dependents and for the household. “De plaats van de vrouw is thuis” (the woman’s place is at home) indicates the deep embeddedness of this norm in Dutch gender culture (Pfau-Effinger, 2004: 109). The pillarised structure of society kept these dominant cultural norms well in place (Andeweg).

There was also a strong political consensus against working women. The governmental policy reflected the dominant cultural conceptions – women were fired once they got married or once they gave birth to their first child (Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Consequently, the social norm postulated that in ‘good families’ children are cared for at home, and that childcare outside the home is only for failing families. Similarly, post WWII the welfare state was based on the assumption of the gendered division of labour and actively discouraged women (via the tax and social security system) to remain in paid employment after marriage (Bussemaker and Kersbergen, 1999; Kersbergen and Kremer, 2008). Given that mothers stayed at home, clearly, only parents with ‘abnormal’ family situations made use of formal childcare services, and one needed an indication for it (interview 12 and 13). This was also the policy line pursued by all political parties (Kremer, 2005: 158). Moreover, the Dutch breadwinners were doing well enough to afford to keep their wives at home. The fact that the families were rich, and that the pillars were supporting the existing gender norms, explains why no movement away from the status quo happened until the 1960s (Kremer, 2005: 160).

In the 1960s public childcare was even regarded as something immoral in a well-developed welfare state (Bussemaker, 1998: 71). “By an all-pervading system of breadwinner facilities, women were defined as mothers, destined for the private sphere, whereas men were responsible for the public sphere, the world of paid employment” (Plantenga, 1999: 157). From the end of the 1960s onwards, the cultural visions about the social role of women began to change substantially upon insistence of some groups within the feminist movement for greater gender equality, including access to paid employment. Childcare gained gradually public character i.e. began to be seen as an issue that does not solely concern the private sphere. Consequently, for the first time the Dutch government received demands for the organization of mass-scale out-of-home (formal) childcare. The first societal group to spell out the link between the public provision of childcare and gender equality (in this research this is denoted as policy frame 1 or F1) was Man-Vrouw-Maatschappij (the Man-Woman-Society), which together with Dolle Mina organised a series of crèche-actions (Peters, 1999: 96). The government however turned a blind eye to these demands (IJzendoorn et al., 2004: 16). One of the reasons for that is that the feminist movement itself was divided on the issue. Some feminist groups demanded childcare, others were firmly against it due to the mothering ideal (interview 11). The latter insisted on women remaining the principal carers for household and children, but that this unpaid work became officially recognised and paid for. Due to these divisions, no concerted push for action came from these societal pressure groups. In terms of this research: the problem of gender equality (P1) was

prominent and high on the agenda, but the policy solutions were sought in facilitating access to paid employment. No influential actor¹ coupled P1 to childcare. Subsequently, the government did not stimulate childcare during the 1960s. Nevertheless, some changes did come about in the late 1960s. The “bewaarplaats” was replaced by the “crèche” or the “kinderdagverblijf”. Furthermore, next to caring (verzorging), upbringing functions (opvoeding) became also part of the description of a day-care centre (IJzendoorn et al., 2004) Finally, in 1965 the first peuterspeelzaalen (toddler playgroups) emerged. The rationale behind these public facilities for children was to assure socialisation, to support parents in their upbringing (opvoeding) responsibilities and to prepare for school. These services have always been available for a couple of hours per day only, and were not meant as an instrument to reconcile work and private life.

Throughout the 1970s women groups were regularly placing the issue of childcare on to the public agenda, but despite the growing need for childcare facilities (due to the growing numbers of working women), governmental action was not initiated. Nevertheless, the private sector responded partially to the women’s claims, and in the decade of the 70s company daycare centres emerged (bedrijfscreches) in sectors where women were greatly needed (FNV, 2006). Still, these were corporate initiatives, and no governmental action was undertaken. According to the Childcare nota of FNV from 2006 this is due to the fact that the mothering ideal was not only still strong culturally, but also embedded in the normative stance of one of the main political actors, the Christian Democrats (Christen Democratisch Appel or CDA). According to the CDA position at the time, mothers would ideally stay at home and care for the children (interview 11 and see also section 6.2.1.6.) Given that the CDA was the main partner in all coalition governments (see Table below) it acted as a gatekeeper with enormous influence (interview 14) and (Peters, 1999: 114). It is not surprising therefore that also in this decade there was no governmental commitment to the support of formal childcare. Until the 1990s this service remained atypical for the average Dutch family, and the majority of children going to day-care centres were “problem cases”.

Basically, throughout the 1980s nothing changed with regard to policy programmes and instruments for childcare – the state simply did not deem public actions necessary. There was a short exception to this policy line in 1981. The van Agt II government², where the Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid or PvdA) was strongly represented, formulated for the first time a state policy on childcare. This was a breakthrough, yet this government lasted less than a year (until May 1982) and its policy was not continued by the ensuing cabinets (Peters, 1999: 97). Instead the Lubbers³ era arrived, characterised by aspirations to reform the welfare state, and for which the keywords were ‘saving’, ‘decentralization’ and ‘personal responsibility’. In the debates about the welfare state reform the Dutch politicians became strong advocates of the market and the ‘community’ (Kremer, 2005: 158) as the primary sources of welfare. They stressed the personal responsibility for one’s wellbeing and the need to diminish the role of the state therein.

In this context a key agreement on how to accomplish the reform of the welfare state – the so-called ‘Wassenaar consensus’ - was reached in 1982 between the government and the Social partners.

¹ No one from the Parliament or from the governing coalition.

² The state secretary for emancipation in this cabinet was Heidi d’Ancona – one of the founders of the Man-Vrouw Maatschappij.

³ Named after Ruud Lubbers – the Prime Minister who served 2 terms in office and who defined and accomplished the welfare state reform of the Netherlands in the 1990s.

The main elements of this agreement, which would become the cornerstone of the Dutch economic reform and revival, included the freezing of wages, the fighting of unemployment via part-time jobs, and the raising of female employment (Visser and Hemerijk, 1997). This is how female employment became not only an emancipation goal but also an instrument to accomplish the welfare state reform in the Netherlands. Moreover, from a rather marginalised feminist objective it became part of the mainstream policy agenda.

This radical change in the attitude of political actors toward female employment did not induce a follow-up change in the views toward childcare. Hence, next to public policy problem P1 (gender inequality) now also P2 (low female labour market participation) was articulated in the public sphere but again the solution was not sought in childcare due to the deep entrenchment of the mothering/home-based upbringing ideal. Hence, the solution to P2 was sought in part-time work. Part-time work assured that women could work (while their children are at school) and could care (once the school-day is over and the children are back home). Thus, throughout the 1980s women massively entered the labour market but worked predominantly part-time in order to be personally able to take care for their children.

In 1984, in order to stimulate the female labour market participation, the government introduced a fiscal rebate for second earners in families with children younger than 12. This decision can be regarded as the beginning of the end of the male-breadwinner model at public level (which until then was supported by different institutions of the welfare state). It was explicitly chosen not to stimulate childcare facilities directly, but to give families extra money and to allow them to find individual solutions. Hence, in the mid 1980s the Dutch government again did not stimulate the growth of childcare facilities but opted for an alternative policy measure.

The turning point in the official stance on childcare came at the end of the 1980s. The decisive push came from the Employers as they realised that in order to attract women to fill in the job vacancies or to keep their present female employees after having given birth, childcare has to be provided (interview 12). Leave periods or money transfers were not a viable solution, because such instruments keep women away from paid employment. Conversely, the childcare service was a perfect match between the need to attract (or keep) women on the labour market and the care for the children. It was therefore largely a push from the employers that placed the issue of the needed growth of childcare facilities firmly on the public agenda (interview 12). The issue had been advocated in the public sphere for already more than 15 years by the Labour party (PvdA), the FNV trade union and various women's organizations, and supported by the Liberals (the D66 and the VVD), but until the end of the 1980s it was linked to a different problem e.g. gender equality (see also section 6.3). Once women began to be seen as an untapped resource of labour by the employers and the government acknowledged the need of their human capital, the governmental position toward childcare began to change. Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century this would be the dominant policy frame in Dutch childcare policy-making (see section 5.3). Childcare has started losing its negative image, but is still not well accepted in society. It is seen as the "necessary evil" and used as less as possible – for 2 to 3 days a week.

The concrete beginning of a consciously pursued public childcare policy in the Netherlands is considered to be the abolishment in 1988 of the special fiscal rebate of 1984. Ensuing the advice of a special committee (Oort committee) this rebate was discontinued and 130 million guilders became available. The Ministry of Public health, Wellbeing and Sport (VWS) asked several prominent

governmental advisory committees for advice on how to allocate the money and, more generally, how to approach childcare in public policy at the beginning of the 1990s. The received advice emphasized the quick maximisation of the available childcare places especially through cheap forms of childcare (e.g. the guest-parent model “gastouders”). From the letter asking for advice as well as from the interpretation of it by the advisory committees it is obvious that the government regarded childcare predominantly as an instrument to stimulate female labour market participation (SER, 1989: 16). This was the second attempt since 1981 to develop Dutch public policy on childcare. This time however it surpassed the policy formulation stage and was actually implemented.

In 1989 the new cabinet’s coalition agreement (formed after the 2nd chamber elections of September 1989) included 130 million per year for childcare (Peters, 1999: 98). The concrete governmental act endorsed by the VWS Ministry was the Stimuleringsmaatregel Kinderopvang 1990-1993 (Stimulatory Measure Childcare 1990-1993). Albeit of temporary nature, the act can be regarded as the official start of the Dutch public policy on childcare. The subsidy measure was extended until 1996 when childcare policy was transferred to the portfolios of the municipal authorities (Plantenga, 1999: 160).

To summarise, until the 1980s childcare facilities in the Netherlands were a welfare measure administrated by the Ministry for Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport (VWS). These were places for deprived children, whose mothers (for various reasons) could not take care of them e.g. were handicapped or in a psychiatric clinic. Formal childcare was a provision for abnormal family situations. A typical working family did not use it, and “one needed an indication in order to use childcare services” (interview 12). As of the 1980s it was realised that childcare might serve as a reconciliation measure and might facilitate the ongoing emancipation of women. Company day-care centres emerged and long waiting lists became the reality. The big public investment in childcare began in the Netherlands only at the beginning of the 1990s following the realisation that the provision of formal childcare might improve the labour market participation of women, a goal pursued by all major policy actors. From then on childcare provision became part of the portfolio of the Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment.

4.1. The growth of childcare facilities in the Netherlands

Without doubt the 10-year period examined most closely in this study (1998-2008) was the decade of most intensive growth of the Dutch childcare policy. Rapid development was demonstrated not only in terms of expansion of the existing capacities, but also in terms of professionalization of the service, public regulation and policy support. During the 10-year period analysed in this study there were 5 different cabinets in power. Not a single one of them served a full 4-year term, but 2 could be considered to have been long enough in office, and for which the pursuit of a defined policy line could be identified: the Kok II cabinet (a coalition government by PvdA, VVD and D66) and the Balkenende II cabinet (a coalition government of CDA, VVD, and D66). Despite their political rivalry, the two cabinets of PvdA and of CDA followed a similar policy line with regard to childcare. The strategic priority with regard to employment policy has been the increase of the labour market participation of women. Due to that there was the strong commitment to facilitate the reconciliation

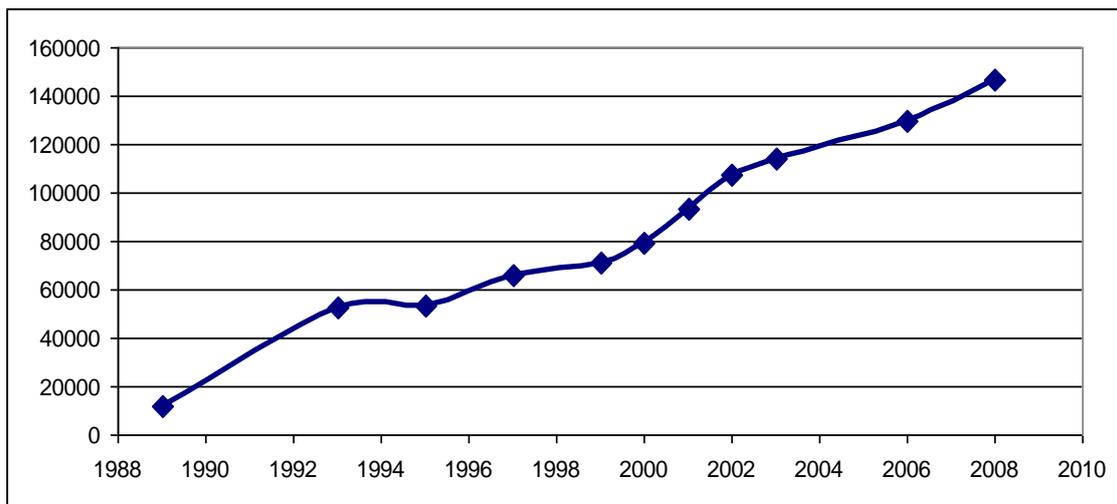
of family and work life and to boosting childcare provision, which was regarded as the main tool to achieve female labour market participation. The growth is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of childcare places and childcare facilities coverage rate in the Netherlands (1989 – 2008)

	1989	1993	1995	1997	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2006	2008
Number of childcare places (0-4 years)	12085	52520	53420	66000	71238	79298	93345	107211	114150	129811	146566
Number of children (0-4 years)	738000	783000	785000	775000	778000	790000	808000	820000	820000	785000	747000
Capacity (no. of childcare places per 100 children 0-4 years)	1.64	6.71	6.81	8.52	9.16	10.04	11.55	13.07	13.92	16.54	19.62
Intensity of use (no. of children using 1 childcare place)	1.2	1.2	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	2	2
Coverage rate = capacity x intensity of use (the Barcelona target of the EU)	1.97	8.05	12.26	15.34	16.49	18.07	20.79	23.53	25.06	33.08	39.24

It is visible that since the beginning of the governmental support for childcare facilities the number of available places constantly rises (see Fig. 2). In 1989, when the first stimulatory act was launched, the Netherlands had merely 12,000 places. In 1997, when the EES was endorsed, the number of places had grown more than 5 times to 66,000 places. At the end of the studied period – in 2008 – the number of childcare places was more than 146,000.

Figure 2. Growth in the number of childcare places in the Netherlands (1989-2008)



4.2. The Dutch childcare policy discourse

This section examines the dominant policy discourses in Dutch childcare policy-making and their dynamic evolution since the end of the WWII. As a main source of data for this analysis the coalition agreements are used, which are a reliable source of the policy intentions of the ruling parties and set the tone for governmental actions during the mandate of the cabinet. Thus, they could be considered a proxy of the development of the Dutch policy discourses.

Examined were all coalition agreements available in written form since the end of the WWII. As pointed out by Timmermans written coalition agreements exist since 1963 (Timmermans, 2003). Therefore the dataset for this study consisted of 15 coalition agreements (see Table 3).

Table 3. Childcare-related policy frames in Dutch coalition agreements (1963-2006)

Year of the agreement	Coalition partners*	Total number of references to childcare	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963	<i>KVP</i> /ARP/CHU/VVD	0						
1965	PvdA/ <i>KVP</i> /ARP	0						
1967	<i>KVP</i> /ARP/CHU/VVD	0						
1971	KVP/ <i>ARP</i> /CHU/VVD /DS70	0						
1973	PPR/ <i>PvdA</i> /D66/ <i>KVP</i> /ARP	0						
1977	<i>CDA</i> /VVD	1	1					
1981	PvdA/D66/ <i>CDA</i>	1	1					
1982	<i>CDA</i> /VVD	1	1					
1986	<i>CDA</i> /VVD	1	1					
1989	PvdA/ <i>CDA</i>	8	1	3				
1994	<i>PvdA</i> /D66/VVD	4		2				
Introduction of the European Employment Strategy								
1998	<i>PvdA</i> /D66/VVD	23	1	3				
2002	<i>CDA</i> /VVD/LPF	2						
2003	D66/ <i>CDA</i> /VVD	3		1				
2007	PvdA/ <i>CDA</i> /CU	6		1			1	1

* Source: Andeweg, 2005 and own calculations. The party of the Prime Minister is indicated in Italic and Bold.

From Table 3 it is visible that the coalition agreements include only the policy frames related to gender inequality (F1) and competitiveness (F2). Although different frames that link childcare to various public policy problems exist in the discourse of the actors (see the next section), when it comes to collective societal action only the gender equality policy frame

(F1) and the competitiveness frame (F2) are of relevance in the Netherlands. An example of F1 is this excerpt from the coalition agreement of 1989⁵:

“One of the consequences of the emancipation and of the growth in the number of single-parent families is that the demand for childcare services strongly increases. That is why this subject will be specifically addressed together with the social partners – given their importance and responsibility – so that the businesses themselves offer more possibilities.”

On the other hand, an example of F2 is to be found in this excerpt from the coalition agreement of 1998⁶:

“The lack of sufficient number of childcare facilities seems to be the reason for many women to stop or not to begin working. The policy on enlarging the childcare facilities will be continued. “

Naturally, it is important to discover the dynamics of interplay between these 2 frames i.e. which emerged when in the set of examined coalition agreements, which of the frames was dominant during which period etc. (see Fig. 3).

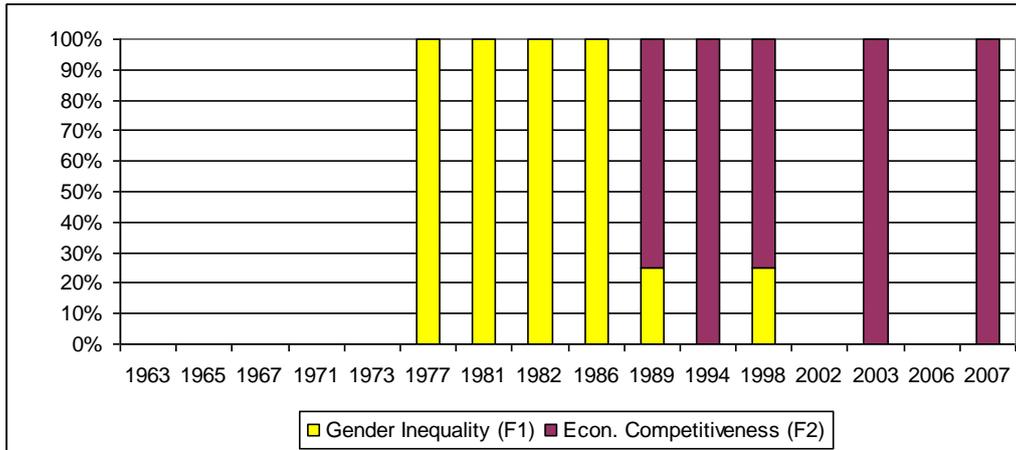
Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of Table 3 and Figure 3 above:

- Childcare enters the main public policy discourse (as reflected in coalition agreements) in the late 1970s. The first references date from 1977.
- Up to the mid 1980s the dominant policy frame was F1 i.e. the leading interpretation was to view childcare as a solution to gender inequalities. Up to then, however, there was no governmental effort to support the growth of childcare (see section 4). In other words, the view of childcare as forwarding the emancipation processes was not able to generate real policy measures. Exactly in 1989, when F2 displaced F1 as the leading policy frame, the real stimulation of childcare facilities begins in the Netherlands.

⁵ Author's own translation. The original text in Dutch reads: “Een van de gevolgen van de emancipatie en van de groei van het aantal eenouder-gezinnen, is dat de vraag naar kinderopvang sterk toeneemt. Dit onderwerp zal daarom nadrukkelijk betrokken worden in het overleg met de sociale partners - gezien ook hun belang en verantwoordelijkheid –, opdat het bedrijfsleven zelf meer mogelijkheden zal bieden.”

⁶ Author's own translation. The original text in Dutch reads: “Het ontbreken van voldoende opvangmogelijkheden blijkt voor veel vrouwen een reden om met werken te stoppen of er niet aan te beginnen. Het beleid tot verruiming van de kinderopvang wordt voortgezet.”

Figure 3. Relative proportions of policy frames F1 and F2 in Dutch coalition agreements



- As of 1989 F2 enters the Dutch governmental policy discourse, and immediately becomes the dominant frame. Moreover, since then concrete policy measures are issued. Hence, only when coupled to the issue of competitiveness childcare facilities received the massive funding that women’s organisations and the Unions had been advocating.
- As of 1989 until present F2 is the dominant interpretation of the childcare issue.
- Since the last cabinet (Balkenende IV, in which the PvdA was a major coalition partner) also policy frame F5 (early education and socialization) is gaining importance. The PvdA has advocated for F5 already since the late 1970s but only 30 years later their claim found a place on the governmental agenda. This could be explained by the fact that after the great emphasis on availability and growth of the number of childcare places, at present more attention is devoted to the quality of the services (interview 4). Therefore, much more actors could support the PvdA’s standpoint. The expectation is that the view on childcare as being an educational service alongside being a reconciliation measure will become even more prominent in the future. Arguably, this is due to the fact that F5 could be the normative legitimization of the competitiveness frame (F2) i.e. the two frames go well together. This potential future policy development notwithstanding, for the present study F5 is of little relevance.

Given all these developments it can be concluded that the 10 years examined by this study (the first 10 years of implementation of the European Employment Strategy) coincide with the fastest growth of childcare provisions in the Netherlands. Taken overall, this section made clear that within a period of 20 years (1989-2009) the Netherlands developed from scratch a policy on childcare provision (based on regulatory framework and financial instruments) in a field that was not recognised as an area of public policy concern until 30 years ago.

5.THE POLICY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE IN DUTCH CHILDCARE POLICY

This section reviews the evolution in the position of the main Dutch policy-making actors on formal childcare since the 1970s (when the public policy dimension of the care for the children was acknowledged). Moreover, it elaborates on the coalition building dynamics and suggests why the policy outputs and outcomes (presented in the previous section) look the way they do. The aim is to reveal – this time from the perspective of actors – which agents were the driving forces behind the observed policy developments. The studied actors include the political parties (who define the strategic vision), the Trade Unions, the Employer's organizations, and the Dutch parental organization (BOINK). Policy frame analysis was the preferred method for data analysis of the actors' position. This method was applied to the position of the political parties as this was easily accessible in party manifestos. For the other actors (the Social partners and the NGOs) the method of the interview was used, complemented with documentary analysis of position papers.

Political parties

The Dutch political parties can be positioned according to 2 dimensions: socio-economic (commonly referred to as the left-right dimension), and ethical/religious (commonly referred to as the conservative-progressive dimension) (Andeweg, 2005: 60). These dimensions are important for the current analysis because, as will be revealed below, the position of a political party toward childcare is determined by the general party position toward more or less intervention of the state in the economy, and the likelihood of adoption of more libertarian (permissive) policies. In general, progressive parties support the organization of childcare in a formal setting outside the family, while conservative parties are slower in adopting such views. Moreover, leftist parties are prepared to stimulate the use of childcare facilities i.e. to develop and subsidise the sector, while rightist parties prefer policy solutions involving minimum public investment.

Andeweg (based on data from Laver and Mair (1999) orders the Dutch parties according to the dimensions above in the following way:

From Left to Right: SP, GL, PvdA, D66, CDA, VVD

From Progressive to Conservative: D66, GL, PvdA, VVD, SP, CDA

Indeed, as will be revealed below this order is a good predictor of the childcare position of the political actor. The progressive-conservative dimension forecasts fairly well whether the political party will be supportive of formal organization of childcare outside the family, while the 'left-right' dimension predicts the position toward financial support (i.e. budgetary spending) for the use of childcare facilities. As the analysis of the previous section

also demonstrated: once the PvdA came to power at the end of the 1980s the childcare policy witnessed a real boost (the other 2 progressive parties D66 and GL were never a leading coalition partner in any post-war cabinet).

The rest of this section presents the results of the policy frame analysis of the party manifestos of the main Dutch political parties. The dataset consisted of the party manifestos of 6 political parties for the period 1963 to 2006.⁷ The analysis involved the same method as applied to coalition agreements and the EU legislation i.e. the presence and prominence of the 6 main childcare policy frames was examined via qualitative content analysis of the texts of the party manifestos. Below for each of the parties a table is presented displaying the dynamics of all policy frames and a graph that displays only the dynamics among the two most prominent frames – F1 and F2.

5.1. D66

The most progressive Dutch party (Andeweg, 2005: 60) D66 was among the first political actors to discuss the public organization of childcare in the national public sphere. The first reference is in the manifesto of 1977, and is linked to the ‘problem’ of gender inequality (p. 13):

“The emancipation policy should be directed to the provision of equal chances to develop for both men and women. Concretely this means:

....

to remove the relative backward position of the woman as an employee

- work opportunities for people after a break in their employment through provision of childcare in order to allow reintegration in the working process;...⁸

⁷ The author is grateful to the Comparative Electronic Manifestos Project which supplied the electronic versions of the original texts (Paul Pennings and Hans Keman, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, in cooperation with the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (Andrea Volkens, Hans-Dieter Klingemann) the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung, GESIS, Universität zu Köln, and the Manifesto Research Group (chairman: Ian Budge). Financed by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO project 480-42-005).

⁸ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch reads: “Emancipatie moet gericht zijn op gelijke ontplooiingsmogelijkheden en gelijke kansen voor vrouwen en mannen. Dat betekent voor:

....

achterstand van de vrouw als werknemer op te heffen;

- werkgelegenheid of ww/wwv voor mensen die na een onderbreking door kinderopvang weer aan het arbeidsproces willen deelnemen;...”

As of 1989 the economic competitiveness frame (F2) entered the D66 discourse and quickly established a dominant position. Below is an example of F2 from the 1989 party manifesto (p. 27)⁹:

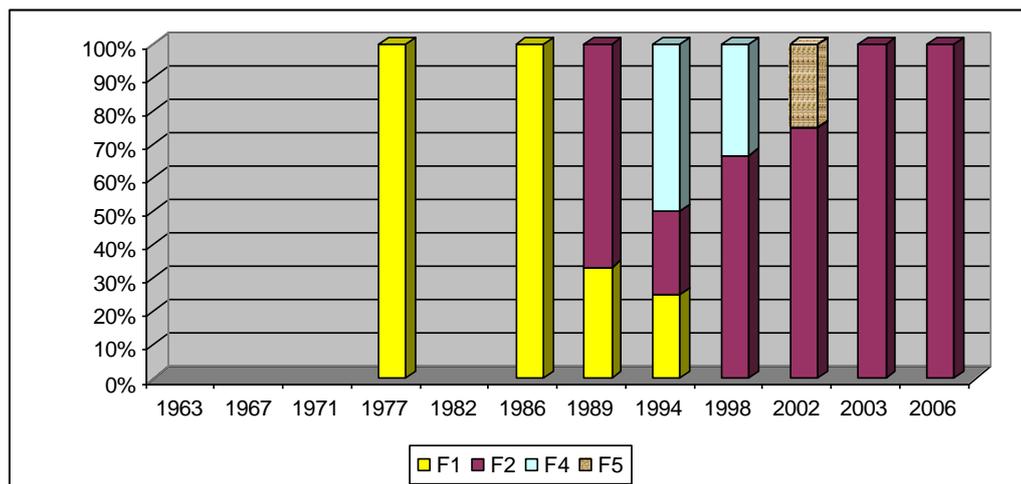
“CHILDCARE

D66 stands for an extensive system of childcare facilities, pregnancy and parental leave. In this way men and women could maintain their band with the labour market in combination with the care for the children.”

D66 also emphasizes childcare as a welfare measure (F4). In the party manifesto from 1994 this frame is twice articulated (p. 53)¹⁰:

“In childcare policy it has to be emphasized the offer of facilities that will allow the care for children with special needs.”

Figure 5.1. Relative proportions of childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of D66



⁹ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch reads: “KINDEROPVANG

D66 staat een uitgebreider systeem van kinderopvang, bevallings- en ouderschapsverlof voor. Zo kunnen vrouwen en mannen de band met de arbeidsmarkt behouden, in combinatie met de verzorging van kinderen.”

¹⁰ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch reads: “Bij kinderopvang moeten met nadruk ook faciliteiten worden geboden voor de opvang van kinderen die bijzondere zorg behoeven.”

Table 5.1. Childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of D66 (1963-2006)

Year of the manifesto	Total number	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963	-						
1967	0						
1971	0						
1977	2	1					
1982	-						
1986	2	2					
1989	8	1	2				
1994	5	1	1		2		
1998	4		2		1		
2002	5		3				1
2003	1		1				
2006	6		2				

All in all, the range of problems for which childcare is proposed as a solution by this political actor is rather limited for this actor – gender inequality, competitiveness and social exclusion.

5.2. *GroenLinks (GL)*

The Green party participates in elections since 1989¹¹, and articulates a position on childcare from its first manifesto. Most prominent are the policy frames of gender inequality and competitiveness (F1 and F2) but it is difficult to determine a domination of any of the two. They seem to co-exist in parity in the GroenLinks discourse on childcare (see Table 5.2.)

¹¹ GroenLinks was the name chosen by 4 leftist Dutch parties to participate in the national elections of 1989. The party itself was formed in 1990.

Table 5.2. Childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of GroenLinks (1963-2006)

Year of the manifesto	Total number	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963	-						
1967	-						
1971	-						
1977	-						
1982	-						
1986	-						
1989	10	2	1				
1994	5	1					
1998	2		1				
2002	10				1	1	
2003	2	1					
2006	7	1	2		1		

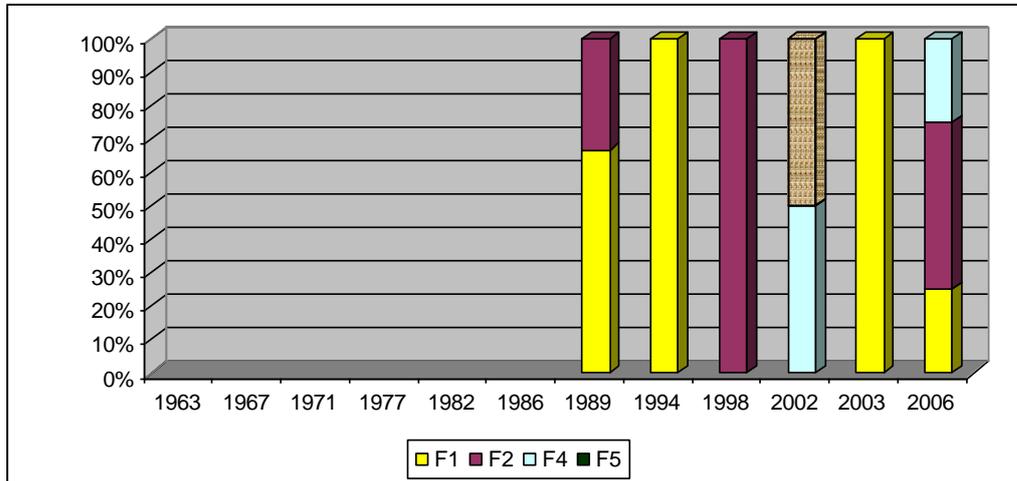
The two frames are presented as complementary – labour market participation will lead to greater levels of financial independence and hence increased equality¹²:

“GroenLinks finds the financial independence of every person very important. Unfortunately only 48% of women earn sufficiently so that they can support themselves. That is why we think that the labour market participation of women should be stimulated. This is good for the Netherlands because we are in great need of working women. And this is good for the women themselves.”

¹² Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch is found on the official website of the GroenLinks party <http://standpunten.groenlinks.nl/kinder+opvang> (accessed on 3 May 2010): “GroenLinks vindt het ook van groot belang dat iedereen economisch zelfstandig kan zijn. Helaas verdient slechts 48% van de vrouwen voldoende om er van te kunnen leven. Wij vinden daarom dat de arbeidsparticipatie van vrouwen moet worden bevorderd. Dat is goed voor Nederland, want we hebben al die werkende vrouwen hard nodig. En het is goed voor vrouwen zelf.”

Furthermore, F4 and F5 are present in the manifestos but they are negligible in terms of frequency.

Figure 5.2. Relative proportions of childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of GroenLinks



Overall, the data do not reveal the domination of any policy frame. Purely numerically F2 prevails over F1 but given the low number of observations it will not be well-grounded to claim that any frame dominates. Nevertheless, the prominence of F2 indicates that the Green’s view on childcare is supportive of the EU frame, or rather that the EU frame resonates well with the party’s discourse. It is however not possible to discern any Europeanization effects.

5.3. *Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA)*

The Labour Party (PvdA) and the Conservative Liberals (VVD) are the first political parties to take a stance on childcare. At the beginning of the 1970s PvdA linked the problem of gender inequality with the provision of formal childcare services. This is visible from its party manifesto of 1971¹³ (p. 3):

¹³ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch: “12. Gelijkstelling van man en vrouw Man en vrouw nemen op gelijkwaardige wijze deel aan het maatschappelijk leven. Daartoe worden: a) De werkgelegenheden in de parttime sector zowel voor mannen als voor vrouwen uitgebreid. De overheid geeft hierbij zelf het voorbeeld en stimuleert het bedrijfsleven. b) De werk- en schooltijden zoveel mogelijk met elkaar in overeenstemming gebracht. c) Goede en betaalbare kindercentra beschikbaar gesteld. d) De belastingen op inkomens zodanig gewijzigd dat, met inachtneming van het draagkrachtbeginsel, vrouw en man individueel worden aangeslagen. e) De her- en bijscholingsmogelijkheden uitgebreid.”

“12. Equality of women and men

Men and women participate in an equally valuable way in public life. To that end there will be: a) Enlargement of the work opportunities in the parttime sector for women as much as for men. c) Good and affordable daycare centres. d) Individual taxation of income of men and women, taking into account the possibility to sustain the tax burden. e).....”

Up to 1982 this is the dominant policy frame in the party discourse on childcare (see Table). The gender equality frame (F1) is present until 2002, but much more prominent since the mid 1980s is the economic competitiveness policy frame (F2) which entered the party discourse in the manifesto of 1982 and clearly dominates over the other possible interpretations to date. Hereby an example of this frame from the PvdA manifesto of 2003¹⁴ (p.3):

“The childcare services will be improved and enlarged. Also the after-school and the lunch childcare services for children who go to school will be expanded, so that children are well taken care of and parents can work without any worries.”

It is interesting to note that the PvdA accords to childcare also a role in the battle against social exclusion, and that the party regards childcare as part of the educational system since 1977. This has the important implication that the PvdA will be inclined to financially support childcare via the budget (something which will not be done until 30 years later).

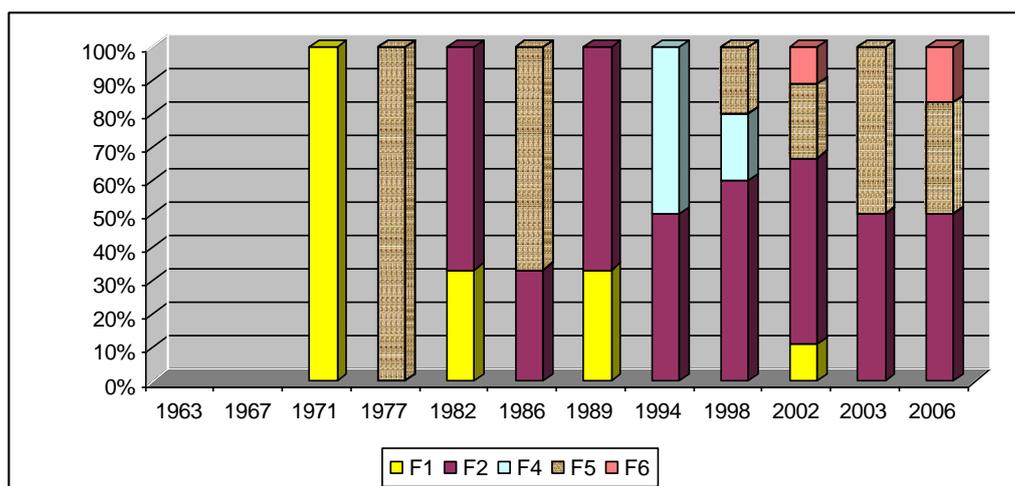
Table 5.3. Childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of PvdA (1963-2006)

Year of the manifesto	Total number	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963	0						
1967	0						
1971	1	1					

¹⁴ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch: “De kinderopvang wordt verbeterd en verder uitgebreid. Ook buitenschoolse en tussenschoolse opvang voor schoolkinderen wordt uitgebreid, zodat kinderen goed verzorgd zijn en ouders zonder zorgen kunnen werken.”

1977	3					1	
1982	3	1	2				
1986	5		1			2	
1989	5	1	2				
1994	5		2		2		
1998	7		3		1	1	
2002	17	1	5			2	1
2003	3		1			1	
2006	18		3			2	1

Figure 5.3. Relative proportions of childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of PvdA



An interesting feature of the PvdA discourse on childcare is that it has the broadest vision with regard to the possible applications of childcare as a policy solution: with the exception of the demography frame (which is generally not popular in the Netherlands) all contemporary public policy visions of childcare are present in the party manifestos of the PvdA. This means that the Dutch Labour party recognizes the various applications of the ‘childcare’ solution. In any case much more so than the other political parties (see 5.3.).

5.4. *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD)*

The People's party for freedom and democracy VVD – the Dutch Liberal conservative party – was together with the PvdA the first to include childcare in its party manifesto. The manifesto from 1971 links the problem of gender inequality to the solution of childcare¹⁵ (p. 14):

“12. The Woman

A.

.....

E. Where necessary the establishment of playgroups, facilities to stay for lunch for children who go to school, crèches and other childcare facilities will be stimulated.”

It, has to be noted, however, that after this one reference as early as 1971 the VVD's manifestos will remain silent about the subject until 1986 (see Table 5.4.). As of 1986 the policy frame of competitiveness (F2) appears in the VVD discourse and is dominant to this day (and hence in line with the EU discourse). Apart from two references to F4 and F5 in 1986 – the VVD discourse is generally devoted to F1 and F2.

¹⁵ Author's own translation. The original text in Dutch:

“12. DE VROUW

- A. Verwezenlijking van het wettelijk recht op gelijke waardering en gelijke beloning voor gelijkwaardige arbeid voor vrouw en man. De overheid moet hierbij het goede voorbeeld geven en aan ambtenaressen dezelfde aanstellings- en promotiekansen bieden als aan ambtenaren. Het verdrag van de ILO (International Labour Organisation) moet worden geratificeerd.
- B. Verbetering van de belastingheffing voor de gehuwde vrouw zodanig dat daarbij meer rekening wordt gehouden met haar zelfstandige positie.
- C. Part time betrekkingen: ook hier kan de overheid het goede voorbeeld geven.
- D. Het op korte termijn tot stand brengen van een wetwijziging die bepaalt dat het beding in een arbeidsovereenkomst met een vrouw dat haar bij huwelijk ontslag wordt verleend, nietig wordt verklaard.
- E. Waar nodig moet de op- en inrichting worden bevorderd van peuterspeelzalen, overblijfmogelijkheden voor schoolkinderen, crèches en andere opvangmogelijkheden. Overheidstoezicht op het voldoen aan vast te stellen wettelijke normen is gewenst deskundige leiding is noodzakelijk.”

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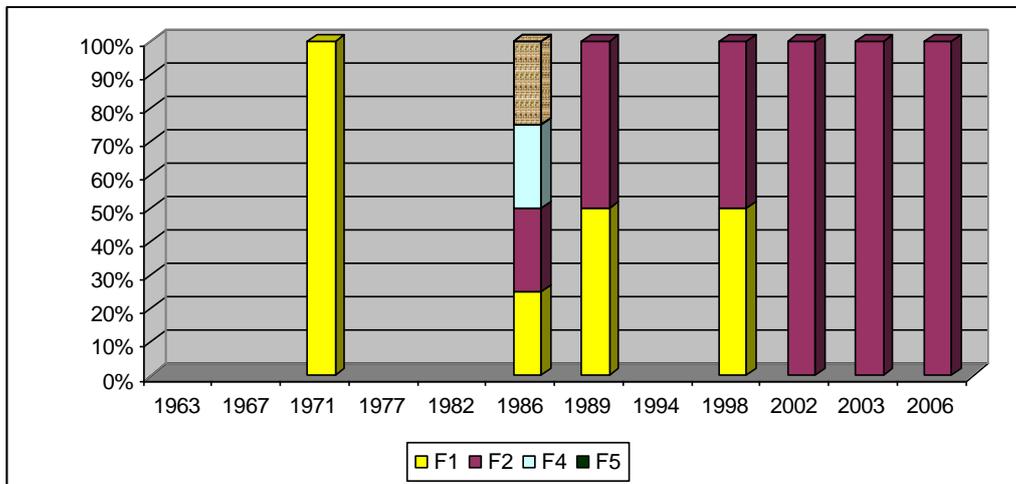
Email: espanet2011@uv.es

Table 5.4. Childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of VVD (1963-2006)

Year of the manifesto	Total number	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963	0						
1967	0						
1971	1	1					
1977	-						
1982	0						
1986	3	1	1		1	1	
1989	3	1	1				
1994	0						
1998	4	1	1				
2002	8		1				
2003	1		1				
2006	2		1				

All in all, the range of problems for which childcare is proposed as a solution by this political actor is rather limited – gender inequality, competitiveness and early education. It is clearly visible from the data (see Table 5.4. and Figure 5.4.) that since the introduction of the EES the discourse of VVD is fully in line with the EU discourse. Causal influence cannot be established however because the dominant position of F2 was established already in 1989 (10 years before the EES).

Figure 5.4. Relative proportions of childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of VVD



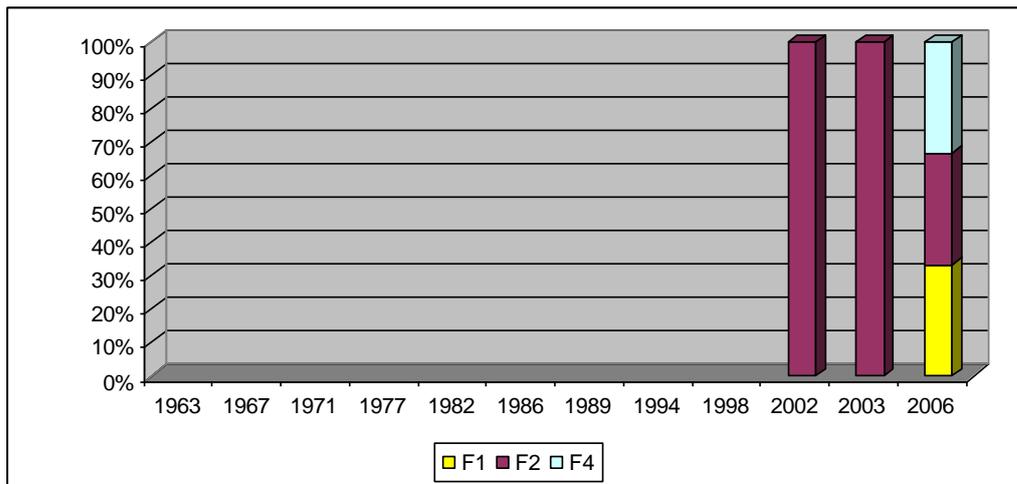
5.5. *Socialistische Partij (SP)*

The Socialist party takes part in elections since 1998 but devotes attention to childcare only since 2002 (see Table 5.5. and Figure 5.5.) The dominant discourse in the last 3 manifestos is definitely the one on competitiveness (F2). Hereby an example from the 2002 manifesto¹⁶ (p. 11):

“Therefore we should offer to lone parents on social benefits all the possibilities to get into paid employment, for example by providing sufficient childcare, but without obliging them to apply for jobs until the children have to go to school.”

¹⁶ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch: “Zo moeten we alleenstaande ouders in de bijstand wel alle mogelijkheden bieden om betaald te gaan werken, bijvoorbeeld door te zorgen voor voldoende kinderopvang, maar hen niet achtervolgen met een sollicitatieplicht, zolang de kinderen nog leerplichtig zijn.

Figure 5.5. Relative proportions of childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of SP



In the manifesto of 2006 the party points at childcare as a solution not only of competitiveness (F2) but also to gender inequality (F1) and to social exclusion (F4). The example of F1 is¹⁷:

“In order to give to women greater chance to take part in the working process the current constraints should be removed, for example through better and more affordable childcare. Equal pay for equal work should be guaranteed. Men and women should acquire more possibilities to combine work and care.”

and the example of F4 from the same 2006 manifesto of the Socialists is¹⁸:

“Childcare should be affordable and of good quality. The income-dependent own contribution will be halved. ... Also for children with a special social or medical indication should be guaranteed good childcare”.

¹⁷ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch: “Om vrouwen meer kans te geven aan het arbeidsproces deel te nemen moeten bestaande hindernissen worden weggenomen, onder andere door meer, betere en betaalbare kinderopvang. Gelijke beloning voor gelijk werk moet worden gewaarborgd. Mannen en vrouwen moeten meer mogelijkheden krijgen om zorgtaken en arbeid te combineren.”

¹⁸ Author’s own translation. The original text in Dutch: “Kinderopvang dient betaalbaar te zijn en van goede kwaliteit. De inkomensafhankelijke bijdrage wordt gehalveerd. Kwaliteitseisen voor kinderopvang worden wettelijk vastgelegd. Ook voor kinderen met een specifieke sociale of medische indicatie moet goede opvang worden gegarandeerd.”

Table 5.1. Childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of SP (1963-2006)

Year of the manifesto	Total number	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963	-						
1967	-						
1971	-						
1977	-						
1982	-						
1986	-						
1989	-						
1994	-						
1998	0						
2002	7		1				
2003	7		1				
2006	4	1	1		1		

5.6. Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA)

The Christian-Democrats were rather late in discussing the public role in childcare provision. The first reference in a party manifesto is from 1982 (i.e. 10 years after parties such as PvdA and VVD). This is hardly surprising given the conservative background and ideology of the party, and the party's position that it is ideal for each child to be raised at home by the mother/relatives. This is also suggested from the fact that the F1 policy frame (childcare as a solution to gender inequalities) appears only twice in the CDA party manifestos during the 1980s (see Table 5.6). The Dutch Christian Democrats were never strong proponents of emancipation. During the same decade F4 (i.e. childcare as a welfare/social exclusion measure) was also popular in the CDA discourse. This is hardly surprising given the ideological background of this party. Since the end of the 1990s the party also articulates that childcare might be a solution to integration problems (F6). In two consecutive manifestos (from 1998 and 2002) the CDA underlines that the socialization

function of childcare might help in integrating the children of second and third generation immigrants. Hereby an illustration of this frame from the 2002 manifesto (p. 40)¹⁹:

“It is recommendable to link integration courses to the orientation of the people taking the courses. For example, combined trajectories that include working, childcare and [social] integration must be possible.”

All in all, despite the relatively wide range of problems for which childcare is proposed as a solution by this political actor, the competitiveness frame takes the lead in the CDA discourse (see Table 5.6. and Figure 5.6.). Again, similarly to the other political party discourses, the data reveal no influence of the EU in the formation of the party position – the dominant position of F2 was established already in 1989 (10 years before the EES).

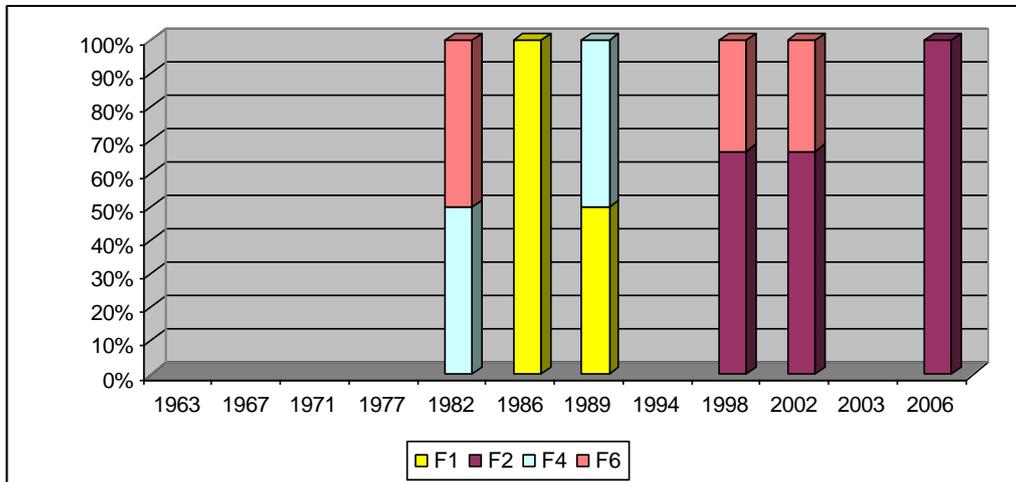
Table 5.6. Childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of CDA (1963-2006)

Year of the manifesto	Total number	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963	0						
1967	0						
1971	0						
1977	0						
1982	2				1		
1986	5	1					
1989	7	1	2		2		
1994	6						
1998	6		2				1
2002	16		2				1

¹⁹ Author’s own translation. The original text in dutch reads: “Het verdient aanbeveling bij inburgeringscursussen aan te sluiten bij oriëntatie van de cursisten. Zo moeten er meer gecombineerde trajecten van werken, inburgering en kinderopvang mogelijk worden.”

2006	7		3				
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Figure 5.6. Relative proportions of childcare-related policy frames in party manifestos of CDA



The overall conclusion that could be drawn from the policy frame analysis of the party manifestos is that the majority of the Dutch political parties converge in terms of discourse to the EU policy frame. Nevertheless, Europeanization effects cannot be established because the dominant position of F2 in the Dutch political party discourses is visible already from the beginning of the 1980s, and is rather to be associated with the period of radical Liberal reforms of this decade (the Lubbers era) than to the adoption of EU policy frames (which only took place at the end of the 1990s).

Trade union federations

There are 3 trade union federations in the Netherlands: the FNV, the CNV and the MHP. With almost 1.4 million members²⁰ the FNV is by far the biggest among the three. The CNV represents 360.000 people and the MHP – 160.000. The sections below briefly present each federation, review their standpoints regarding childcare, and the potential EU influence therein.

²⁰ The data about the membership numbers were taken from the respective websites: www.fnv.nl; www.cnv.nl; and www.vakcentralemhp.nl (accessed on: 24 May 2010).

5.6.1.1. *Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV)*

The Dutch Trade Union Federation (FNV) represents 19 trade unions with a total of approximately 1.4 million members. It was founded in 1976 as a federation of two existing unions: the Catholic NKV and the social-democratic NVV. The Protestant CNV also took part in the initial talks, but it refused to fully merge into the new union. The federation was founded because of declining membership, due to depillarization and increasing political polarization between left and right. The two fused officially in 1982. Wim Kok (who will later serve as prime minister of the Netherlands, between 1994 and 2002) had already been chair of NVV between 1973 and 1976, so he was the obvious choice for chairing the new organization. He remained the head of the FNV until 1986 when he entered parliament for the PvdA. Hence, although the FNV is officially independent of other organizations, in reality there are strong ideological and personal links between the trade union and the social-democratic party – the PvdA.

Given its ideological proximity with the social-democrats it is not surprising that the FNV mirrors to a large extent the standpoints on childcare expressed by the PvdA. From the FNV Childcare Nota of 2006 (p. 2) it is visible that since its creation in 1976 the FNV was aiming at a universal benefit status for the childcare service (i.e. independent of whether parents work and of their income – childcare is assured by the state on the same basis as school education for example). Since at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s the government was not that much interested in supporting childcare, the FNV adopted a different strategy, namely to assure that via the collective labour agreements (CAOs) the employers contributed to the childcare costs of their employees (interview 9). Due to these efforts, according to the FNV data, in 2005 three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) of all parents enjoyed partial coverage of the childcare costs by their employers.

In terms of policy frames, in the key FNV document – the Childcare nota - all (F1 to F5) are mentioned already in the introduction by Wilna Wind (FNV nota on Childcare, 2006). Interestingly, there is a prioritization between the frames: F1 and F5 are taken as most important (starting point), while F2 comes second on the list. F4 and F3 are also mentioned but they seem to be only adding up to the argument (the use of universal childcare provision) rather than being the main problem to be addressed via childcare provision. This prioritization is where the FNV discourse does not resemble the PvdA discourse where there is no explicit ranking between the frames.

Further in the document the commitment to providing chances to women (F1) is elaborated. It is stated that women have to be supported in their wish to continue working and that childcare is a means to achieve this. Moreover, the fact that women have begun to work much more hours since the 1960s is seen as due to the improved technologies that cut the hours spent on household maintenance in half and not so much on better sharing of unpaid work between the partners.

With regard to female labour market participation (F2) the FNV states that it is expected from women to work more hours once childcare provision is universal (p. 7-8).

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This argument is supported by a reference to the present situation where women work more and more even though not so much support is available. It is therefore expected that if greater support is provided the numbers will grow further and further.

To summarise, the FNV trade union is one of the oldest and most active proponents of childcare in the Netherlands. From the documentary analysis it became visible that the main reasons for this actor to support childcare is in order to increase gender equality (F1) and children's socialisation/education (F5). Hence, there are substantial differences between the EU (propagating childcare for the sake of increased competitiveness – F2) and the FNV discourse. Moreover, the 2 interviews conducted at FNV confirmed that the trade union's discourse is entirely shaped by domestic developments (interviews 1 and 9).

5.6.1.2. *Christelijke Nationaal Vakverbond (CNV)*

The CNV (the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions) is a federation of eleven trade unions. It is not a typical trade union federation as it does not come from a Socialist/Communist background where the Conflict paradigm²¹ is central. “The CNV was founded in 1909 by people who rejected the class struggle, and instead oriented themselves toward a corporatist model of the economy i.e. toward cooperating with the employers” (interview 5). Furthermore, the CNV comes from the Christian Democratic tradition which stresses the importance of the family and of the own responsibility for one's wellbeing.

These two particularities of the CNV – the non-Conflict perspective to work relations and the Christian Democratic ideology – shape the standpoint of the trade union on formal childcare. Concretely, the CNV does not emphasize (as much as FNV) that women should work, and that therefore the country needs childcare facilities. Instead the official position is that: “Men and women are free to choose what they want to do in their lives and they are responsible” (interview 5). If women choose to work, however, then the CNV is supportive of the formal organization of childcare.

Due to these views the CNV was rather reactive with regard to childcare (contrary to FNV which were proactively advocating childcare since the late 1970s). For the CNV childcare only became an issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The trade union federation was never a very active participant in the debate. “If the CNV is asked to issue an opinion on a proposal or on a governmental initiative then the CNV will formulate one, but proactive drafting of positions is rather rare” (interview 5).

The reason to support the formalization of childcare is the combination between work and family life i.e. F2 (Paas, 2008). Hence, there is full alignment between the EU and the CNV discourse. Nevertheless, the support of this policy frame comes from the proximity between the CDA and the CNV discourses rather than from EU-level influence.

²¹ The 'conflict paradigm' denotes the opposition between labour and capital i.e. between workers and employers (capitalists).

5.6.1.3. *Vakcentrale voor middengroepen en hoger personeel (MHP)*

The smallest Dutch trade union federation, the one for middle and higher level employees, was founded in 1974. The main reason for the emergence of this union was that the interests of professional and managerial staff became clearly distinct from the interests of the other employees and in need of separate representation at the national level during the 1970s. Similarly to the other Dutch trade unions the “MHP represents its members at national and international level regarding terms of employment, industrial relations, working conditions, equal opportunities, participation, social security, pensions and education”²². Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts, no interview with a representative of MHP could take place during the data collection period of this research. Hence, this study does not reflect the MHP position on childcare.

Employer's organizations

There are three major employer's representatives in the Netherlands: the VNO-NCW, the MKB-Nederland, and LTO-Nederland. The VNO-NCW is the largest organization, and represents 90% of the employment positions in the market sector of the country²³. The MKB-Nederland represents the interests of more than 186,000 small and medium-sized enterprises, and LTO-Nederland represents the agricultural and horticultural sectors. The sections below briefly present VNO-NCW and MKB, and review their standpoints regarding childcare.

5.6.1.4. *Vereniging VNO-NCW*

VNO-NCW (the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers) is the biggest Dutch employers' confederation. VNO-NCW was founded in 1996 by a merger of the Christian-democratic Nederlands Christelijk Werkgeversverbond (NCW – Dutch Christian Employers' Union), and the liberal Verbond van Nederlandse Ondernemingen (VNO - Union of the Dutch Enterprises). Both organizations had strong ties with the Protestant and

²² Retrieved from www.vakcentralemhp.nl on 24 May 2010.

²³ The data about the membership numbers were taken from the respective websites: www.vno-ncw.nl and www.mkb.nl (accessed on: 24 May 2010).

the Liberal pillar respectively. The VNO-NCW represents Dutch business in numerous governmental advisory and consultative committees.

The issue of provision of formal childcare became important for the employers in the 1970s and the 1980s when women entered massively the labour market and the employers wished to support this new development (interview 12). The childcare service had an important role in this process – more women could start working or return to their jobs after giving birth if the number of childcare places in the country grew. Initially, the employers reacted on these developments by providing vouchers to their employees to cover the costs or by organizing day-care centres within their enterprises (bedrijfscreches).

During the mid-1980s, however, it became visible that the scale of the process was enormous and that state support was needed. The VNO was instrumental in putting the childcare issue firmly on the governmental agenda (interview 12). Upon insistence by the Employers that childcare is an important reconciliation measure that will boost the female participation on the labour market and consequently the Dutch economic reforms, the government undertook decisive policy actions to stimulate the childcare service.

The main actors (the government, the employers and the trade unions) realised that the growth of formal childcare was inevitable if women were to work (interview 12). Thus, the main issue for the VNO was who will finance the process of expansion that was gaining speed at the beginning of the 1990s. It was decided at the time that there would be a tripartite financing of the service – the state, the employer and the employee/parent. It was underlined that this was a voluntary agreement and not something that had to be regulated by law. The state contribution got materialised in a tax relief measure, and the employer's contribution was regulated at the level of the company or at sectoral level (in the collective labour agreements – the CLAs).

The developments in the 2000s, namely the ever-increasing regulation of the sector by laws (in 2005 the Law Basic Provision of Childcare came into force), and especially the end of the voluntary contributions and the introduction of the obligation to pay 1/3 of the childcare costs (as of 2007) were not welcomed by the Employers, and they tried to resist them (interview 12).

Finally, the Dutch employers from the VNO are in favour of setting EU targets for overall employment level and for employment rates for women and the elderly. Such global objectives are acceptable. But fixing specific targets for childcare at the EU level is not welcomed by the VNO. “These are much too concrete policy issues to let the EU decide on them” (interview 12). Moreover they are much too contingent upon culture and prior policy choices, “one cannot specify this for all member states”.

5.6.1.5. MKB-Nederland

The MKB-Nederland was established in 1995²⁴ from a merger of Koninklijk Nederlands Ondernemers Verbond (KNOV – the Royal Dutch Entrepreneurs' Union) and

²⁴ The oldest of its predecessors was founded in 1902.

the Nederlands Christelijk Ondernemers Verbond (NCOV – the Dutch Christian Entrepreneurs' Union). The organization represents the interests of the small and medium-sized enterprises (midden- en kleinbedrijf: MKB) at national and international fora. It cooperates closely with the VNO-NCW and since recently they occupy the same building in the Hague (de Malietoren) and representatives of the two organisations may speak for both unions.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the MKB has a very similar vision toward childcare as the VNO-NCW. The childcare service is seen as an opportunity that allows parents (especially women) to engage in paid employment (interview 3). For the MKB childcare is first and foremost a reconciliation measure. Moreover, it is the preferred reconciliation measure (i.e. receives priority among other measures such as part-time work or leave schemes) because it allows people to stay or return quickly to their jobs. This is important for the entrepreneurs from the MKB and they are prepared to pay for it i.e. to contribute to the childcare costs of their employees (interview 3).

Unlike the FNV trade union, which pleads for childcare to acquire the status of a service of universal character (basisvoorziening), the MKB only regards it as a reconciliation measure that ideally fulfils the “7 to 7” concept i.e. an employer to being able to leave his/her child in a day-care centre at 7 am and to pick him/her up at 7 pm, and not to worry in between (interview 3).

The other issue of great importance for this employers' organisation is the financing of the childcare provision. The MKB is ready to pay for childcare for the working population, and not as a universal service for the general population. Furthermore, the quality of the service should be constantly improving.

The MKB (similarly to all other Dutch policy actors) cannot identify any influence of the EES in the field of childcare provision: the national reforms have started long before the endorsement of the Strategy. Nevertheless, the MKB regards the Lisbon Strategy as a positive development. It has as a central concept the issue of activation which is also very important for the Dutch employers.

Belangenvereniging van ouders in de kinderopvang en peuterspeelzalen
(BOINK)

The BOINK is the organization that represents the interests of parents of children who visit day-care centers and playgroups. It exists since 1995 and aims to influence policy- and law-making at the national level. By own estimates, the BOINK currently represents about 80% of the parents whose children make use of daycare²⁵. The organization stands for good quality and affordable childcare services, and for a clear and simple regulatory framework for the sector. BOINK representatives are frequently invited to national discussions and conferences that debate the issue of childcare, where the aim is to share the information and experiences of parental committees from all over the country (interview 4).

If one childcare policy frame has to be singled out which BOINK supports then this will be the early education and socialization one - F5 (interview 4). According to the Chair of the Board of the organization the attention at the national level has shifted from emphasis on the quantitative growth to an emphasis on the quality of the service provision (interview 4). This is quite natural given that the period of rapid growth has already taken place. Once the sector has matured it is to be expected that the quality of the service will move higher up on the agenda. The present representation of childcare as an educational issue (e.g. the move in 2007 of the childcare dossier to the portfolio of the Education ministry) should be interpreted precisely in these terms – the maturity of the sector and the shift from quantitative to qualitative considerations (interview 4).

The use of childcare facilities as an instrument to boost female labour market participation is dubious. According to interviewee #4 such a tool is successful only up to a certain level of participation. Afterwards, it becomes more and more difficult to ‘swing’ housewives into working. Moreover, convincing mothers to work could only be successful if the quality of the service is very high and guaranteed, which is not the case in the Netherlands yet (see the studies of IJzendoorn et al., 2004 and the Netherlands Consortium Kinderopvang Onderzoek). But even when the quality is high the inflow of women onto the Dutch labour force is dubious because women in the Netherlands do not work because they are economically forced to work (i.e. if the salary of the husband would not be enough) but out of social needs. “We in the Netherlands have a luxury problem” (interview 4). Hence, culture plays a significant role for such decisions and in the case of childcare it is not supportive (see section 5.1.).

The EU is not present in the work of BOINK. Naturally, the Lisbon strategy and the Employment policy coordination process are known, but there are allegedly no direct implications thereof on the daily workings of the BOINK. According to the Board’s Chair the Employment Strategy does not have much impact in the field of childcare policy. When

²⁵ Data retrieved from the organization’s website: http://www.boink.info/wie_is_boink (accessed on 14.06.2010)

the EU requested the member states to enlarge their childcare facilities in 1997 with the endorsement of the EES and in 2002 with the approval of the Barcelona quantitative targets, the Netherlands had already realised the need for a bigger childcare sector and was already implementing measures in that context (interview 4). Hence, the EU guidelines came as a confirmation and encouragement of an already ongoing domestic process to which all influential actors had agreed.

ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION IN THE ACTORS' POSITIONS AND OF THE COALITION BUILDING DYNAMICS

This section aims to bring together the domestic actors and the ideas (policy frames) they stood for in the last 50 years. The aim of this analysis is to reveal the dynamics of coalition building regarding the different childcare policy frames, and thus to account for the various policy shifts that took place in the Netherlands in the past decades. The objective is to suggest an explanation as to why the policy process and the respective policy outcomes in the Netherlands looked the way they did (see section 4). To that end the following questions will be addressed: who (which actors and coalitions) stood for what (which policy frame)? When? To what success?

To begin with, the table below maps out the six policy frames examined in this study and the domestic political parties that supported them (based on the policy frame analysis of the party manifestos of the major Dutch political parties).

Dynamics of the actors' standpoints on childcare according to the policy frame analysis of the party manifestos

Year of the coalition agreement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
1963						
1967						
1971	PvdA, VVD					
1977	D66				PvdA	
1982	PvdA	PvdA		CDA		
1986	D66, VVD, CDA	PvdA, VVD		VVD	PvdA, VVD	

1989	D66, GL, PvdA, VVD, CDA	D66, GL, PvdA, VVD, CDA		CDA		
1994	D66, GL	D66, PvdA		D66, PvdA		
1998	VVD	D66, GL, PvdA, VVD, CDA		D66, PvdA	PvdA	CDA
2002	PvdA	D66, PvdA, VVD, SP, CDA		GL	GL, PvdA	D66, PvdA, CDA
2003	GL	D66, PvdA, VVD, SP			PvdA	
2006	GL, SP	D66, GL, PvdA, VVD, SP, CDA		GL, SP	PvdA	PvdA

The table demonstrates the ‘career’ of the childcare solution in the Netherlands. In the 1970 and 80s it has been coupled mostly to the problem of gender inequality (F1). Backed up initially by feminist groups and progressive political parties, throughout the 1980s this policy frame gained popularity amongst most political actors, and reached a peak in 1989 when all major political parties mentioned it in their party manifestos.

The support then shifted to a new policy frame. With the emergence of the debate about the reform of the welfare state in the 1980s the childcare solution received a new interpretation. It started to be regarded as an adequate tool to boost the levels of female labour market participation (F2). This interpretation received popularity among all political parties in the 1980s and the 1990s (revealed by the densely populated column of the table above), and crucially, was supported by all main policy actors outside Parliament (e.g. the Social Partners – see below).

The demography policy frame (F3) does not appear in any of the manifestos, and generally is not present in the Dutch discourse on childcare (unlike in Germany, where it is one of the leading policy justifications).

The social exclusion frame (F4) is supported by all political parties as all of them mention this interpretation in various manifestos. Nevertheless, this is definitely not the engine or the leading interpretation of childcare in the Dutch policy discourse because in none of the election years there was a majority (i.e. a winning coalition) which stood behind this frame.

The interpretations of childcare provision as an early educational tool (F5) and as a means to integrate migrants (F6) receive only limited support in the Dutch policy debate. This is hardly surprising given these are relatively new interpretations. Moreover, the analysis clearly demonstrates that so far they have been the ‘hobby horses’ of particular political formations: PvdA is a long-term proponent of F5, while F6 receives support from CDA and PvdA. All in all, similarly to the social exclusion frame (F4), these two frames are definitely not the driving interpretations of the Dutch childcare policy discourse.

The above analysis confirms the observation that the gender inequality and the competitiveness frames are the most prominent legitimations of public childcare provision in the Netherlands. It comes as no surprise therefore that these two dominate also the actual policy discourses (as reflected in the coalition agreements). The rest of the section will zoom into each of these two policy frames and will analyse the coalition that supported it. It will then embark on an analysis as to why the competitiveness frame (F2) became core of the governmental policy (as does to the present day) while the gender equality frame (F1) was not able to mobilize public policy support.

The “Gender Equality” Coalition

The gender equality policy frame (F1) dominated the emerging discourse on the provision of out-of-home childcare during the 1970 and 1980s. Arguably, the whole debate about the public support of childcare began due to the link between the emancipation (that peaked in these decades) and the childcare service. Prior to that childcare policy did not exist: the government only supported the few childcare facilities in the country as a welfare measure aimed at ‘failing’ families.

When the problem of ‘gender inequality’ became a pressing societal issue in the 1970s, the ‘solution’ of childcare was articulated firstly by feminist groups (e.g. ManVrouwMatschappij and Dolle Mina) and then was quickly picked up also by the PvdA and the FNV trade union. Also the VVD mentions this policy frame in its party manifesto of 1971. In the mid-1970s the D66 joins the coalition around F1 as well. During the 1980s the CDA also articulates the gender equality policy frame in its party manifestos. Basically, by the mid- 1980s all major policy actors express support for this policy frame. Nevertheless, it never managed to result in concrete policy actions and initiatives, and after the peak of support in 1989 it comes back in the discourses of only a few political parties. Instead, the competitiveness policy frame takes over the dominant place in the Dutch childcare policy discourse.

The “Competitiveness” Coalition

The emergence of this policy frame has to be understood against the neoliberal economic paradigm shift of the 1980s that took place in the Dutch ‘master discourse’ on the reform of the welfare state and on the enhancement of the competitive profile of the Dutch economy. According to this discourse the housewives were ‘wasted human capital’, an untapped potential to which the economy could and should resort in order to accomplish the needed reforms.

The PvdA, in its party manifesto of 1982, was the first political party to articulate that investing in childcare facilities will increase the female labour market participation. In 1986 it was joined by the VVD. By 1989 all the five major political parties in the Netherlands maintained that increased provision of childcare facilities would boost the participation of women, and therefore also the economic reform of the country and its competitiveness. Moreover, the same view was shared by the Social Partners, and crucially this time (unlike the gender equality frame) also the Employers insisted on enlarging the capacity of childcare facilities. Thus, backed by all actors in the policy community, in 1989 the first Measure on the Stimulation of Childcare (1990-1993) was approved by the Parliament. The coalition around the competitiveness frame is maintained to the present day and has the dominant position vis-a-vis the other five ‘problems’ that call for the childcare solution.

6. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the above that the policy actors were not prepared to invest in enlarging the Dutch childcare capacities due to emancipation concerns alone. In contrast to the gender equality frame (F1) that remained a rather ‘empty’ rhetorical effort, the competitiveness frame (F2) mobilised all major political parties and eventually resulted in policy measures that within a decade gave birth to a full-fledged new policy field on childcare facilities stimulation. How can this finding be accounted for? Why did the ideas behind F2 managed to materialise in policy actions, while those behind F1 did not?

To begin with, the size of the coalition that backed the competitiveness frame was bigger. Basically all political parties and the Social Partners supported it. Crucially, the pro-F2 coalition contained the Employers who were prepared to finance the enlargement of the childcare facilities as long as this would result in greater labour supply. The Dutch businesses did not mind paying for keeping (or for attracting) women on the labour market (interview 3 and 12). They would not (and have not done so) for the abstract ideal of gender equality alone.

Furthermore, gender equality was not a mobilising enough frame even for the women’s organizations. The reason for that is that the majority of the Dutch women were prepared to give up their employment and career ambitions for the right upbringing of their children. Undoubtedly, in this ‘sacrifice’ cultural believes played a substantial role. As revealed in section 4, emancipation may have dismantled the housewife ideal and the breadwinner model

in the country, but has only moderately affected the mothering ideal transforming it in a 'parental sharing' ideal for children's upbringing. Given this background, it is not surprising that the 'gender equality' frame never led to concrete policy actions.

Conversely, the competitiveness frame (F2) was a strong motivator. When female labour market participation became a reform objective during the 1980s it was evident that this goal could only be attained if a viable solution was found to the reconciliation dilemma. Among all conceivable solutions to this problem, childcare provided the best "fit" to the discourse of full labour market participation. Alternative solutions to the work/care dilemma (e.g. leave schemes, part-time work, fiscal measures/ transfers, welfare allowances) either burden the fiscal pot or leave labour force capacities untapped. It is only childcare that at the same time allows women (parents) to work, and moreover creates new jobs (in the care sector). This unique 'fit' between the demands of the normative environment (activation, participation, fiscal discipline) and the capacity of childcare as a policy solution to match them accounts for the materialisation of this policy frame into actual policy actions. Next to these ideational reasons, the political process i.e. the Dutch electoral alternations clearly indicate why childcare facility growth stimulation in the Netherlands only began in 1989 (and not earlier or later).

Due to the domination of the CDA in all cabinets until the end of the 1980s, childcare was never high on the public policy agenda. Given the views on childcare of this political party it is not surprising that few policy actions took place during the mandates of the CDA. The Christian-Democrats seem to have acted as a 'gatekeeper' (interview 14) in the field of childcare policy. Real boost and steps forward this policy achieved only when the CDA was in opposition or in coalition with a strong supporter of childcare facilities development. This is precisely the case as of 1989 onwards. After the 30 year 'reign of the CDA' – the period between 1958 and 1989 when with the exception of the 1973 cabinet the CDA was the leading political force of the country in 1989 the CDA formed a governing coalition with the PvdA. Given that for the PvdA the issue of childcare was very important since the 1970s this cabinet was bound to undertake serious commitment toward childcare. Throughout the rest of the 1990s PvdA kept its top decision-making position, and led two consecutive cabinets (the Kok I and II coalition governments also known as "Purple I and II"). Naturally, they continued supporting the growth of childcare facilities in the country. By the time the PvdA handed in the steering wheel back to the CDA in 1998 the Netherlands had already an irreversible policy commitment to boosting the childcare infrastructure. Moreover, important cultural changes have taken place - the Dutch women have joined in high number the labour market and out-of-home caring has become acceptable (see section 4). Furthermore, there was a huge societal need and demand for continuation of the taken course of action exemplified by the long waiting lists at the existing crèches. Hence, the new government could not do anything but continue the adopted line. And it did.

In this paper the process of Dutch childcare policy-making was investigated and the positions of the main policy actors were identified. It was discovered that the PvdA, D66,

FNV, VNO (the pro-childcare coalition) were pushing the issue higher on the governmental agenda, and at the times when the PvdA and D66 were in a position to directly influence policies (the periods when they were in the cabinet) the policy field experienced a boost of public support. Most of the domestic political parties and the Social Partners have adopted F2 as the leading policy frame in their discourses already in the 1980s. In this way they formed a clear coalition around F2 (all policy actors and the micro-policy frame analysis confirmed this finding). The overall conclusion derived from this study is that due to the unity the competitiveness policy frame installs (F2), such enormous progress with regard to the stimulation of formal childcare is observed in the country in the period 1998-2008.

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