



Sustainability and transformation in European Social Policy

Valencia 8-10 September 2011

9th Annual ESPAnet Conference **Sustainability and transformation in European Social Policy**

Valencia, 8-10 September 2011

Stream 4: Agency and social policy transformation: bringing actors back in to the research on social policy

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Shifting ground: The diffusion of gender knowledge in local childcare policies

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Paper for the 9th ESPAnet Annual Conference, 8.-11.09.2011, University of Valencia

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Abstract

Recently, public childcare for children under the age of three has been expanded considerably in different European welfare states, among them the U.K., Sweden and Germany. There is much debate on the drivers of these reforms on the EU and national level, highlighting socio-economic developments, the role of women's movements, employers' interests, and the diffusion of discourses on social investment that gradually replaced discourses on gender equality at EU level. However, little is known so far on the – individual as well as collective – actors and ideas that promote the implementation of these policies on a local level. In order to identify and explain different national and local trajectories and outcomes of the implementation of childcare policies, the paper presents a research design for comparative case studies in Germany, the U.K. and Sweden.

The following questions will be tackled: 1. Who are the promoters of this policy on the local level and what are their motives? Do individual actors attached to the women's movement or employers and their organizations play any role? 2. What kind of ideas do the promoters of public childcare refer to? It is assumed that in order to support an expansion of public childcare, actors must refer to non-traditional ideas on gender and gender relations. However, while both the discourse on gender equality and on social investment provide such non-traditional ideas, their implications for the implementation of childcare policies might be quite

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different. 3. What kind of conflicts and alliances can be identified in the local policy arena, and whose ideas eventually are fed into the local policy process? 4. Does this imply diffusion, change or even the disappearance of ideas of gender equality that once have been promoted by women's movements?

Key words: women's movement, gender, social policy, childcare

Acknowledgements: This research project was conceived as part of an interdisciplinary research group on 'Moving Transformations' ('Bewegte Transformationen') at the Zentrum für Gender Studies und feministische Zukunftsforschung of the Philipps-Universität Marburg. Thanks to all colleagues from the gender centre for helpful comments! Seed money to apply for a larger research grant for this project will be provided by the Hessisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst from Okt. 2011-März 2012.

1. Introduction: the expansion of childcare in the U.K., Sweden and Germany

Recently, policies for early childhood education and care (ECEC) have been expanded considerably in different European welfare states, among them Sweden, the U.K., and Germany (Bahle 2009) – countries that according to Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) belong to different welfare regimes. On a national level, the three countries pursued different policy paths: In *Sweden* as a social democratic welfare state, the provision of high quality public childcare has been a high priority since the increase of female labour force participation in the 1960s and 70s. In 1995, parents were granted a legal right to public childcare after the first birthday of their child (Neumann 2009). While working parents, lone parents, immigrant or low-income families originally were given priority, since 2001 children of unemployed parents are guaranteed a place at least on a part-time basis. According to Bahle (2009: 35), Sweden raised its coverage rates for children under three to over 60% during the last years. The communities are the main providers of childcare services; after a period of de-centralisation the Swedish state returned to a re-regulation of childcare policies in recent years (Bergqvist/Nyberg 2002, Neumann 2009).

In the *U.K.*, for decades the supply as well as the quality of out-of-the home care for small children has been quite poor. Starting in 1997, the Labour government promoted the expansion of childcare (Randall 2002, Bahle 2009, Penn 2009). In 2006, parents were granted a right to childcare for 20 hours a week. While parents have to pay for nursery care, they are compensated at least partially by a child-care tax credit (Penn 2009). The recent growth of coverage rates for children under the age of three to over 20% is seen as a result of this policy change (Bahle 2009: 35). The governments' main strategies to expand childcare were de-centralisation and privatization. The local communities act solely as „providers of last resort“ (Penn 2009: 122), while private and third sector providers have priority. Through this policy the importance of private providers (among them multinational companies and chains that are listed on the stock market) increased (Penn 2009).

In *Germany*, the expansion of public childcare was part and parcel of a new social investment approach (Leitner 2008, Henninger/von Wahl 2010). The red-green government (1998-2005) made the first steps to overcome the long-standing modernisation deficit of (West) German family policy (Gottschall/Bird 2003, Henninger et al. 2008) by initiating a public debate on 'sustainable' family policy. The new policy was put into practice under the following great coalition government (2005-2009). In 2005, a law was passed that promoted an expansion of childcare for children under three. In 2008, another reform was dedicated to meet the childcare quota of 33% for all under three-year-olds earmarked by the EU in 2013, drawing on an expansion of public childcare, an increase of the number of self-employed child-minders, and on improved subsidies for private service providers.

These national policies have to be implemented in quite diverse local settings. In Germany, the states are responsible for the legal regulation of childcare; spending, quality standards, and provision (e.g. opening hours) differ widely (Bock-Famulla/Große-Wöhrmann 2010). While on national average the childcare quota for under three year olds reached 23% in 2010, there are marked differences between the east German communities, where generally about 50% of this cohort are enrolled in public childcare, and Western Germany where childcare quotas linger

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mostly between 5 and 15% (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2010). German communities have the legal right to raise fees for public services (or to decide not to do so), leading to huge differences in the fees parents have to pay for childcare (Kreyenfeld 2004). Empirical evidence for geographic disparities in the provision of public childcare also exists for Sweden and the U.K., where local communities became more leverage in ECEC policies during the de-centralisation processes in the last decades (Penn 2009, Neumann 2009). In Sweden, for example, public day care is generally more common in cities than in rural areas, where children are cared for at home; however, in rural Northern Sweden public childcare is quite popular (Neumann 2009: 164).

Also, in all three countries the local welfare mix might differ from patterns predicted by the national welfare regime. The recent expansion of childcare in Germany is in itself a path-breaking development, given the high degree of familiarization in Germany as a conservative welfare regime (Henninger et al. 2008). On a local level, the welfare mix might be dominated by third-sector providers, as in Frankfurt (Riedel 2009) – or, e.g. in the city of Kassel, by private enterprises whose market conditions have been enhanced by recent reforms. In Sweden, in contrast to the dominance of communal providers that is predicted by the national welfare regime after the introduction of a right to childcare private providers gained leverage in some communities, e.g. in the suburbs of Stockholm (Mahon 2005). While Penn (2009: 106) states that the recent expansion of childcare in the U.K. follows an overall logic of the marketplace, there still seems to be leeway for feminist activists to influence local childcare policies (Ball/Charles 2005).

While there is much debate on the drivers of the recent ECEC reforms on the EU and national level, there has not been much research on local childcare policies so far. The aim of this paper is to contribute to this evolving strand of research, focusing on the local implementation of recent national reforms in childcare policies in Germany, the U.K. and Sweden. The first part of the paper provides an overview on theoretical explanations for the expansion of childcare on a national and a local level. Based on this overview, I argue that actors and ideas are the most important drivers for the current expansion of childcare in local communities. The existing literature identifies activists from the women's movement, local employers and private companies that provide childcare as a marketized service as the main promoters of the current expansion of childcare. In order to support this policy, political actors must refer to non-traditional ideas on gender and gender relations. Therefore, the second part of the paper introduces the analytical concept of gender knowledge that allows investigating individual actors' ideas on gender and their sources empirically. While both the discourse on gender equality stemming from the second wave of the women's movement and the newer social investment discourse stemming from the EU gender machinery provide sources of non-traditional ideas on gender, their implications for the implementation of childcare policies might be quite different. The last part of the paper presents the research design for a planned empirical study of local childcare policies in Germany, the U.K. and Sweden.

2. Theoretical explanations: the importance of actors and ideas

Recently, there is much debate on the drivers of the current ECEC reforms on the EU and national level. Drawing on the established schools of welfare state research, students of family

policy either claim that *socio-economic transformations* bring about new social risks that trigger an expansion of reconciliation policies. Alternatively, others argue that the power resources or the political positions of *collective political actors*, such as national women's movements or political parties, are the main drivers of the expansion of childcare, while *institutionalists* remind us that the policy legacies of the national institutional setting create path dependencies for the recent reforms. Some authors also claim that the expansion of national childcare policies can be explained by the intervention of supranational institutions such as the EU. Others point to the power of *ideas* – either in form of ideologies of gender and the family that influence national gender regimes or in the form of new discourses on social investment.

By contrast, the literature on local childcare policies is quite sparse. Authors argue that local policy trajectories are influenced on the one hand by political factors, such as voters' preferences and the (partisan) composition of local policy networks. Moreover, local women's movement activists are regarded as promoters of this policy. However, little is known so far how ideas and discourses that are prevalent on the (trans)national level are mediated in local policy networks; nor are there consistent explanations for variations in the local welfare mix that seem to contradict national welfare regimes.

2.1 Setting the childcare agenda: the importance of national women's movements

In industrialized western countries, national women's movements played an important role in putting childcare on the political agenda as well as in the process of its institutionalization. According to Bahle (2009), the member states of the European Union (EU) experienced two historical periods characterized by a strong expansion of public childcare: First, the introduction of pre-schools in the 19th century in the context of nation building and industrialization and second, the expansion of childcare in the context of the transition to the service economy starting in the 1970s. Bahle claims that while in the early period the conflict between the church and the state as well as the class conflict were the main drivers for the introduction of public childcare, in the second period women's movements and state policies were the main drivers of its expansion. However, historical research in gender studies and in pedagogy shows that already the first wave of the women's movement in the 19th century played an important role for the institutionalization of childcare as a female profession. In Germany, the professionalization of childcare was strongly promoted by the conservative wing of the women's movement used the concept of 'spiritual motherhood' as an asset in a struggle for jobs, power and opportunities for professional development (Rabe-Kleeberg 2009). A similar development can be observed in the U.K., where the professionalization of 'mothering' was seen as offering new career opportunities for middle class women (Penn 2009).

Second wave feminism brought the question of public childcare back to the political agenda in the late 1960s. A sufficient, socially inclusive and affordable supply of childcare was considered as a precondition of female emancipation – not only enabling women's entry into the labour market, but also more comprehensively their entry into the public domain. However, the political strategies of second wave feminism did not only aim towards an access of women into a society that was conceived as deeply unjust and patriarchal. At least in its early years, the women's movement shared with the New Left the claim to transform the existing political

order (Holland-Cunz 2003, Fraser 2009). The 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of self-help projects as well as of experiments with alternative forms of living and education (Baader 2008a, Lenz 2009). But national women's movements also addressed political demands towards the state. Their protagonists expected public childcare to soften social inequalities as well as to provide high quality employment in the service economy (Banaszak et al. 2003, Mahon 2005, Baader 2008b).

However, the success of these political demands differed considerably on a national level. In the U.K., where in the early 1960s a committed mother had set up a national campaign to encourage middle class housewives to start their own playgroups on a voluntary basis, Penn (2009: 116) observes an "uncomfortable alliance between those pressing for better state provision and those advocating self-help". In 1980, British feminists launched a national childcare campaign, calling for a better supply of state funded childcare; one of its' outcomes was the introduction of community nurseries in the Greater London area. However, the marketization of care under the Thatcher and Major government put an end to these efforts (Penn 2009). The cross-class mobilisation for an expansion of public childcare caused by the *Swedish* women's movement in the 1970s occurred in a social-democratic welfare state with a strong orientation on equality that considered the expansion of social services as a strategy to buffer the transformation from a male breadwinner- towards a dual earner model. In this context, the Swedish women's movement could forge a political alliance with social democrats and the labour unions (Naumann 2005). The *West German* women's movement did not succeed to mobilize political support for the expansion of public childcare in the 1960s and 70s. Naumann (2005) explains this with the movements' origin in the left-wing students' movement of the 1960s. Both movements were characterized by a transformative political orientation and scepticism towards the state. With the institutionalisation of equal opportunity policies in the 1980s the autonomous wing of the West German women's movement lost political ground (Holland-Cunz 2003). In some larger university cities with a strong women's movement, such as Frankfurt/Main and Berlin, parents' cooperatives could establish themselves as accredited providers of public childcare (Schmid 2008, Riedel 2009). But in most communities equal opportunity officers as well as feminists continued to campaign for an expansion of public childcare – an effort that proved to be vain in a conservative welfare state with a strong male breadwinner model (Lewis/Ostner 1994), where for decades none of the large political parties (including the social democrats) promoted an expansion of public childcare (Gerlach 2004, Ostner 2006). The process of re-unification at the beginning of the 1990ies anticipated a new area: now, the West-German male-breadwinner model was confronted with the dual-earner model established in the GDR (Dölling 2001). Moreover, the EU put pressure on its member states to promote the expansion of public childcare.

2.2 Recent reforms: new political actors and changing discourses

While some authors point to the importance of second-wave feminism for the expansion period starting in the 1970ies (Bahle 2009, Naumann 2005, Mahon 2005), the recent expansion of childcare policies is not considered to be the result of the long-standing claims of national women's movements. Rather, in spite of their substantive effects and the continuity of a manifold feminist infrastructure on a local level (e.g. Holland-Cunz 2003, Gerhard 2008, Lenz 2009), national women's movements seem to have lost

momentum during the last decades. For Germany, academic commentators concede that the women's movements' potential for public mass mobilisation has declined somewhat during the last years (Lenz 2009); others argue this is due to a process of successful institutionalization that was accompanied by a weakening of the movements' original transformative orientation (Holland-Cunz 2003). From a comparative perspective, Banaszak et al. (2003) argue that the moderation of national women's movements in the last decades runs parallel to changes in state policies that offered opportunities as well as barriers to social movements. In contrast to this mixed view, Nancy Fraser (2009) draws a critical conclusion: She argues that the diffusion of cultural attitudes that originate from second wave feminism legitimated a neoliberal transformation of capitalism that is opposed to feminist ideas of social justice.

Rather, socio-economic transformations, new constellations of actors and new ideas and discourses are considered to be the drivers of recent reforms in ECEC policies. The rising demand for public childcare since the 1970s is explained with processes of socio-economic change, such as women's rising levels of qualification, an increase of female labour market participation, and rising numbers of non-traditional families, that occurred in the context of a transformation from Fordism to Post-Fordism, with an increase in knowledge-based service sector employment and a growing demand for highly qualified professional workers (Mahon 2005, Bahle 2009, Mosimann/Giger 2008). Some researchers claim that these socio-economic transformations bring about new social risks (Esping-Andersen 1999, Bonoli 2005), such as problems of reconciliation of work and family. Bonoli (2005) argues that in the face of an ageing society and due to political opposition against immigration, conservative welfare states in particular are under pressure to recruit new potential workers. Bonoli supposes active labour market and reconciliation policies to be in the interest of employers as they increase the female labour force potential. From this perspective, employers are considered as promoters of an expansion of childcare facilities.¹

Moreover, during the last decade the European Union gained importance as a supranational political actor in family policy (Morgan/Zippel 2003, Haas 2003). In 2000, the European Union member states met in Lisbon and agreed to raise the employment rate of women to 60%. Two years later, at a meeting in Barcelona, a goal was established to provide sufficient childcare facilities for 90% of children over 3 years old and 33% of children under 3 years old. Both goals were supposed to be reached by 2010. As Jenson (2008) criticizes, in this process the European social policy lost its focus on gender equality during the last years. Rather, reconciliation policies are legitimated with their positive effect on human capital; in the short run, they are conceived to enhance the female labour force participation, in the long run, they are supposed to increase the qualification level and the labour force participation of the future generation.

With this so-called social investment approach, the EU follows the recommendations of academic advisers such as Gøsta Esping-Andersen (2002). The concept of 'sustainable family policy' is a German variation of this approach. It was implemented with political support from

¹ For empirical accounts of NSR policies in Germany, see Häusermann 2006 and Seeleib-Kaiser/Fleckenstein 2009.

the employers (Henninger/von Wahl 2010). Empirical evidence for the growing importance of employers for German reconciliation policy also can be found in the prevalence of local 'alliances for the family' (Klammer/Letablier 2008) and in an increase of firm-level reconciliation measures (Seeleib-Kaiser/Fleckenstein 2009). In contrast to liberal welfare states, the growing importance of private providers is quite a new phenomenon in Germany (GEW 2008)² – regardless of an irregular market for childcare services. Due to the shortage of public care services, families draw (amongst other solutions) on au-pairs and irregular migrants (Lutz/Palenga-Möllenbeck 2010). On the regular market, so far public and third sector providers were given an advantage through public subsidies. While there is empirical evidence for a growing differentiation of providers (Riedel 2009: 141), in 2009 private companies still made up a tiny minority of 1.6% of all providers (or 820 childcare institutions, among them 95 firms offering day care for their employees), even when compared to the number of parents' cooperatives (8.7% or 4.370).³ However, this could change with the 'Child-Promotion-Law' (Kinderförderungsgesetz, short KiFöG) that was passed in 2008. With the objective to improve the availability of public childcare, the law now grants private providers even access to public subsidies. Moreover, it aims at a marked increase of self-employed childminders – thus also increasing the marketization of childcare, at the cost of worsening labour conditions for those employed in this sector (Schritt/Zenning 2010).

It can be assumed that not all local political actors share the objectives of the expansion of childcare in the face of dwindling public resources, last not least caused by the repercussions of the recent financial crisis. At the same time, the new policy might be welcomed by some of the local activists and institutions. Besides the new actors identified by recent research (employers, private service providers) at a local level there still might be actors with a background in the women's movement, such as equal opportunity officers, feminist projects and 'femocrats' (feminist bureaucrats) in political parties, labour unions and public administration.

Besides the quantitative increase of the childcare quota, questions of quality are at issue. Do opening hours allow a dual earner partnership for both parents, or are they conceived as half-day solution, thus promoting a slightly modernized variant of a male breadwinner model with (short) part-time work for mothers? Do childcare fees allow the enrolment of the children of poor families? Do the new jobs created by the expansion of childcare offer decent work for those employed in this (female dominated) labour market segment? A central claim of this research is that decisions on these and related issues are deeply influenced by local actors' political positions as well as by their ideas on gender, their gendered norms and role expectations.

Research on local childcare policies claims that local actors and their preferences might be important drivers of an expansion of childcare, e.g. voters' preferences (Noailly/Visser 2009)

² See Brennan (2007) for Australia, Penn (2009) for the U.K. and Noailly/Visser (2009) for the Netherlands.

³ According to official statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt 2009), among the 50.299 providers 34.3% (17.256) belonged to the public service, 15.3% (7.703) were non-religious third sector organisations, 35.6% (17.924) religious organisations, 13.1% (6.596) others (among these parents' cooperatives) and 1.6% (820) private enterprises.

and the (partisan) composition of local policy networks. Especially the strength of left parties alone (Noailly/Visser 2009) or in combination with a high degree of female political representation on the local level (Mosimann/Giger 2008) is considered to promote an expansion of public childcare. Moreover, local women's movement activists are regarded as promoters of this policy (Ball/Charles 2006, Mahon 2005).

Drawing on contrasting case studies in Toronto/Canada and Stockholm/Sweden, Mahon (2005) provides an in-depth analysis of local reform coalitions from the New Left and the women's movement that promoted an expansion of public childcare in both cities in the 1960s and 70s. Childcare was conceived as a public good that should be accessible for all citizens at a high quality and at affordable prices – and offer good working conditions for those employed in this sector. Resistance against this concept came from conservative parties who argued for family care and from liberals arguing for market based solutions. Confronted with a nation-wide austerity policy, Toronto was forced to reduce the supply of public childcare and to lower its quality standards in the 1990s. Stockholm reacted to the nation-wide introduction of a right to childcare in 1995 with the admission of private providers to meet the growing demand. Thus, both cities had to forsake their former orientation on social inclusion and high quality at least partially.

A study on the implementation of the recent expansion of childcare in Germany based on case studies in communities with a high expansion rate (among them Frankfurt/Main) analyses the governance structures in local policy networks (Riedel 2009). The four communities under research pursued different policy paths: In contrast to other communities, in Frankfurt third-sector organisations (mostly parents' cooperatives who founded a strong umbrella organisation) were the draft-horse of the childcare expansion. This stems from the strong tradition of parents' cooperatives in Frankfurt, which was one of the centres of the West German women's movement.

On the other hand, local political actors bring their ideas on gender, gendered norms and role expectations into the play. National ideologies on the family, motherhood and childhood are considered to influence the emergence of national gender regimes (Pfau-Effinger 2004) or childcare regimes (Veil 2003). However, gendered norms do not only differ at a national, but also on a regional level (Duncan/Smith 2001, Sackmann/Häussermann 1994, Klenner 2009). Using data from referenda on reform bills, Mosimann/Giger (2008) show that dominant regional ideas on the family influence the expansion of childcare: where gender norms are more traditional, there is less support for an expansion.

3. The diffusion of (anti-) hegemonic gender knowledge in local childcare policies

Based on the research reviewed above, I argue that actors and ideas are the most important drivers for the current expansion of childcare in local communities. The existing literature identifies activists from the women's movement, local employers and private companies that provide childcare as a marketized service as the main promoters of the current expansion of childcare. In order to support this policy, political actors must refer to non-traditional ideas on gender and gender relations. While both the discourse on gender equality stemming from the second wave of the women's movement and the newer social investment discourse stemming from the EU gender machinery provide sources of non-traditional ideas on gender, their

implications for the implementation of childcare policies might be quite different. Moreover, it is not clear how local political actors refer to these discourses. Therefore, the next part of the paper introduces the analytical concept of gender knowledge. This concept was developed by Irene Dölling and her team to investigate individual actors' ideas on gender empirically.

Drawing on Bourdieu, Dölling (2005: 49) conceives gender knowledge as a stock of structured patterns of facts, connections between and interpretations of these facts that are biographically constructed and assembled from different sources. Gender knowledge consists of three forms of knowledge: 1. Every day-knowledge that is pre-reflexive and dominated by cultural stereotypes; 2. Expert knowledge, which is created in institutions and oscillates between affirmation and the critique of gender relations; 3. Popular, (anti-)hegemonic knowledge that is created e.g. by the media and by social movements. Thus, individual gender knowledge is to a high degree pre-reflexive, but also includes cognitive, reflexive elements that make it accessible for change. Dölling supposes that individual strategies of action in a specific social field are influenced by actors' expectations of wins and losses for their position in this field. Thus, connecting individual and field specific knowledge can explain why certain forms of gender knowledge become dominant in a certain field (Dölling 2005: 54). In-depth, narrative interviews that include a biographical focus as well as questions on the empirical field under research can generate data for the reconstruction of idiosyncratic as well as field specific patterns of gender knowledge.

The analytical concept developed by Dölling et al. proved to be helpful for the analysis of gendered policies in two empirical studies: Andresen et al. (2003) analyzed the gendered outcomes of career promotion policies in a local administration, Weinkopf et al. (2009) studied the gendered implementation of the new German policies for the long-term unemployed. Notwithstanding the gendered outcomes of both policies under research, the interview partners presumed that their own work practice as well as their organisations' approach was universal and gender-neutral. The authors explain this discrepancy with the dominance of field specific knowledge that remained uncontested in both organisations.

This might be different in local policy networks, which include actors with a more diverse spectrum of gender knowledge. In our research, local policy networks in different national settings are conceived as an arena where gender knowledge is constructed and put into practice collectively. This process is influenced by national as well as by regionally situated gender ideologies. Also, in decisions on childcare policies the importance of gender might be somewhat more obvious for individual actors as in the research reported above. Proponents of a traditional male breadwinner model probably do not support an expansion of childcare services for small children. Thus, it can be supposed that the promoters of such a policy are adherents of modernized variants of gender knowledge. Potential sources of this modernized gender knowledge are the women's movement, whose activists might still be part of local policy networks, and expert knowledge that is produced in institutionalized contexts, e.g. the social investment discourse.

4. Research design and methodology

Thus, not only the local welfare mix and the composition of policy networks on a community level have to be assessed empirically. It also is an empirical question what kind of gender

knowledge local actors apply when it comes to political debates and decisions on childcare policies. In order to identify and explain different local trajectories and outcomes of the current expansion of childcare, I plan a comparative study with local case studies in Germany, the U.K. and Sweden. In this research, the following research questions shall be tackled:

1. **Actors:** Who are the promoters of an expansion of childcare on the local level and what are their motives? Do individual actors attached to the women's movement or employers and their organizations play any role? And how can local and national differences in the composition of policy networks be explained?
2. **Ideas:** To what kind of gender knowledge do the promoters of public childcare refer? How is this knowledge influenced by national or regional gender regimes, and what role do feminist claims or discourses on social investment play as a source of (anti-)hegemonic knowledge?
3. **Policy Process:** What kind of conflicts and alliances can be identified in the local policy arena, and whose ideas eventually are fed into the local policy process?
4. **Effects of the women's movement:** Does this imply diffusion, change or even the disappearance of ideas of gender equality that have been promoted by second wave feminism?

To select cases in *Sweden* and in the *U.K.*, due to the sparse literature on this field of research, I plan to draw on data on local childcare quota and to conduct interviews with experts on national childcare policies. For *Germany*, the case study design is already laid out: As the legal framework differs considerably between the German Leander, we decided to focus on three cities in Hessen. Hessen is one of those German regions where the expansion of childcare has been most dynamic during the last years (Bock-Famulla/Große-Wöhrmann 2010). Supposing that in city centres the demand for public childcare is higher (Noailly/Visser 2009, Mosimann/Giger 2008), and considering that the degree of feminist mobilisation was highest in university cities (Holland-Cunz 2003), we focus on three university cities (Frankfurt, Marburg, Kassel). We suppose that in these cities, there is still an infrastructure and local networks that were shaped by the women's movement. Thus, women's movements activists might be part of local networks on childcare policy.

While all three cities increased their childcare quota for under three-year-olds, Marburg currently has the highest quota among all Hessian cities and communities (31.4%), Frankfurt ranks midway with 24.1%, and Kassel in the lower third with 18.9%. Besides these quantitative differences, there are also indicators that local actors pursue different policy paths.⁴ Moreover, the composition of local policy networks differs: Frankfurt has been one of the centres of the West German women's movement. Parents' cooperatives that had their origin in the social

⁴ Frankfurt increased its childcare quota from 21.6% (2009) to 24.1% (2010), among these 21.3% in daycare institutions and 2.8% with childminders. Kassel raised the quota from 15.2% to 18.9%, among these 14% in daycare centers and about 5% with childminders. By contrast, Marburg relied mainly on with childminders (13.1% of places in contrast to 18.5% in institutions) to achieve an increase from 27.7% (2009) to 31.5% (2010) (www.statistik-hessen.de/themenauswahl/gesundheitswesen-soziales/regionaldaten/kinder-unter-3-jahren-in-tageseinrichtungen/index.html, Zugriff 18.11.2010).

movements of the 1960s and 70s still do play an important role in the local policy network, while private providers are of marginal importance (Riedel 2009). By contrast, in Marburg local employers and in Kassel an expanding private provider are among the promoters of the new policy.

To explore the field in the local case studies, in a first step we will analyse media coverage on local childcare policies. The aim of this step is to reconstruct the policy process, to identify relevant actors, their political positions and conflicts as well as alliances in the local policy arena. In a next step, we will conduct a policy analysis of the local policy networks, drawing on official documents that were produced during the policy process as well as on narrative interviews with key promoters of the new policy. The interviews will include a biographical focus as well as questions on the local policy field in order to generate data for a reconstruction of actors' idiosyncratic as well as field specific gender knowledge. The interview data will be analysed using a combination of content analysis (Meuser/Nagel 1991) and hermeneutic sequence analysis (Hitzler et al. 1999). For an interpretation of the interview data from Sweden and the U.K. we plan workshops together with local experts. The objective of this step of research is to reconstruct and explain the locally dominant policy paths.

With this comparative research, I hope to contribute to the evolving literature on local childcare policies and shed some light on the causes of the local variations in terms of service provision as well as in terms of local welfare mixes that seem to prevail under the umbrella of seemingly homogeneous national welfare and gender regimes.

4. References

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