National policies, local policies and women’s right to work

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INTRODUCTION

This comparative study analyses attitudes concerning social policies among local politicians with respect to gender equality and women’s access to paid work. The purpose of this study is to investigate if and how local politicians in the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, and Sweden define local and national policy needs that support gender equality in terms of improvements that further female economic independence. Two other components of gender equality, female political representation and male right to take part in family care responsibilities and household duties are treated briefly in connection to the empirical results. The countries were selected because of their different approaches and policies that support individual economic autonomy, female labour market participation, and social and family policies directed at public and/or private childcare and elderly care responsibilities. Undoubtedly the influence of labour market policies, social policies, family policies, and tax legislation greatly influence men and women’s work opportunities and indeed explain a considerable part of the national differences in women’s labour market behaviour and in the shaping of men and women’s life choices and gender inequalities. This is also reflected in intensified national and international debates regarding welfare policies that enable women to gain their individual social citizenship rights and in national policies aiming to support female labour market participation. It has been argued that just as national policies differ between countries, geographical location and local social political and economic structures make a difference (Duncan 1998, Forsberg 1998, O’Reilly and Fagan 1998, Sackmann 1998, Crompton 1999). Local policies and practices in a country may vary depending on local labour market structures, political influence, historical traditions, and cultural traditions and experiences. Although national value orientations and institutional settings are important for the individual, local opportunity structures and social contexts constitute an even stronger force that influence individual choices and practices (Duncan and Pfau-Effinger 2000).

In the last ten years, feminist welfare state research has pointed out that women’s ability to become financially self-supporting and independent from men, who are traditionally seen as the main source of income in a family, is crucial if women are to reduce dependence and achieve greater economic and political equality with men. While female labour market participation

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1 Only Länder in the former Federal Republic of Germany, as composed before reunification, are included.
differs largely between countries, it has been shown that the relationship between the family and the level of female employment is embedded in a larger and quite complex context. In contrast to men, several specific factors—all connected to the construction of individual welfare state policies—strongly influence women’s participation in the labour market. The distribution of resources and responsibilities between the state, the market, and the family are all intimately connected with a woman’s choice to enter or remain in the labour market (Lewis 1994, 1997 and 1998, O’Reilly and Fagan 1998, Daly 2000). The relationship between paid work, unpaid work and welfare therefore becomes crucial (Taylor-Gooby 1991).

While men’s social rights historically derive from their labour market status, women have gained their rights through marriage or motherhood. Within a normative framework of responsibility and obligation women have been confirmed as (for the most part) caregivers whereas men are recognised as providers of financial and social security for the family. Due to the growth in unemployment and changing demographic patterns in the last ten years, most West European welfare states have reacted with both economic retrenchment and restructuring of public spending. Access to social rights increasingly has been linked to employment. As more women enter the labour market, the need for social services to help facilitate the combination of care responsibilities for children and elderly and employment for women has become evident. In social research, the care concept focuses on how paid and unpaid care is performed and how it is shared between the state, the market, and between men and women in families. Issues of care obligations and the cut-off points for entitlements to care are central in studies that examine the influence of gender on welfare regimes. Care is increasingly used as a category of analysis to measure degree of female autonomy and the degree of citizenship rights (Anttonen and Sipilä 1996, Lister 1997, Bettio and Prechal 1998, Bettio, Del Bono and Smith 1998, Lewis et al 1998, Daly and Lewis 2000). Care, as a social right, has also become a political issue. Elderly people’s, children’s, and disabled persons’ need for professional care and the close relationship between care responsibilities and women’s working patterns have been underlined. In Germany and Italy, the question of care responsibilities for children and elderly has largely been neglected or treated as a matter to be solved by the family. In the late 1960s, Swedish public care developed as a response to the rapidly increasing number of women in the work force.

The framing of welfare policies is set at the national level, reflecting both overall political ideologies and ideological and economic conflicts between social groups. Cross-national comparisons of welfare states and their effects
on gender have almost completely been conducted on a national scale. Results of such studies have gained some resonance in national and international policy making and since the mid 1990s most national policies in West European countries have included gender equality in the labour market. Gender equality and women’s labour market participation are largely normative issues and the practical realisation of most welfare and social policies is carried out at a local or semi-local level. State institutional arrangements may, in a variety of ways, support local governments in their obligations to offer welfare services to their citizens and the actual implementation of welfare policies. In the local political context the gendering effects of welfare policies are most real and visible and the fulfilment of policies, local or national, therefore also depend on attitudes among citizens, administrators, and local and regional politicians who may run ahead or lag behind national guidelines. However, as observed by Rostgaard and Fridberg, social services are characterised by their weak ties to social rights because of their “complex financial structure and an intricate assessment of need based on health, gender and family situation rather than being based on labour market attachment or contribution records” (1998, 12). Due to the decentralised distribution and local deliverance of social services, they usually vary substantially within nations (Kröger 1997, Trifiletti 1998, Millar 1999), which suggests that the local variations arise from differences in national policies and the division of responsibility between the national and the local political and administrative level. Depending on how the relations between the national and the local political and administrative level are regulated, local politicians face varying degrees of autonomy. Policy variations within countries and variations in female labour market participation rates are closely linked to local financial supplies, labour market structures, and differences in the normative understandings of female employment. For this reason, we expect to find different levels of political support for female employment on the local level. In addition, we expect to find different rationale for care services and different amounts of care services offered that are aimed to relieve individuals from care responsibilities.

In this study, local politicians responsible for social services in medium and large towns in Germany, Italy, and Sweden have been interviewed. The politicians were questioned about the social policies that relieved families from their care responsibilities and influenced women’s possibilities to increase their financial independence. In addition, they were questioned about political motives to reform social policies that would support increased gender equality. National patterns of female employment and variations in social policies and social services are accounted for and compared with
results from research on attitudes about gender relations and on shifts and variations in women’s, and to some extent men’s, work and family orientations. To capture signs of change or resistance in the local political comprehension of the increasing work orientation among women in combination with changing national policy directives, we make use of Pfau-Effinger’s (1998a, 1999a) concept of gender culture and gender order. Briefly, gender culture is defined as common assumptions about gender and the ‘desired’ or ‘normal’ division of labour between men and women. Gender order is defined as institutionalised norms within formal organisations. In addition, but partly out of focus for this study, Pfau-Effinger makes use of a third concept gender arrangement, which emphasises gender relations, social practices and social action as structured within the context of historically and nationally specific gender cultures and gender orders.

While the three countries represent different types of welfare regimes with different policy approaches concerning women and their assumed relationship to employment and family responsibilities, there are also significant differences in female employment levels and in attitudes concerning women’s labour market participation in each country. Due to changes in peoples’ attitudes and in their behaviours coupled with a clearer political articulation of gender issues and the identification of needs for changes in national welfare policies, we are interested in studying how these topics are treated at the local level. Assumptions about gender relations, and especially about women’s relation to paid work and components of its requirements, seem to be under reconsideration both at the national political level and at the individual level. This raises questions about political perception and conclusions drawn at the local political level. The main comparative goal is therefore to study how the process of value changes on different societal levels is perceived and conceptualised among local politicians. How are shifts in the political discourse and in attitudes and/or behaviour among the population in each nation viewed and dealt with? How do local politicians rationalise the relation between women’s employment and women, men, family, and care responsibilities? What do local politicians see as new objectives for public policies that improve women’s opportunities to achieve increased economic independence? Finally, using interviews and public material available from each town studied, the potential for increased gender equality at the local level in relation to national policies and in association with women’s autonomy and self determination is discussed.

The text is structured as follows. As a point of departure for this study, a short introduction provides an overview of current feminist theoretical
discussions about women and social citizenship rights. This is followed by an overview of contemporary feminist theories on women and the welfare state. Subsequently, the conceptual framework that intends to capture processes of social and cultural changes in relation to women and care is presented and the overall status of female employment in Germany, Italy, and Sweden is examined. The method for the interviews is described and the results from the interviews in each country begins with an introduction of each country and their welfare political history and their position in terms of facilities to encourage gender equality. Finally, the conclusions are presented and discussed.
SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP—SHOULD WOMEN ENTER THE WORK FORCE?

Citizenship issues and gender issues intersect when political preferences regarding if and how women should be addressed in social and labour market policies are approached. Among the main concepts in both political and academic welfare state debates is the definition and meaning of citizenship rights. Because “rights, obligations and virtues or participation” are key to understanding the concept of citizenship, it is an “essentially contested concept” (Bussemaker and Voet 1998; 280). In the post-war period, improved living standard, educational level and economic security allowed disadvantaged groups to exert their civil and political rights. While originally intended to diminish the power of market forces and social inequalities, social rights became increasingly connected to the inclusive dimension of citizenship by means of reducing general social risks and extending and enriching “the concrete substance of civilised life” (1998, 289). The definition of social citizenship and its discursive framework inherit assumptions about gender, gender relations, public responsibilities, and private responsibilities. Therefore, they are important, maybe even essential, for the conceptualisation of individual rights and obligations. Depending on national and specific historical traits and power relations in welfare states, the nature of women’s opportunities to participate in the labour market as a rewarding way to achieve social rights varies between nations and between different groups of women. In several countries, cultural, ideological, and constitutional preferences for traditional gender division of labour is coupled with a political ambivalence about the promotion of female labour market participation. While men’s labour market participation is homogenous, regardless of nationality and social grouping, for reasons often related to national policies and labour markets, women’s participation rates vary between countries and between different groups of women (OECD 1995a, 1995b, 1997). Because combining employment with marriage and family responsibilities is difficult, women also face obstacles achieving access to social citizenship rights. For this reason, this study focuses on women’s opportunities to chose between, or to combine, work and care responsibilities.

The main reason for the interest in social citizenship rights among feminist researchers is the obvious connection to the welfare state, civil and political rights, and the quality of these rights for men and women. In addition, the

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2 See also Lister (1997) who traces the phrase back to Gallie 1955-56.
importance of studying the ways in which gender and gendered subgroups, such as social class, age groups, sexual minorities, and ethnic groups, are affected by different welfare state regimes has been underlined. By adding the concepts of family and care responsibilities to the discussion of citizenship, it has become clear that women face different and unequal opportunities than men with respect to economic independence and access to social citizenship, autonomy over their bodies, and political participation. To shed light on aspects of gender issues with respect to social citizenship, this study examines the following themes: equality/difference, dependence/independence, employment/unpaid care, private/public, and family privacy/family support. Much emphasis has been put on the right to individual autonomy as a complement to decommodification, which is characterised by methods that reduce dependence on market forces (Esping-Andersen 1990). Several writers have proposed that autonomy, or independence, should be defined as individual freedom from compulsion to enter potentially oppressive relationships and the capacity to form an autonomous household without risking poverty and marginalisation (Orloff 1993, Hobson 1994, O’Connor 1996). Lister (1995) has picked the somewhat different concept of ‘defamilialism’ to express the same dimension of social citizenship. The notion of individual autonomy is key because it links social rights to citizenship and basic human rights (Lister 1997).

Today, women are predominantly expected to gain access to social rights through employment on formally equal terms with men. However, there are large national variations as to whether care responsibilities and care needs are regarded as social rights and on what grounds (see Millar and Warman 1996, Hantrais and Letablier 1996, Daily 1996). In the absence of laws guaranteeing equal distribution of income within a household and to reduce women’s economic dependence on a state or a male partner or spouse, the significance of access to paid work has been underlined (Hobson 1990, Orloff 1993, Fraser and Gordon 1994, Saraceno 1994, Trifiletti 1997). The divide between a public and a domestic (or intimate) sphere therefore concerns important questions for women as they are closely linked to citizenship rights. Whether women work or not, they usually continue to carry the main responsibilities for care and domestic work. To reduce female poverty risks, welfare states offer women economic independence to various degrees while simultaneously constructing their economic dependence on public benefits or assistance (Lister 1997). Important factors include the ways in which legal and policy lines are drawn between the state, the market,

3 See O’Connor 1996 and Lister 1997 for extensive overviews and discussions.
and family obligations. That is, questions concerning what are public matters versus what are private matters and how economic redistribution and services are emphasised.

From the point of view of theories and the politics of difference, criticisms have been raised against demands on equality. These criticisms contend that equality arguments emanate from a position of domination and neglect the values and the conditions under which devalued groups live. Within these approaches, women’s difference from men are accentuated, sometimes as fundamental, and the theoretical and political need for recognition of differences between women due to social status or geographical location are emphasised. The underlying idea is that differences in cultural values among different social groups should be respected and accounted for. In line with these arguments, the significance of women’s paid work to neutralise the influence of marriage is challenged. Women’s need for independence from male dominance might just as well be expressed as a citizenship right not to engage in the labour market (Knijn 1994, Sainsbury 1996, Lewis 1997). With the purpose to reduce married women’s dependence on husbands and to save single mothers from the difficult task of combining (often) low paid jobs with care responsibilities, the intention is to elevate the caregiver and domestic labourer and put it on a par with the formal paid worker. To make the proposal work against poverty, social insurance and benefit levels should be given to care givers in parity with those aimed to cover loss of income from formal employment.4

The question of paid compensation for domestic care work is a delicate one. Most feminists agree to it in principle because it illuminates existing inequalities among different groups of women and between men and women. It is rather the policy formulations—who is supposed to care for whom, the level of benefits for care relative to income from work, the duration of the right to care, and the possibilities for exit and re-entrance in the labour market—that are important to discuss and evaluate. The open, and underlying question for many writers is how to solve the dilemma of women’s citizenship without trapping women in a paid or unpaid caring role within the family. Because of the difficulties imagining a sudden change in the valuation of care work with respect to a market income, employment continues to remain the main route out of poverty and dependence. In addition, labour market participation offers financial, social, and potentially political advantages.5 Moreover, it has been pointed out that motherhood as a

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4 For a more thorough discussion, see Lister (1997)
5 The importance of female labour market participation and access to the public
way to achieve social and political rights in a wider perspective legitimises the traditional sexual division of labour. This would further cement women’s marginalisation within social and political rights (Fraser 1996). Of course, it would also undermine and limit men’s position as fathers and caretakers. Clearly, the public-private divide does not have a given definition but depends on historical and cultural contexts and the relative power of different social groups. However, as concluded by Lister: “[t]he struggle to control its meanings and positioning is central to the project of engendering citizenship” (1997, 124-125).

Several studies have compared institutional constructions that encourage certain types of family forms and behaviour along gender lines in different countries. The ‘breadwinner’ regime concept emphasises the notion of policy incentives that support a male breadwinner family or a double income family (Lewis 1992 and 1997). Others have analysed the extent to which countries share common expectations about family obligations (Millar and Warman 1996, Millar 1998). A third approach treats multidimensional patterns of social inequality and the distribution of gender inequalities along categories such as class and ethnicity (Korpi 2000, Acker 2000). A fourth and more recent approach is to conceptualise care and how it is recognised and solved by the family, the market, or the state (Lewis 1998, Daly and Lewis 2000). All four approaches distinguish and examine gender-relevant dimensions from other important social determinants, but are vague in their interpretation of how policies respond to changing normative ideas about gender relations and the logic behind such changes. In this study expressions of normative assumptions in each country about what characterises female and masculine normative behaviour and the expected gender arrangements are observed. Only a few cross-national attempts have been made to analyse the importance of shared values and cultural connotations for the understanding of gender segregating structures in welfare states. Gender relations are shaped in contexts, such as the family, the labour market, and the state and these structures are renegotiated through collective claims and political action and/or through changed attitudes and behaviour among groups of citizens. Although not every collective claim or welfare policies present demands on maintained or changed gender arrangements as their primary goals, the social consequences of certain policies may unintentionally provoke change or solidify the status quo position.

The connection between the welfare state, women, and women’s relations to paid work and family is visible in normative beliefs about gender that have become ‘fixed’ in the construction of country-specific institutional welfare arrangements. Normative beliefs about gender relations are explicitly or implicitly formulated in policies that address men and women and their expected duties or obligations. The ways in which such arrangements are constructed originate from dominating collective ideas about social values that are left largely unquestioned within a given society at a given time. It has often been stated that welfare states are effectively gendered by the “construction of constrictions as choices” (Yuval-Davis 1997, 86). People’s experiences, subjective and objective living conditions, are not merely mediated through free choices or normative expectations but also through material relationships and structures. Institutions and structures such as work places, the family, social services, labour market regulations, and taxation laws constitute constraints that influence material and cultural practices accessible to individuals. The social and economic consequences of different cultural understandings of men and women and the normative relationship between them are important because they inform how gender inequality is produced through gender relations, employment patterns, and access to social rights. As Crompton puts it: “Conformity to gender norms might not be experienced as ‘constraint’, but the outcome—that is, the reproduction of gender practices that subordinate women—is the same in any case” (1999, 202-203).

When social structures or institutions are perceived as barriers and people choose to negotiate or go around them, it influences the relationship between individuals, the family, the labour market, and the welfare state. The inconsistency in values inherent in welfare policies and attitudes expressed by social actors such as political parties, employers, labour unions, and individuals are not fully captured in institutional approaches. Because the

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6 Although it is clear that public policies and institutional settings largely influence people’s attitudes and behaviour, it is equally obvious that their explaining force is limited. Employment rates and attitudes in Iceland and the former German Democratic Republic can be taken as examples. Women living in the former GDR and who worked full-time are today still much more positive about female labour market participation despite the normative and legislative influences taken over from former West Germany after reunification. The differences from the FRG concerning attitudes about childcare and working mothers are especially illuminating (see Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. Band 117:3 1996). In Iceland, female employment rates and the birth rates are among the highest in the Nordic countries and childcare facilities and social policies such as maternity leave
social reproduction of nation specific gender relations can only be understood as interrelated in all these spheres, the components of the normative understanding of gender within a particular national setting have increasingly come into focus (Duncan 1994, Connell 1987, Pfau-Effinger 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b, Kulawik 1999, Crompton et al 1999).

GENDER CULTURE, GENDER ORDER, AND GENDER ARRANGEMENTS

To more closely examine explanations that centre on structural differences and their effects in defining patterns of female labour market participation and the development of family policies, Pfau-Effinger (1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b) has developed the concept of culture as an important way to explain women’s social practices in cross-national comparisons. Without denying the significance of institutional frameworks, Pfau-Effinger (1998a, 177-179) put focus on an individual or a group’s resources with respect to cultural ideals, values, and norms and to conceptualise the interrelationship between culture, structure, and social action. Pfau-Effinger’s concept of gender culture refers to common assumptions about what is considered “normal” or “desirable” forms of gender relations. While the perceptions of gender may vary between social groups and geographical regions within a country, the gender order refers to institutionalised gender relationships in and composed by the welfare state, the labour market, and the family. To bridge the gap between the gender culture and the gender order and to enable an analysis of how and why different power relations between social actors occur in different societies, Pfau-Effinger introduces the concept of gender arrangement. Gender arrangement concerns the limiting and restraining forms of arrangements resulting from negotiations between actors relating to the gender culture and to institutions within the gender order. By doing this, Pfau-Effinger attempts to empirically approach the ways in which social actors with different resources negotiate in the sphere between a specific

have been absent until recently (Eyedal 2000). The first example illustrates how cultural and normative values, policies, and institutions influence attitudes and behaviours remain the same despite far-reaching change in both normative values and institutional settings on a national level. The second example shows how a culture of female economic activity is adapted to a society with, in a Nordic context, almost non-existent childcare policies. Only quite recently has the Icelandic political system started to incorporate social rights and social services into family policies in order to facilitate the reconciliation of employment and family.

Pfau-Effinger’s model is a combination and development of Hirdman’s (1988) gender system theory and Connell’s (1987) theory about the construction of the social relations of gender.
gender culture and institutions within a given gender order. The gender order reflects pre-existing gender cultures, gender relations, or politically defined and institutionalised measures taken in order to maintain or change the practice of the gender arrangements or the gender culture. Simultaneously, cultural ideas influence the functioning of welfare state institutions. Power relations in the spheres of the welfare state, the labour market, and the family are visible in strategies used by social actors such as political parties, labour unions, feminist movements, and individual men and women. Changes in gender cultures, gender orders, and gender arrangements could create tensions and contradictions in the existing power-balances between men and women at different levels in society. As concluded by Pfau-Effinger, such changes may lead to political demands for re-negotiations of the gender arrangements and their premises by individuals and/or collective actors (1998a, 1999b). Because welfare state policies result from conflicting interests of social groups with unequal power positions, they may contribute to the development of social and economic inequalities between different social groups.

Although it is evident that feminist demands in some countries have greatly influenced gender arrangements and the adjustments of gender orders and gender cultures, women’s demands in other countries have been less successful. In both cases the outcome of welfare policies as persistent or changed gender arrangements are closely related to how women’s demands become transformed and institutionalised in negotiations with other social groups. On the other hand, welfare policy measures, with no intention to change gender arrangements, can unintentionally produce similar effects. Pfau-Effinger’s theoretical framework is primarily designed for cross-national comparisons and analyses of family ideals and gender arrangements with respect to the interrelationships between gender and social practices such as motherhood, care obligations, and employment on different levels in

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8 See for instance the discussion in Italy in the 1970s around the divorce legalisation. As a product of forceful feminist demands and because the Vatican and the Christian Democrats feared the dissolution of the traditional family and that married couples would use the divorce right in order to avoid discriminating taxation rules for two-earner families, individual taxation was introduced. As a side effect and an unintentional outcome, individual taxation favours female employment. In reunified Germany, strong feminist demands for the legalisation of abortion were bypassed in the political process (see Lemke (1994) for an account on how the case was treated in German politics). Although abortion remains illegal, there is no punishment connected to having one during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and given that certain procedures are complied with. The fact that abortion is technically an illegal act may still have unintended effects on family formation and gender arrangements.
society. For our purpose, Pfau-Effinger’s theoretical framework will be used to expose resistance or changes of gendered power relations as expressed through the gender culture and gender order on a national and local level with respect to local political rationale and actions in Germany, Italy, and Sweden.

Preferred gender arrangements will then be presented and analysed from a perspective of gender equality and female independence. As will be clear to the reader, the understanding of gender equality and its political imperatives differ in important aspects between the three countries, and sometimes even within the same nation. Ambiguities are present in the national and local formulation and design of welfare policies, labour markets, female political representation, and attitudes towards working women. Therefore, we expect local politicians to emphasise different problems and suggest different welfare policy measures.

As will be presented below, the overall female labour market participation rates are low in both Germany and Italy as compared to Sweden. Relying on statistics for mother’s employment rates, Germany\(^9\) and Italy fit best into a male breadwinner/female unpaid care-provider model, although an increasing number of Italian mothers are returning to full-time employment and German mothers to part-time employment. Sweden corresponds most closely to a dual breadwinner/state care-provider model.

**WELFARE STATES AS GENDER REGIMES**

Through the immense attention that has been drawn to comparative welfare state research and to the integration aims of the European Union in the last ten to twenty years, it has become evident that the construction of welfare systems and their socio-economic compositions display large differences between countries. One of the most influential explanations to these

\(^9\) In German and Italian families with children below the age of 6, less than half of the women are as likely as their men to be employed. In Sweden, the female pattern resembles that of men (Gornick 2000, 119). It should be added that almost 50% of Swedish women with children below school age are involved part-time jobs, most commonly working 75% of full-time employment (SCB 2000).
variations has been suggested by Esping-Andersen (1990); he traces the
collection of individual Western welfare states to the history of class
coalitions as the most decisive cause for their specific form. and so he argues
against the Marxist and Modernist idea that convergence of disparate
national developments are historically determined. Instead, the future of
different welfare states largely depends on power relations between social
classes within each country. He identifies three different types of modern
welfare state regimes. The first type consists of the welfare states that rely
mainly on market forces to cover the social rights of individuals (the Anglo-
Saxon countries belong to this type). The second type is the continental and
Mediterranean Western European countries’ type of welfare state, including
Germany and Italy, which he defines as conservative-corporate where status
maintenance and differentiation is achieved through the collaboration
between the state, employer organisations, and the labour unions. In these
states, social rights are predominantly achieved through labour market
participation. The third type is found in Scandinavian countries and is
characterised by universal benefits and social rights based on citizenship and
financed by taxes.

Esping-Andersen’s (1990, 1993) strong emphasis on class and the
importance of social and institutional frameworks in the stratifying processes
as well as in the figuration of gendered labour markets has been criticised by
feminist researchers. Numerous comparative studies show that patterns of
segregation along social class have different implications for women than for
men (see O’Reilly and Fagan 1998, DiPrete and McManus 2000). Assumptions about gender are embedded in the social and institutional
structures, such as the role of the family, the degree of recognition of unpaid
work, care, sexuality, women’s right to paid work, and individual female
autonomy. As such, outcomes of welfare policies have different effects on
women as compared to men. Because gender relations differ between
countries, as do the ways in which gender intersects with class, gender must
be regarded as an equally important factor influencing welfare policies
(Kaplan 1992, Biester et al 1994, Skocpol 1995, Hobson and Berggren 1997,
Hobson and Lindholm 1997, Pfau-Effinger 1998a and b, Bergqvist 1999,
Bimbi and Del Re 1997, Kulawik 1999).

Depending on the type of welfare state regime, the different outcomes and
prospects for women become quite clear when comparing the countries
chosen for this study. Because the Swedish social security system and supply
of public social services are closely connected and consistent to a political
ambition to provide full employment among both men and women, women
have gained a steady foothold in the labour market. Despite the resemblance
in the social security systems with respect to employment in Germany and
Italy, the political conditions, the rules, and traditions guiding the labour
markets and the design and formulation of the employment/family systems
differ in important aspects.

Principles and suppositions behind most of today’s welfare state policies can
be derived from previous social events and relations. The effects these
policies have on gender relations have not only drawn a larger sphere of
academic attention to national and international conditions but these policies
have also drawn attention to policy considerations. Feminist critiques of
mainstream analysis of welfare states have been brought to the political
agenda and have been accepted by academics and politicians. By focusing
on access and quality of social rights, it has opened the discussion about the
conditions for women’s citizenship rights. As national demands become
more prominent on individuals to increase/prolong their labour market
participation in order to achieve social rights, the question of men and
women’s positions in the family, care, and employment becomes more of
and issue. To some extent, this can be said to have provoked an awareness of
the need for a reorientation of social policies and most West European
countries are now in a political process of redefining family obligations.

In 1996, the European Commission committed itself to considering gender in
all aspects of policies and practises.\textsuperscript{10} The reasons for this are threefold.
First, women are an increasing part of the labour force. The conditions for
their labour market participation and the effects of existing social policies on
women’s social rights as compared to men have been emphasised. Since
women have been expected to take the main responsibility for care of family
members, social services are often underdeveloped and labour market
policies are constructed around men as breadwinners. Second, changing
population structures, a growing number of elderly combined with lowered
birth rates, render both paid and unpaid care one of the most important social
issues in all developed welfare states. Increasing female labour market
participation creates a care-deficit for children, the elderly, and the disabled.
Third, this brings the care issue itself to the fore in most countries as the
delicate question of the right to receive care is addressed.

\textsuperscript{10} In 1996 the Commission of the European Communities (1996) incorporated equal
opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities (COM
(96) 67 final (the Mainstreaming Communication, Luxembourg: Office for Official
Publications for the European Communities).
When political attention is drawn to the boundaries between the individual, the family, the market, and the state, it becomes evident that care is closely related to assumptions about male and female engagements and obligations and to what is considered desirable gender arrangements. When renegotiating the boundaries, issues of care, access to social services, and their links to social rights become prominent. Social services, such as care for children, the disabled, and the elderly may have different policy objectives such as freeing female labour from unpaid care duties, widening the educational system to encompass pre-school children, or to meet the demographic pressure from an ageing population. The issues of employment and access to care as conditioned or universal rights become conspicuous. The ways in which such needs (or rights) are met can be expected to reflect nation-specific traits with respect to structural, ideological, and cultural reasoning and methods to address certain social or administrative structural problems. Examples of political subjects that spring out of changed behaviour and growing public demands are mirrored in arguments that question normative assumptions about the family or care responsibilities and how care should be acknowledged in welfare policies with respect to citizenship rights.

The growing number of women in the work force coupled with changing family values have been interpreted as empirical evidence of changing gender norms (Palomba 1995, Knudsen and Wærness 1996a and 1996b, Ellingsæter 1998, Sundström 1999, Sabbadini 2000). Furthermore, decreasing birth rates and changing family patterns have been explained as a reaction against welfare policies that are out of step with social and economic changes (Crompton and Harris 1997 and 1999, Yeandle 1999, Sundström 2000). Despite cross-national similarities in attitudes about women who work outside the home, there are very few indications of convergence in national welfare policies that reflect this trend. In support of Esping-Andersen’s thesis on power relations between social classes within countries, but extended to include also gender power relations important features of policy making can be derived from regime types that may influence welfare reform in Western European countries (Ferrera 1996, Daly 1997, O’Reilly and Spee 1997, Scheiwe 1997, Szebehely 1998, Trifiletti 1999b). Hence, we may expect the development of policies to depend on both previous courses of political action and on the power relations between different social groups within each country. Even so, some converging aspects can be observed among countries. As concluded by Millar (1999), the similarities are related to changes of policies that reduce the importance of marriage in favour of the understanding of parenthood as the most important relationship and to the increasing number of cash benefits or
payments for care providers in many European countries. It needs to be emphasised, however, that differences exist in national policies and public financial assistance that address the needs of a caretaker or the person in need of care. Moreover, the regime differences and their gendering effects are manifested in female participation in the labour force.

**THE DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT**

The overall growth in female employment is partly the result of de-industrialisation and the expansion of service jobs, which create new opportunities for women in the labour market. In Germany, Italy, and Sweden the female educational level is rising and the traditional schedule for family formation and childbearing has shifted. Women marry later and have fewer children, which permits them to secure a foothold and remain employed with less conflict between their care responsibilities and their paid work. At the same time, more couples separate and the number of single parent families is increasing. From a historical perspective, none of the three countries were prosperous and the uneven distribution of wealth forced most working class women to find work after marriage and having children despite the growing influence of ideologies addressing motherhood and domestic life. Today, there are vast national differences in female labour market participation and an important part of the growth in women’s labour market participation, particularly in Italy and Germany, consists of married women re-entering the work force after a “family-break” (Addabbo1997, Drobnič 2000). The female labour market participation rates vary from 45.0% in Italy, to 63.1% in Germany, and 72.7% in Sweden (OECD 1999, 157, 197 and 253).

The geographical variations in countries have been related to aspects of local labour markets and the overall access to paid work. While the composition of labour markets and access to services are the most determining variables in relation to female employment, several authors claim that regional socio-economic differences for the development of varying gender cultures and practices are important (Sackmann and Häussermann 1994, Forsberg 1998, Sackmann 1998, Solsona 1998). They argue that the structuring of the gender relations and hence of female employment is strongly influenced by the interplay between structural and institutional factors, local practices, and subjective choices. Together these factors produce variations in regional outcomes in gender inequalities in Germany, Italy, and Sweden.

The differences between groups of women with respect to educational level, marital status, presence of small children, and age seem to be the most
determining variables (Fagan and Rubery 1999, 17). Predictably, unmarried and qualified women without children are more likely to be employed than are low-skilled, married mothers. Unlike the first part of the 20th century, now low-trained women exit from the labour market in larger numbers when they have dependent children than do high-skilled women. Hence, while educational training is a crucial factor for women’s labour market participation, the presence of dependent children strengthens the significance of the relationship. The effect is more prevalent in Italy and Germany because of the low or medium levels of female labour market participation and less access to social services. In Sweden, however, which overall has a high level of female employment and a more developed social service sector, the effect is less accentuated. Still, while married or cohabiting mothers tend to reduce their working hours or even exit from the labour market, single mothers in all three countries are inclined to rely more on full-time employment (Bradshaw et al 1996, Vogel 1997, Lewis 1997). As manifested in several empirical studies, living with a partner who is employed has the largest effect on a woman’s, and especially mother’s living standard (Riedmüller 1994, Casper, Garfinkel and McLahanan 1994, DiPrete and McManus 2000). Especially in Italy, the importance of female employment among low-income families has been stressed as it clearly combats family poverty.

The consequences of the welfare state policies are of profound importance for women, particularly in soothing the effects of unemployment or the loss of a partner. This emphasis the links between the welfare regime, access to social services, and female employment. Rates of female employment, however, do not correspond easily to normative values held by a population. As shown by Künzler, Schulze and van Hekken (1999) and Knudsen and Wærness (1999), there is an inconsistency between norms and policies and between attitudes and behaviours in some European countries (Ellingsæter 1998, Sundström 2000). Using the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) data from the 1994 Family and Changing Gender Roles II, both Künzler et al. and Knudsen and Wærness conclude that there is a gap between the modernisation of norms in favour of female employment and policies that would support such behaviour. This is particularly obvious in Italy and somewhat less evident in former West Germany. Sweden has the lowest divergence between family norms and policy measures (Künzler, Schulze and van Hekken 1999). Knudsen and Wærness, on the other hand, emphasise the interaction of gender and national policies and what seem to be changes in normative values in a global perspective towards a larger acceptance of individual choices and behaviour that cannot be related directly to types of welfare state regimes. Using the same ISSP survey,
Sundström’s results (1999, 2000) show that women in Germany, Italy, and Sweden are responding more positively to female employment than men do. Furthermore, although many women with small children support a mother’s access to part-time employment, only a few German and Italian women in this group were actually active in the labour market. In Sweden, women’s behaviour is consistent with their attitudes. Both Ellingsæter and Sundström conclude that preferences and behaviours correlate to national policies but vary within countries according to social divisions such as gender, age, educational background, and family situation.

The national and international political conclusions drawn from demographic changes, increased female labour market participation, shifts in women’s values, and the gender inequalities produced by welfare systems have led most West European nations to express political intentions to support gender equality on an international and national level. As such, this could indicate a shift in the political power balances toward more gender-sensitive policies. The strength and importance of such a shift vary largely between different countries and the swiftness of modification or transformation of gender cultures and gender orders differ within countries. Local politicians represent both the national and the local regulatory framework and institutions. At the same time they function as a litmus test for social demands and are presumptive actors for changes in policies. Therefore, the focus here is to capture what social circumstances local politicians perceive as motivating the persistence of the status quo or call for policy changes to alter women’s position in relation to family, care obligations, employment, and social rights. An additional task is therefore to identify possible effects of gender and political belonging in relation to definitions of political issues.

This study addresses the following questions. What are the main local political arguments for changing, maintaining or strengthening the gender order and the gender arrangements? What impact do political claims, statements, and regulations at the national level have on local policies and are there any important geographical differences related to demands from the local public? Institutional reforms that address gender equality or the rationale not to address gender equality are of particular interest.
METHOD

A number of local politicians responsible for social services that affect care issues and economic assistance were interviewed. These interviews provided data for analysis of how specific gender cultures intervene, mediate, or conflict with a given gender order and its gender arrangements. About twenty interviews were conducted so to allow the respondents to prepare their answers to a list of open-ended questions sent to them in advance. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed by country according to the responses and to the questions presented below. All quotations are from the taped material in the respondent’s native language. The author translated the material into English. The quotations were chosen because they were representative responses in each country or because they reflect political or geographical bias. The interviewees are identified by the public office they hold, not by their personal names.

Because of the national official statements related to gender equality and women’s right to work, the problems of gender cultures, gender orders, and gender arrangements with respect to reconciliation of work responsibilities and family responsibilities are apparent. As will be presented in further detail below, in Germany and Italy social services are either quite scarce or incompatible with demands from the labour market or from people in need of care. However, other patterns of gender discrimination, such as those encountered by women in workplaces, are in this context only treated in a broad outline. In the interviews, I have tried to address the following questions: What are the political beliefs concerning women’s access to employment and individual social rights? How do local politicians reason and argue about the relation between women, men, paid work, and care obligations? Is women’s access to economic independence a political issue and if so, what is identified as the best way to achieve it and what are the main obstacles? What are the implications of different local political views for women’s opportunities to enter or remain in employment? Do they believe that their own gender influences their ability to identify and argue for improvements?

The interview questions intend to understand the respondents’ understanding of the relationship between care needs among groups of individuals, family responsibilities, public responsibilities, and women’s labour market participation. The care dimension of entitlements of social rights is treated

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{See appendix for the letters of presentation and interview questions that were directed to the interview persons in each country.}\]
from the perspective of political awareness of financial or service needs for individuals and needs for families as well as its liberating potential for women. The issue of the individual's right to be taken care of is therefore dealt with when associated to women's autonomy. The social groups in focus and the service needs for families and women met by the local welfare systems are also addressed. This study does not sort out the actual quantitative or qualitative policy outputs in terms of social services or rights. This study, however, does examine the local political intentions with respect to social and family policies and the assessment of individual and especially female social citizenship rights. Finally, the socio-political consequences in terms of gender equality of the perspectives represented in the interviews are discussed.

The choice of interviewees was based on location, political majorities, and population size of each town and in each country. The choice of towns was not to gain a statistically representative selection but rather to maximise the variation according to geographical and political characteristics. The towns chosen represent large and small towns with geographical and political diversity. The political majorities represent varying coalitions, from mainly liberal and conservative to mainly socialistic. Town size is relative. A small to medium sized German or Italian town—300,000 to 800,000 inhabitants—would actually be a large Swedish town. The German and Italian conditions have been used as a starting point for the method of selection. Municipalities with smaller populations were not used because in Germany and in Italy smaller towns or villages often lack diversified labour markets and the economic resources necessary to support the social services fundamental for a politicising of issues such as female employment and economic autonomy. Although only a few interviews were conducted in each country, it still seems that the material reached a certain level of saturation in the variety of responses and issues raised by the people interviewed.

Overall, the provision of German and Italian welfare services rest on welfare associations and the extent of their services are difficult to capture. In contrast to Sweden, where the majority of social services are administered and co-ordinated by local authorities, the services offered in Germany and Italy are fragmented, making it more difficult to provide and co-ordinate services. Moreover, there were no co-ordinated or systematic evaluations whatsoever of policies and services. Due to the vast differences in data collection, more accurate statistical comparisons between different towns are restrained.
The Italian sample consisted of town councillors (*assessori*) in the council departments for social affairs. Three of the towns are large, more than one million inhabitants (Milan in the region of Lombardy, Naples in Campagna, and Turin in the region of Piedmont). One town is a medium sized town, 300,000 to 800,000 inhabitants (Bologna in Emilia-Romagna). Two are larger small towns, 200,000 to 300,000 inhabitants (Verona and Venice in Veneto). Except for Naples, the common traits for all towns are decreasing birth-rates, increasing numbers of elderly, increasing numbers of employed women, and increasing non-problematic ‘normal’ individuals and families with service needs. In Naples, the demographic structure still resembles a pyramid–relatively more children than elderly. The political majorities, during the time of the interviews in spring 1999, vary between centre-right-wing and centre-left-wing coalitions evenly distributed within the sample.

It was not an easy task to get appointments with some of the Italian politicians and in most cases I was given access to conduct the interview only after several requests. The impressions of the reluctance to accept an interview resulted from scarce time resources and trust in the capability of their subordinates to work effectively without them. Often I had to play a waiting game when the potential interviewees did not respond to interview requests. In Naples, governed by a left-wing coalition, and Bologna, governed by a centre-left coalition (*Ulivo*), the town councillors presented no obstacles and were well prepared and forthcoming. In Turin (centre-left coalition, *Ulivo*), a political secretary was interviewed but the atmosphere was forthcoming and helpful. In the cases of Verona and Milan (governed by neo-conservative/right-wing coalitions, *Polo*), I was, after several phone calls and last minute re-booking of appointments, referred to civil servants working with the councillor of social affairs. Similar to many other Italian towns there were no official political programmes available in Milan. The respondent was neither familiar with the subjects for the interview nor willing to refer to or confirm policy lines or to make any straightforward statements about present political goals or actions. Instead references were repeatedly made to year reports and evaluation reports on different social programmes and therefore the analysis of Milan relies mainly on information from such reports. As for Venice, I did not manage to arrange an appointment. Hence, five interviews were conducted in Italy.

The choice of towns in Germany and Sweden were similar to Italy. The ambition was to obtain geographical and political diversity as well as to choose towns ranging from medium to large. It was considerably less difficult to get appointments for the interviews in Germany and Sweden. In Germany, the respondents consisted of town councillors (*Bürgermeister*-
rinnen für Soziales, Jugend und Gesundheit) and directors of the equal opportunity offices (Frauenreferat/Gleichstellungsstelle). The only persons who turned down my request were the male councillors in Paderborn and Frankfurt am Main. Seven interviews were conducted. In Bremen, no interviews were made with the equal opportunity office and in Göttingen no interviews were made with ruling political office holders (left-wing coalitions). In both cases, they referred to a close and trustful collaboration between the two offices. As for Göttingen (Lower Saxony), an appointment with the political office holders was established but unfortunately due to illness, it was cancelled on the day of the interview. Bremen is politically and administratively both a federal state (Bundesland) and a municipality. The interview in Bremen was made with the senator, who was responsible for work and social affairs (Arbeit, Frauen, Gesundheit, Jugend und Soziales) and the former director of the equal opportunity office. In Paderborn (North Rhein-Westphalia), which is governed by conservatives, the office for social affairs simply turned down the request. Instead the head of the equal opportunity office was interviewed. In Frankfurt am Main (Hesse), which is led by a left-right-wing coalition, an interview was conducted with the director of both the equal opportunity offices and with an administrator for the office for social affairs. In Stuttgart (Baden-Wurttemberg), which is governed by conservatives, the interviews were conducted with the director of the equal opportunity office and with the local politician responsible for social affairs.

In Sweden, all interview persons accepted my request without hesitation or arguments. Six interviews were conducted with political leaders responsible for social affairs in the same number of towns, reaching from the north to the south of Sweden. Luleå (Norrbotten county) and Katrineholm (Södermanland county) are both traditionally governed by strong social democratic majorities. In Uppsala (Uppsala county) and Gothenburg (Gothenburg county), the majorities have shifted in the last 20 years. At the time of the interview, both had weak left-wing majorities. In Jönköping (Jönköping county), there was a coalition of Social Democrats and the Centre party. In Nacka (Stockholms län), the conservatives have been in the majority for the last 25 years.

For all countries, it is difficult to neglect the impression that the openness with which I was accepted in some offices and less so in others reflected the political willingness or ability to acknowledge and discuss the issues suggested. It seemed to be related to the desire of some public officials to demonstrate their distaste for academic research and gender policies (often manifested as agitation or uncomfortable feelings at the prospect of
discussing these issues). Moreover, these people may have been concerned about the influence of the possible outcomes of such a study.

Next, the study outlines the three countries according to their welfare policies and their sensitivity towards the connection between employment strategies and care obligations. The political climate and susceptibility to policy suggestions with gender equality connotations is vital to how political propositions are encountered by actors such as political parties, employers, or individuals. The ways in which political actors neglect or promote and participate in public debates that put gender equality in focus is thus important for the legitimacy of actors’ values and behaviours. Another important issue is the organisation of social services as a matter for the public, private, or non-statutory sector. Furthermore, the attempt was made to capture the overall gender culture of each nation through a short analysis of national welfare policies and the most important changes or suggestions for changes in this area. By depicting results from studies on attitudes among the population of each country, a picture is presented of how people reason in relation to each gender culture and gender order according to what they offer as possible gender arrangements.
GENDER: NATIONAL AND LOCAL WELFARE POLICIES

The German, Italian, and Swedish welfare states differ substantially about the ways in which political institutions treat gender inequalities. The Swedish welfare state is based on the distribution of social services as citizenship rights with the distribution of transfer payments depending on previous income. Because the individual and not the family is used to calculate benefits, the importance of marriage with respect to social rights is neutralised. The social democratic ideology of equality in relation to class has been extended to include gender relations with strong state involvement in the sphere of care and a gender ideology of shared roles and obligations. The by now traditional full employment and active labour market policies also include women and most women are employed. In line with this, the difficulties in reconciling employment and family are to a high degree treated as a public issue. Care services have almost completely been administered and produced by public institutions. Individual taxation and equal access to paid work in combination with the political commitment to full employment give women the potential to have an income of their own and access to benefits.

In contrast, the welfare states of Germany and Italy combine a strong work-orientation with familialism. This results in strong support for the male breadwinner family model in social security systems and a reluctance to promote women’s labour force participation and public social services. In both countries, state and church are closely linked through strong Christian Democratic parties that have had forceful normative influences on social policies and cultural practices. This is true for both countries, despite left-

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12 Familism or familism is a concept used to describe the relation between the family and the welfare state with strong reliance on subsidies (see footnote 14-15).
13 In Italy, the Catholic Church is dominant. In Germany, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church have about equal number of members.
14 Kersbergen (1995, 186-191) has defined the ideology of Christian Democracy as social capitalism. It can be seen as the means by which Christian Democracy has tried to establish cross-class accommodation. The state is not regarded as characterised by a permanent reform capacity, social inequalities are understood as natural and therefore the state should concentrate on compensation for inadequacies produced by the market rather than on promoting equality goals. The family is the unit of society, women are assumed to be the prime providers of care and only marginally present in the labour market. In social capitalist ideology social citizenship is not generated as individual rights but related to the special duty of the state to uphold the capacities of persons or social groups.
wing influences on policies from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Neither Germany nor Italy guarantees a minimum standard of living for their citizens, but Germany has nationally standardised regulations governing the subsistence poverty level through social assistance. In Germany, most municipalities use a measure of average costs for food (Warenkorb) in their social assistance programmes. In Italy, a few selected towns participate in a national program to reduce poverty, which is supposed to guarantee citizens in these towns a minimum income. Other Italian municipalities have made similar policy measures. In both countries, the social insurance systems are geared to provide equivalence through income maintenance of people in or exiting from employment, rather than vertical redistribution of wealth. While normative assumptions regard women as prime care givers and laws and policies explicitly or implicitly fix differentiated or unequal gender roles, the welfare systems of Germany and Italy support gendered status maintenance.

Ambiguous and passive social policies emphasise cash benefits rather than services in combination with notions of family solidarity through the principle of subsidiarity in family and care policies (Claesen and Freeman 1994, Ostner 1994, Saraceno 1994 and 1998, Kersbergen 1995, Bimbi 1994, Daly 1997, Bussemaker and Kersbergen 1999). In addition, and due to acknowledged cultural variations within each country, both Germany and Italy allow far-going regional and local sovereignty in decision making concerning social infrastructures. As will be presented in more detail below, the differences between the German and the Italian welfare regimes bear country-specific historical, political, religious, and/or cultural value orientations and institutional characters that produce different implications for and effects on female autonomy and access to social rights. These features are also explaining factors behind the fragmented influences that the feminist movements in Germany and Italy have had on national policies.

15 The theory of subsidiarity as a social policy doctrine defines a range of boundaries of public intervention. It is closely related to doctrines within the Catholic Church as a way to generate Christian citizens rather than citizens (Kersbergen 1995, 188). In brief, it requires the state to uphold the capacities of persons or social groups but not to interfere, discourage, or reduce the self-sufficiency of individuals. Following the departure in a natural order of hierarchies within the doctrine of subsidiarity, men are treated as family-heads and as members of the public, women are only regarded in their role as family members. With reference to natural hierarchies, distributive justice, rather than re-distributive justice, is to be performed through co-operative or voluntary organisations (Daly 1999, 109-111).
The administrative division of costs and responsibility vary somewhat between the three countries. As a rule, childcare normally falls under the charge of a state’s educational administration and elderly care falls under the charge of the administration for social affairs or is related to health insurance schemes. The largest differences is in the division of costs between different national levels and in the strength and circumstances surrounding care as a legal individual right. Germany is a Federal Republic that since 1990 consists of 26 Federal States (Länder). Each state has its own legislation and redistributes the financial burden between local municipalities within the state. The local authorities are responsible for meeting the needs for social services such as child and elderly care facilities. Due to the special status of the family, the main policy until recently has been to support self-help resources and solidarity from the family and neighbourhood. Today, the costs for childcare, in-home care, and other services for elderly are covered by subsidies from the State, the federal states, local authorities, non-governmental providers, and by user fees. The proportions of finance from the different sources vary largely between municipalities and the users pay a substantial part.

Italy is divided into regions with legislative, administrative, and economic responsibilities and in which local authorities are main responsible for the performance of social services, which are economically subsidised by the State. Most individual and family assistance is the responsibility of local authorities. User fees are partly set by the provider of services and the fees may vary largely both within the country and within each municipality.

In Sweden the costs for social services are divided between different levels of public authorities and usually in combination with user fees. Compared to Germany and Italy, fees in Sweden are generally lower in relation to the income of the user. Swedish municipalities are responsible for the availability of services and enjoy a high degree of freedom to impose their own local income taxes and largely decide on the scope and composition of the services. Still, and despite the traditional concept of local self-governance, Swedish social services (especially daycare services) have been strongly regulated by the central government and guided by the principle of equality.16

16 Kröger (1997) emphasises one important goal with universal purport in the Scandinavian model, valid at least for Finland and Sweden. In these two countries, publicly financed services should be available to all citizens, that is, they shall reach beyond the most needy or those with the lowest incomes. Despite the local self-governance (particularly the supply of childcare covering most children below school age) it is guided by centralised decrees. Furthermore, the economic situation
GERMANY

The German state is a corporate system with a conservative cultural legacy. Germany’s organisation of capital and labour define masculinity as self-assertion while marginalising, redefining, or reducing feminist demands into piece-meal issues (Kaplan 1992, Ostner 1994, Young 1996, Ferree 1997, Kulawik 1999). Kulawik (1999) demonstrates that the principles of difference between male roles and female roles were introduced in labour protection laws in the late 19th century. Although the proclaimed aim of these laws was to protect women at their work places or from forces in the labour market in general, the laws were discussed in parliament with a male bias and social or moral themes such as the degradation of family life as the result of female employment. These laws, in a large part reflecting masculine identities but also women’s experiences with paid work, consolidated gender differences in social conditions that came to characterise German political thought and the present development of the welfare state. From the late 1940s to the end of the 1950s, in the shadow of the National Socialism and the conflicting ideologies of post-war West and East Germany, family policies and gender equality in West Germany were rejected and discredited by all political parties as Nazi relics or communist dogma. To keep the state out of family matters, the Christian Democrats encouraged the institutionalisation of the family unit with policy that promoted family independence and family structures based on a gendered division of labour with men in the workforce as sole breadwinners. This policy reinforced the authoritative position of a male head of household by protecting the institution of marriage and encouraging financial support to families with children. Although gender equality was proclaimed in the German Basic law in 1949, marriage laws and family laws restricted a woman’s legal rights in marriage and a married woman’s labour market participation.

The official German concept of equality is ambivalent. Departing from hierarchies of difference, gender equality in social policies reflects an understanding of equity and not equality (Sauer 1994, 8). From the 1950s, feminist movements have been actively counteracted (Young 1996) and have only marginally influenced national West German policymaking. In line with the juridical ambivalence visible in social and family policies and the in the 1990s has rendered the financing of social services more difficult for the state. National financing has resulted in many municipalities with economic difficulties. At the same time, liberal tendencies have demanded stronger self-governance in the offer and composition of social services. Following national withdrawal from financial and regulatory responsibilities greater local variations in social services has developed.
experiences from political exclusion, many feminist groups have cultivated female difference. In the 1970s demands were raised for a legal proceeding of gender equity through an introduction of a housewife salary. Such demands conflicted with other claims from other feminist groups that desired female participation and gender equality on equal terms with men. In the 1980s, with the entrance of the Greens into national politics, the marginalisation of women in public debates and in politics were brought into focus. The unification of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1990 and the new directives for a barrier-free common market within the EU by the end of 1992, forced feminist organisations from both east and west and national political parties to refine their understanding of women’s right to work, care services, and the abortion issue. Although female participation rates in politics and the number of women in official seats have increased, they have done so from a very underrepresented position, deriving from the traditional allocation of gender roles and traditional living and working conditions (Behrend-Weiss 1998, 83). In 1990, 20.5% of the members of the National Parliament were women. By 1998, the number had increased to 30.9% (Hoecker 1998, 297, 64). A similar development is visible in federal and local parliaments, but with large differences in the number of women between the federal states. The growing number of women in political parties and who are serving as political representatives can partly be explained by the different sexual quota systems introduced in political party organisations.

One result of women’s increased political influence was that local equal rights offices were established in some municipalities in the 1980s and their number has grown. They are charged with advocating and defending women’s interests and they provide the local political administration with

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18 For the number of women with political memberships and the different parties quota systems, see Hoecker 1998, Chapter 4 and pages 286-289. The number of women in federal state parliaments and towns and municipalities averages 20-25%. In some major cities, the proportion of women is between 40% and 50% (Behrend-Weiss 1998, 84).

19 At the end of the 1970s, equal right offices were introduced on a Länder level. The first municipal equal rights office (Gleichstellungsstelle/Frauenbüro) was established in Cologne in 1982. By 1992, all Länder governments and 1185 municipalities had equal rights offices (Sauer 1994, 8).
statistics and reform ideas. In addition, they provide women with support services such as labour market integration, information, and help for abused women. For institutional, political, economic, and power-discursive reasons the goals of the semi-local and local equal rights offices often remain unclear with their objectives characterised by local circumstances and the subjective preferences by authorities involved, which results in a static and unproductive situation (Sauer 1994, Henjes 1994).

In the 1990s, the concepts of equal rights and opportunities for women were introduced into official German discourse. In 1994, an amendment was made to the Basic Law that has promoted the enforcement of the active promotion of women (Behrend-Weiss 1998). The Law is expected to make an essential contribution to eliminate discrimination and to further women’s access to the labour market, to improve the reconciliation of family and employment, and to increase women’s participation in public institutions.

Although changing, modern German welfare policies can nevertheless be described as ambivalent, a hands-off approach that requires an internal regulation of the household to protect marriage and the family from state intervention (Chamberlayne 1994, 175). While the re-distributive aim of social policies directed towards families with children may be defined as horizontal, the social and gender hierarchical characters continue to dominate access rules and distribution of benefits. The horizontal redistribution is exemplified in the provision of childcare, tax allowances, and general cash transfers, the latter by the protection of marriage over female social rights. Mothers, and especially unemployed married women, are not entitled to individual benefits and the importance of a second income is reduced through taxation incentives for a non-employed spouse (Daly 1999, 114-116). However, the expansion of work-oriented welfare policies towards a more active inclusion of women into the labour market seems to have brought about a change in social policy related to political discourse by increasing acceptance of the inclusion of suggestions concerning public support to families.

In Germany, the three-step-model, where women leave work for care obligations and re-enter when children are older, has been modified but is

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20 According to Sauer and Henjes the male dominated local authorities have defective competence and little interest in political issues concerning gender issues.
21 The amendment of Article 3, Paragraph 2, of the Basic Law states that “[t]he state promotes the implementation of de facto equal rights for women and men and works towards the elimination of existing disadvantages”. (Berend-Weiss 1998, foreword)
intact. The largest changes in female employment rates have occurred with married women who have children. In this group, the employment rate increased from 41.7% to 56.2% between 1980 and 1994 (Bauereiss, Bayer and Bien 1997, 30). Now more women re-enter employment on a part-time basis and somewhat earlier than previously. In the last ten to fifteen years, women’s legal rights to re-enter the labour market after parental leave has been strengthened but only 50% of women re-enter the labour market successfully after parental leave (Bettio et al 1998, 59). Collective agreements to facilitate part-time work on grounds of childcare or extended sickness leave do not include the largest female labour market sectors. Low qualified part-time jobs and increased labour market demands on qualification and continuous up-dating turn the three-phase-model into a path which de-qualifies women. The economic risks taken by married women, totally or partly outside paid work, become obvious in cases of divorce, unemployment, or decease in income of the husband. The negative economic consequences from such a policy effect single parents the most (Martiny and Voegeli 1995, Berger-Schmitt et al 1996). Elderly women with low pensions constitute another group at risk.

The legal duration for parental leave is three years with a low level of financial compensation and pension points for child-raising years. Although the legal access to parental leave is gender neutral and a majority of men are in favour of a father’s right to parental leave, only slightly more than 1% of the men make use of it. Studies indicate that men on parental leave have a strong family-orientation, leave an occupation with few career possibilities, and are married to a woman with career prospects with a similar or higher income (Schneider and Rost 1998, Vaskovics and Rost 1999). Childcare for children aged 0-2 is almost non-existent and the childcare there is for this age group is reserved for families with financial problems. Official and public attitudes, as expressed in governmental publications and surveys, indicate that children under 3 years old should stay with their mothers and that full-time care for children between 3 and 6 years old is harmful to a child’s mental development (Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend Band 117:3, 1996, 25-27). Due to increased demands, universal childcare for children between 3-5 years old was introduced in 1996. Childcare was not primarily introduced by

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22 Pension points are calculated using full-time care with additional points to fill up for loss of work-income in case of reduced working-hours for care responsibilities up to the 10th year of the child (Behrend-Weiss 1998, 57).

23 Most men (69%) approve of the right for men to take parental leave and 49% say they would consider making use of it if given the opportunity (Gleichberechtigung von Frauen und Männern 1996, 49-52).
government to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family, but was part of a concession in order to maintain the restrictions in the abortion law and to address pedagogical and educational aspects aimed at children, allowing for women to take up part-time employment. Childcare is state funded but performed by non-governmental organisations. Childcare is provided for 3 to 5 hours a day without meals. The opening hours vary considerably between the federal states. School hours are even shorter, about four hours. Only in rare cases are school meals served and after-school-care is scarce.  

Many working parents depend on private, non-institutional solutions for childcare. Rerrich (1994, 1996). Diezinger and Rerrich (1998) describe the reconciliation of family and employment as a woman’s responsibility. Working women are increasingly dependent on grandmothers, baby sitters, family day care providers, and less on institutional childcare. The latter option is related to locality, costs, hours of operation, and the normatively negative implications attached to leaving a child in public care facilities. Apart from normative precautions, all options have flaws because they do not offer secure everyday childcare during hours compatible with work schedules. Because of the shortage of day care facilities, employers sometimes arrange or subsidise childcare for their employees.

The elderly or persons with ageing relatives confront similar problems. Relying on the principle of subsidiarity care for elderly has been chiefly the family’s responsibility. Due to low pensions, elderly women especially cannot afford institutionalised long-term care. In addition, the care burden or economic expenses have increased considerably for more financially stable pensioners and for their relatives. The growing number of elderly and the limited possibilities for obtaining public financial support to cover costs for assistance for elderly led to the introduction of benefits for home nursing in 1991. While costs for care in residential homes were not included in the reform but could be applied for in terms of social assistance, the national costs increased rapidly. For this reason, a long-term self-financed care insurance fund (die Soziale Pflegesversicherung) was introduced in 1995 that gives special incentives to home care but also permits care in residential institutions. It provides basic, not comprehensive, care guarantees through flat rate benefits to all persons needing care according to a three-level-

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24 According to Behrend-Weiss (1998, 74), due to the few places for childcare only children living with an employed single parent can be accepted.

25 The normative understanding of institutional childcare is connected to poverty and the understanding that working mothers are pitied and forced out of full-time mothering into paid work (Diezinger and Rerrich, 1998, 177).
system. Through care insurance, elderly may also pay for care providers. About 14% of people older than 80 live in institutions and only few receive organised home care (Bettio et al 1998, 35, 61-62). The low status and low quality and alternatively high costs for good quality home care and institutional care, have forced many families to keep their relatives in their own homes to be cared for by mainly their female relatives, daughters, and wives. According to Rostgaard and Fridberg (1998, 522), 90% of the elderly in need of care receive it from family.

Many women feel a moral obligation to care for family members and they can be expected to leave work to take care of children, and later to re-enter the work force. When the care needs among older relatives become burdensome, these women will work part-time or leave the work force to provide informal care. However, there are groups of women who do not leave their jobs but instead opt for care packages provided by the care insurance for relatives in need of care (Ostner 1998, 127-128). Today the effects of both cultural and institutional structures are economic inequalities between groups of women. As long as many people perceive gender equality as an individual responsibility rather than a political issue, the organisation of family obligations, sometimes combined with employment, is perceived as a personal choice thereby making gender inequalities into political issues a difficult if not impossible task. Moreover, inasmuch as care services in political contexts relate to women’s part-time employment and only indirectly or weakly to the social rights of those in need of care, it will be difficult to argue for policies that offer more than basic care facilities or flat rate benefits. If more women chose employment instead of care for family members, most certainly strong demands will be directed toward care insurance and toward an ameliorated professional status and standard for the care of elderly.

Women’s retreat from employment is not merely a sign of gender culture but also of gender arrangements and relates to women's behaviour to both institutional factors and to cultural beliefs about gender norms, thus having social consequences in gender relations. The difference in values, actions, and behaviours between men and women are reflected in attitudes about working mothers. German women and especially women in child rearing ages are slightly more positive about working mothers than men are (Sundström 1999). Although there are significant differences according to educational background, most women from 18 to 54, including women outside the labour force agree that mothers should work at least part-time (Sundström 2000).
A domestic career for a woman supports a discrepancy between motivations, expectations, and opportunities—access to education and employment. Women find it difficult to be accepted on grounds of their qualifications rather than on gender. According to Kolinsky (1989), low and high-educated women find it difficult to acquire work and remain employed commensurate with their training; instead, they choose to leave the paid work force and the competitive climate that discriminates and marginalises them. Many studies confirm that women clearly perceive this discrimination and young women feel very confused and insecure about how to lead their lives (Zoll 1989 and 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1994, Sprey-Wessing et al 1996, Sprey-Wessing et al 1997, Oechsle and Geissler 1998, Glatzer and Ostner 1999). Discrimination and marginalisation are rooted in values related to women’s expected loyalties to their families, regardless of their actual family situation. A previously sharp differentiation between male and female gender roles seems to be loosening, but not in ways that make patterns of gendered behaviour consistent between men and women. While men increasingly question male norms such as work orientation and career planning and underline the importance of communication and expressiveness, they do not seem to move towards more family oriented values or are not deeply influenced by changing female norms and value orientations. Women express an appreciation of a work-oriented life style and the importance of economic independence but are very critical about the institutional support given them in this respect (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. Band 117:3, 1996, 36-37).

Generally, working mothers are perceived as a contradiction to the female nature and to what is considered to be a ‘good mother’, who is a mother that devotes her time to raising her children and the care of the family (Geissler and Oechsle 1994, Oechsle 1998, Schneider and Rost 1998). Institutional resources are not available that will support alternatives to the traditional housewife and male breadwinner model. That is, private and public institutions do not provide the necessary resources for work and family obligations to coincide. Men and women also remain restricted by attitudes in the labour market and by the absence of institutional support for care support. Hence, for many women changing values do not increase individual choices; these changing values merely result in a patchwork-biography, ('Bastel-Biographie'), in which women try to combine educational level and skills with employment and family obligations (Beck-Gernsheim, 1994, 120).
**The German interviews**

German interviews present contradicting attitudes related to gender and ambivalence about the government’s responsibility to increase women’s access to the work force. Politicians and equal opportunity office representatives are squeezed between the public notion of women’s labour market participation as best achieved through the three-step-model, citizens’ demands for increased social service offers, and the double-edged local and national policies in the understanding of childcare and family responsibilities. Most of the interviewed are critical of the multidimensional discrimination against women when it comes to labour market participation. While identifying women’s labour market participation as the most advantageous route out of actual or possible poverty, care continues to be regarded as a mainly female task and only partly as a public issue. Signs of state financial retrenchment have become visible through the economic recession in the 1990s and the economic load on regional and local institutions has escalated. This in turn was given as one of several obstacles that prevent the expansion of quality social services with professional employees. Other more obscure impediments mentioned were gender related power relations in politics and in the labour market. In both these spheres, the conditions for women’s labour market participation and gender equality issues have difficulties making their way to a political agenda or to businesses during labour negotiations.

In Germany, the differences between regions are the result of demographic differences. In large towns, more women are employed and the household and age structures are concentrated around young and middle aged single or two-earner households with a low number of children. The number of children in childcare is higher in the smaller communities than in larger cities. As argued by one of the interviewed, this may be due to the fact that working parents move away from the city centres because of the housing market shortage and to increase the quality of life for a family with children. It is also possible that different forms of childcare are more easily available outside the city centres. Before the introduction of universal childcare in 1996, there was large regional variations childcare access for children in the age group 0-9. These differences have been reduced for the age group 3-5, but there are still important geographical variations in number of hours facilities are open and in the services offered to children younger or older than the age group 3-5. In 1994, full-day childcare was almost non-existent in the old federal states. In the south-west regions of Germany, childcare services were predominantly open in the morning and afternoon but did not offer meals. In northern Germany, mainly half-day services with meals included were available. Only in Baden-Württemberg did the number of
childcare facilities correspond to the number of children in the age group 3-5 (Bauereiss, Bayer and Bien 1997, 94).

In the interviews, variations in services offered and approaches toward women’s employment seem to depend on political majorities and how they encounter increasing female labour market orientation and demands on social services. In general, left-wing dominated coalitions advocate spending on social services and labour market policies while liberal and right-wing coalitions would support increased spending on financial support to families or advocate no changes. This is contradicted by the results referred to above, which show that childcare is more available in the south and politically more conservative parts of Germany than in the more socialist dominated north. One interpretation is that the figures refer to the federal state level and do not describe variations between municipalities. Another interpretation, and maybe a more plausible reason, is that there are historical differences in labour markets between the north and the south of the former Federal Republic of Germany that have influenced the number of employed women (Sackmann and Häussermann 1994). In the northern parts of Germany, traditionally dominated by male workplaces such as coal and iron industries, men have also come to dominate the expanding service sector. Here both employers and women themselves expect women to be family focused at the expense of employment opportunities. Since the turn of the 19th century in the south, married women have been active in small family businesses, home manufacturing, and small firms from which service businesses have developed. Today women constitute a relatively large part of the employed in the service sector. Referring to today’s situation, Sackmann and Häussermann believe that the growing service sector per se does not influence female employment rates. They identify different regional cultures in the traditional financial position of married women coupled with the ways in which employment and housework can be combined as the crucial factors that influence female employment rates. In the interviews performed in this study the notion of married women as mainly workers or mainly housewives is expected to affect the political thinking in each town, illustrating varying degrees of awareness and intentional or practical policy making. Hence, when respondents in southern Germany, representing a more conservative political standpoint, argue for increased financial redistribution to families, they do so from a position in which services may already be more developed and with comparatively larger numbers of women in employment than is the case for northern Germany.

The equal opportunity offices appeared to meet less political resistance from and find it easier to collaborate with left-wing majority local governments
than with right-wing majority governments. In addition, they often referred to close collaboration with the social councillors, who were described as women actively working for gender equality. In the conservative governed small town Paderborn, the head of the equal opportunity office worked more closely with extra-parliamentary groups than with the local parliament. Apart from the performance of a ‘women’s profession fair’ every three years, she could not think of any initiatives taken by the political parties aiming to encourage and support women to participate in the labour market. In the equally small town Göttingen, with a stronger social democratic tradition, some measures were taken to help women to combine work and care for children through a system of mediation of day-mothers. The latter example is not a problem-free solution and I will return to this subject later. Overall, only a marginal number of men are involved in issues concerning gender equality on the local political level.

In all the towns, the problems of conflicting values concerning motherhood and female employment were emphasised. In official political debates and documents and in the interviews, it was noted that a large number of women wish to remain employed and are reluctant to take on childcare and the elderly care at the expense of paid work. The majority of the interviewed people also considered this the most rewarding route to achieve social rights, parity, and autonomy. At the same time, although no longer completely in accordance with political correctness, references were made to an ongoing societal debate about whether mothers should stay at home with their children on a full-time basis or combine motherhood with part-time work, or devote more time to paid work and placing their children in childcare facilities. The crucial point is if and how female full-time caretakers and homemakers should be financially compensated. While parental leave and reduced working hours in combination with childcare below the age of ten already provide the entitlement of pension points, some political respondents mentioned the introduction of a housewife salary to which pension points should be added. This proposal was firmly rejected by the equal opportunity offices on grounds of risking women’s further retreat from the labour market and presumed extreme low incomes from such a housewife salary. Among politicians, on the other hand, it was regarded as one possible means that would offer both an financial compensation and acknowledgement to women’s family work and render women less economically dependent on their husbands. Women’s dependence on their husbands was discussed both as natural and as something that should be counteracted by changes in the economic power structure in marriage. This was believed to be achieved partly through existing divorce rights and maintenance compensation in case of divorce and in terms of the introduction of pensions to housewives.
Women who do not enter the labour market but choose to stay home and take care of their family and the household commonly were referred to as family women. The town counsellor in Stuttgart suggested that a special old age pension should be introduced for persons who have performed family work as their main activity.

[s]o that she later, when she gets old, can have her own pension and does not again become dependent on someone else. Family work is not highly regarded in Germany. I say, there must be a change, it is a job, and a hard job. No eight-hours-a-day job, and unpaid! It’s incredible! (Stuttgart)

Commenting on the large number of non-employed mothers, the politician in Bremen referred to a current debate in Germany, interwoven with the discussion about full-time mothering, that emphasises moral, psychological, and biological arguments to the question of a child’s need for his/her mother.

The number of persons who dare to say it in public is reduced, but I think that it is still very widespread in people’s head . . . Also among women of course! Especially among those women that have decided for themselves, I’ll stay at home. For their own self perception they need to say, that is the best way. (Bremen)

Implicit in this statement is the awareness that many women choose to work at home instead of regular work. This indicates that the obstacles were obscure; they included intra-family gender conflicts, difficulties in access to childcare, and finding work that is commensurate with previous professional experiences. The double-edged political justifications and public institutions related to them reinforced the idea that the public cannot be held responsible for universal care and financial needs. Moreover, families should continue to be the prime providers of care needs. The Bremen politician reflects an attitude consistent with most of the other interviewed people:

Of course, we have a responsibility, a public duty to organise childcare and to lighten the burdens from families. But that cannot be taken so far that the State should be there for everyone and everything and organise round-the-clock services. (Bremen)

In the towns where a continuous dialogue between the equal opportunity offices and the local politicians existed both offices identified similar problems and expressed matching political demands always in favour of increased female economic independence through employment. While the representatives for the equal opportunity offices defined their problems more clearly—their radical view identified women as underrepresented, subordinated, and discriminated against—various perspectives on care issues identified the underlying obstacles that interfere with gender equality.
Having the political and economical responsibility, politicians were far more careful in their analysis and less willing to argue for increased public spending for care services. However, they seemed to agree with the following points that present a traditional picture of gender relations within everyday gender arrangements and the difficulties facing women entering politics:

The stupid thing is that women have so terribly much to do. You know, the double load, the triple load. Paid work, childcare or family care and housework and so on, it’s awful much. That means, they have only very few of these women in women’s groups that are concerned with these problems, that engage politically. Because of this, the concerns of these women arrive in the parliament by roundabout ways. If these women were stronger represented in the parliament they could emphasise this theme and create an opinion around things that are important to them. As they are not represented, they don’t have a voice. No authentic voice of their own. (Equal Opportunity Office, Stuttgart)

And further:

[It] is just so, that social or social policies or welfare political objectives are not as cogent as market-oriented political aims. And if the argument ‘we need the labour force’ emanates from the economic political demands, then it is much more achievable than it is if women always refer to our constitution, in which it says that men and women have equal rights and so on, hence, it is a difficult situation. (Equal Opportunity Office, Stuttgart).

Although most respondents believed that the construction of the social policies protecting married women were a non-viable way to obtain women’s political claims, they also made it clear that the low representation of women in national politics leaves the floor open for arguments that distort women’s demands on gender equality and turn them into market economy issues. That is, although women may gain better access to employment, they believe that such conditions threaten to make women more economically vulnerable in relation to the labour market.

Despite minor variations in emphasis the following problem areas were identified by all the people interviewed. Childcare needs to be extended to include both children under the age of 3 and children in the first years of obligatory school. Existing childcare needs to increase its operating hours to allow women to work full-time. At present, only a few municipalities offer care facilities that reach beyond their legal obligations. Among the towns included in this study, the larger towns offered more facilities with increased operating hours than the smaller towns. For parents with children under the
age of 3 and for those with longer working hours, private daycare mothers are the most feasible option. Although access to childcare for the younger age group varies between the towns, the enrolment rates do not exceed 7% of the total number of children below the age of 3 in any of the federal states (Bauereiss, Bayer and Bien 1997, 92). Still, childcare employment was considered a low status job that was usually done by women. Moreover, families were expected to solve their childcare needs without government assistance. Some of the towns facilitated the hiring of day-mothers. Most often, these day-mothers are persons who take care of children on a short-time basis, for instance during a parent’s job interview or visit to a dentist. For low-income families, the public may pay the costs at very low compensation levels per hour for such childcare. It seems clear that many families find their private solutions for their care needs in this way or completely outside public assistance. For working parents, a day-mother may very well be an acceptable and commonly used solution but is not primarily offered through the municipality. For full-time working parents, private childcare offers a more satisfactory service in terms of coverage. For part-time working parents, this type of care is inexpensive and hence makes female employment more profitable. The Göttingen respondent brought the individual and social security of daymothers and children in their care into focus as problems that need political solutions.

The families find their daymothers in a greyish labour market. That is, one of these twilight zones. It is not legally regulated. There are no quality requirements and no demands on qualifications. In principle, any woman/man could become daymother/father. It is unofficially paid, no taxes. The daymothers are not protected, have no sickness insurance, no holidays, no old age security. I do not think day-mothers are very highly respected because they are regarded as not having proper work. I have been thinking that daymothers could be given the possibility to qualify themselves through specific educational programs. (Equal Opportunity Office, Göttingen)

The prevailing view was that the use of private childcare providers is a family decision made by parents who choose not to make full use of legal parental leave. As far as day-mothers were concerned, their professional background was a non-issue but their duty to pay their social costs and taxes from work income was an issue. Other respondents referred to employment negotiations that should be made between parents and daymothers as representatives of two labour market parties, but at the same time admitting that these services were mostly provided outside the regular labour market. When referring to social costs and taxes, people often exhibited an ironic smile, indicating the knowledge that only few private childcare providers actually declare their incomes. The costs for parents and actual incomes
made by childcare providers remain a private matter. For the older children, strong faith was put in parents’ initiatives to start their own childcare centres with longer operating hours and flexible hours according to the needs of specifics groups of children and parents. Related to demands on increased childcare facilities for all children in the age group 1-6, all interviewed underlined the need to increase the supervision of younger school children. Hot meals to be served as a standard in schools and daycare centres was also mentioned. The bigger towns often offer such services, but it is still an insufficient effort. The smaller towns are even less prepared to offer such services. Frankfurt seemed to have the most developed support system (10 schools).

Most of the interviewed people openly discussed the structures of childcare and school hours as causing problems that force women to be flexible, to segment their role in the periphery of the labour market, and to keep their status dependent on their husband’s income or from social benefits from the public. To reduce stress for working parents, Stuttgart and Bremen had, or were about to organise and enlarge, what they called reliable primary schools (verlässliche Grundschule in Bremen and verbindliche Halbtagschule in Stuttgart) where the children would be supervised after between 7:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. After-school care was to be introduced in Bremen for children in need of more hours of supervision. Despite a public demand for a similar solution in Göttingen, no reforms were made because of public financial reasons. Similar difficulties in arguing for more support directed towards primary schools or for the introduction of school meals were reported. The opposition from male politicians was by many described as firmly and deeply-rooted in the belief that married women and mothers should be housewives, combined with an almost complete unappreciative attitude for working mothers. In order to arrange for full-day supervision of the children and to avoid the risk that children are left unprotected during the school-day, families with the financial requirements often choose to put their children in private schools that offer longer school days or after-school-care. Although many of these schools were religiously affiliated, the main reason parents enrolled their children in these schools was because of the after-school programs and longer school days.

The lack of care for elderly was mentioned but regarded as a problem that has largely been solved through the care insurance fund. According to this law, the fund only covers people with medically defined needs. Others are obliged to finance their own care needs. It is common that female relatives leave the labour market and accept modest care benefits as compensation for loss of income. This is considered problematic by the representatives from
the equal opportunity offices but largely accepted by the politicians. In positive terms, it is referred to as an individual choice or a naturally moral action taken by these women. As the town councillor in Stuttgart stated,

They [adult daughters] do not quit their jobs to protect their parents’ savings or to avoid personal expenses for institutional care. They take care of their parents as a moral act. Here in Germany, they [grown-up children] are not legally constrained to take care of their parents, but many do so. Out of 10 elderly persons in need of care 9 are being cared for at home by their daughters. That is a very high percentage and they do it out if these moral obligation. (Stuttgart)

Another issue concerns employers’ and labour unions attitudes toward both male and female employees. Women are stigmatised as presumptive mothers if they find employment, whereas men are not expected to take up care responsibilities. In an open meeting about the development of Frankfurt from a gender perspective, it came forward that few persons dared to bring the reconciliation of work and family to the fore because they feared the issue would be dismissed as not a work matter. Similar experiences were reported throughout the interviews. Although some public institutions try to accommodate to the request of their employees, of which an overwhelming majority are women, by offering varying part-time models that can be individually combined with childcare, private employers have few or no such ambitions. Only a small number of large companies use flexible working hours and other childcare services at their workplaces or through contracts with private daycare companies.

Female salaries are generally low and based on part-time jobs. Part-time employment has increased considerably in Germany and everyone interviewed agreed that this is both an advantage and a disadvantage for women. The disadvantages include a decrease in financial stability, competence, and career opportunities. The combination of female part-time employment and the legal sanction of a gender division of labour in the household was considered by some as among the most important disadvantages because it further cements traditional gender roles. Others, mainly respondents with an outspoken conservative political view, do not see this as a problem. They emphasised the advantages. Women can take up employment earlier than they have done before and single mothers can increase their opportunities in the labour market and hence reduce their dependence on social assistance.

Because there is a lack of part-time jobs, particularly at a certain level of qualification, it forces groups of women to accept jobs that they are
overqualified for in order to re-enter the labour market. As there are better possibilities to apply for and get reduced working hours on a time-limited basis in the public sector, this problem is particularly dominant in the private labour market and not only viewed with suspicion by employers but also by labour unions. According to the representative for the Equal Opportunity Office in Frankfurt, the labour unions claim they have their hands tied. As long as part-time work and flexible hours are not expressed by their members as an issue to be supported by the union, then they have no intention to take up the subject. This exposes the employer and labour union understandings of gender roles in the family. Because many employees are afraid to support family issues in the workplace and because women are not represented in labour unions very well, they see no reason to pursue these types of family friendly issues.

Men’s lack of interest to take up care responsibilities, or even to discuss gender equality, by all interviewed, was brought up in connection to politics, labour unions, employers, and workplaces or the homes. The financial restraints on families with care responsibilities were mentioned as one factor that kept men away from family care; however, the main problem was noted as the idea of the ‘good mother’ and men’s attitudes toward care and household work.

Many people think that the child belongs with his/her mother, at least during the first years, because these are the years of imprint, and that is still strongly asserted in Germany. It hampers you to say ‘ok, we bear the children but men should bring them up’. I also think that we still have a long way to go. I think men have to insist to get more right to their family. Right to their children but they just don’t do that. Such a movement does just not exist. (Equal Opportunity Office, Paderborn).

The issue of men’s care obligations is by all respondents described as a question that is only discussed among women. Although German women have changed their behaviour from a traditional housewife career to a more work oriented lifestyle, men have not changed their behaviour or their attitude towards themselves as fathers or partners. As discussed above, this issue is closely connected to the image of women’s opportunities in the labour market, their predominance in part-time employment, and their situation as single mothers. But it is also connected to the understanding of motherhood and children’s specific needs for their mothers. The following quotation by a respondent at the Equal Opportunity Office in Stuttgart typifies what most interviewees believe.

We need men that work part-time, we need male models that also show that it is nice to take a walk with children. We need new fathers ‘Neue Männer
braucht das Land’ ['the Country Needs New Men’, a song performed by Ina Deter in the beginning of the 1980s]. The women have done their part to achieve a change. Now it’s the men’s turn.

Men who work part-time because of family reasons or take up parental leave are not accepted and ridiculed by other men. Discovering that the possibilities to influence the labour unions in Frankfurt were closed, people in the equal opportunity office started collaborating with some of the large newspapers about male roles in family care issues. The purpose was to increase public education and opinion about work and family needs, fathers’ right to care for their children, and mothers’ right to be employed.

Some people interviewed stated that income splitting\textsuperscript{26} was as an additional important obstacle because it prevented women from engaging in paid work. Although frequently discussed in connection to gender political issues and several times appealed for in the national court, the outcome has always been that marriage has a particular status of protection in the Basic Law and that the removal of the law would be a violation of the Basic Law. In Bremen, the argument was put forward that this law, in reality supporting a system of unpaid and unproductive housewives, should be abolished and replaced with increased monetary support to families with children. Among the respondents in the equal opportunity offices, the enforced gender arrangements that support a housewife ‘free of charge’ were fiercely criticised and the thesis was put forward that very few women can compete on equal terms with men in the labour market under these conditions.

Many married and single mothers give up their work ambitions because of how difficult it is to combine employment with childcare and because of the low salaries offered in many part-time jobs. Although single mothers are increasingly expected to earn their income by working, they still often use social assistance and are particularly vulnerable. Even so, most towns offered programs that helped single mothers find employment by offering priority to public childcare and the majority of children in public childcare are younger than four years old and living with one parent (Bauereiss, Bayer and Bien 1997, 94).

\textsuperscript{26} The income splitting law permits a one-breadwinner married couple to divide the income in two, as if the couple would have two lower work incomes and thereby reduce the taxation rate. Due to the progressive taxation rules, a second actual income is taxed relatively higher than the first income. The absence or presence of children has no relation to this law.
If they [single mothers] are flexible enough they may solve their situation, adjusting their need for paid work to their care situation. Mostly it is the case that she cannot make it compatible and then she simply stays at home. Then she receives social assistance, if entitled to. (Equal Opportunity Office, Paderborn).

The majority of the respondents described single mothers as stigmatised, living on the edge of poverty, and often using public assistance. They face difficulties finding adequate childcare facilities and adequate employment that provides enough money to cover costs for childcare. Like most women, they also encounter resistance from employers who do not accept the circumstances for their care obligations. Moreover, single mothers run into difficulties finding affordable housing and landlords that accept single mothers. Regulating child support payments from fathers was noted as creating many problems. Large numbers of men avoid paying their child support.

Because of the problems of data collection and interpretation of available statistics, the difficulties in making political points or statements concerning women and their living conditions were emphasised. However, all interviewed believed that it was time to increase female labour market participation, to provide female-friendly labour market policies, to provide full-time childcare facilities, to provide reliable and longer school hours, and to provide professional guidance for women who wish to enter the labour market. In fact, increased flexibility in working hours was regarded as more important than care issues. This is partly explained by the growing tendency among parents to solve the problem of the lack of childcare operating hours by using private childcare providers or parent’s co-operatives thereby handling the problem by themselves with public financial support. Another issue underlined was the need to increase the number of women in leading positions in the political system, in the labour market, and in labour unions. As it is now, according to most of the interviews, many issues are not possible to bring up on a political agenda as they are immediately referred to as being private and hence not political topics. Women’s situations in organisations was described as resembling one of hostages who would lose their protective support from male colleagues if they presented issues connected to working hours, social services, or gender equality. Other issues related to women’s social rights were income-related social benefits and fees for social services, changed taxation for married couples in favour of two-earner families with children, higher income limits for parental leave, and higher economic substitution levels. Female access to and participation in the labour market are matters that meet ambivalent reactions. Although many women return to work before the end of their parental leave, the long
duration of the leave and its implications for women’s financial stability and labour market participation was only vaguely criticised. Instead flexible working hours and improved conditions for part-time jobs were regarded as the primary political issue.

Changes in the overall gender culture towards a clearer expression of achieving economic self-sufficiency through paid work was identified as having provoked a female strategy of postponing or avoiding marriage and returning to the labour market earlier than what has been prevalent among German mothers. It seems that both ideals about good mothering and children’s psychological needs, coupled with men’s absence in care and household work, and the deficits in childcare create manifest constraints for women to return to employment without loosing in income or career possibilities. The unwillingness to take up issues related to circumstances affecting female labour market participation on a political agenda indicates the political status of the subject as having low priority and being controversial. When confronted with the idea of fathers as prime caretakers or the issue of how to deal with the large number of housewives, arguments supporting gender differences were used. As indicated above, social inequalities were rarely taken up directly but were mentioned indirectly with childcare costs, types of childcare available for different social groups, and job opportunities. The geographical differences in female labour market participation rates are not very large and the statistics available are not very precise or possible to use in a comparative study. Still, the scattered data seem to point in the same direction as the results presented by Sackmann and Häussermann (1994). Independent of political affiliation or geographical location, women entering and remaining in employment is expressed as desirable but at the same time female access to economic autonomy through paid work is counteracted by its close relation to demands on increased public spending on services. The need for such services, substituting what by many is regarded as women’s legal and natural obligation toward young and old family members, therefore often is claimed to be a private need and not a public need.

ITALY

In Italy, there is no clear-cut national family policy; the Italian extended family\(^{27}\) is responsible for the social and financial security of individuals, in contrast to the German non-interventionist system of financial support of families. Because of the absence of explicit national family policies,

\(^{27}\) The extended family includes relatives other than children and parents such as sisters and brothers and their children.
Saraceno believes that it is difficult to identify the institutionalisation of such policies (1998, 189). The specific features of the Italian welfare state have been accounted for in detail by several authors (Saraceno 1994, 1998, Bimbi 1994, Trifiletti 1999a, 1999b, Ferrera 1996, Melucci 1996). In short, social policies are fragmented, differentiated, inadequate, and even contradictory and have little or no co-ordinating features on a national level. Universal policies supporting individual autonomy are rare. The labour market legislation and social policies protect (or for some overprotect) segments of the population in regular employment, while leaving large groups with inadequate or no social protection. This becomes especially clear in the social security programmes, pension programmes, and poverty statistics. The irregular and often unofficial labour market is widespread and the labour performed here includes large numbers of women.

The 1948 Italian Constitution has a built-in ambivalence towards individual autonomy that is reflected in national political and legal discourse. The Constitution states that Italian society is founded on work and the citizen is understood as a worker. As emphasised by De Simone and Villa (1998, 6-8), the individual’s right to autonomy and economic independence is declared, but there are no coherent legal or financial tools attached to enforce or implement these rights. In addition, the family is defined “as a natural social unit founded on marriage” (Bimbi 1994, 148). Within the system of subsidiarity intergenerational family solidarity is a legal mediation of individual rights and economic protection and therefore individual autonomy is de-emphasised. Care is recognised as a family responsibility; the family is expected to substitute lacking institutional structures with women as care providers. Rather than expressing a specific breadwinner regime, female dependence on a working husband and intergenerational dependence on several individual incomes from family members is a consequence of the Italian constitution and welfare state because “[f]amily interdependence, more than women’s dependence, is encouraged” (Saraceno 1994, 71, italics in original). While recognising this, the state has taken on a residual responsibility, organising supplementary resources in which there is a priority of cash benefits over service provision. The relation between the positive implications of interdependence, as the opposite to reliance or dependence on the state and public transfers or services, seem to be one of the major stumbling blocks for the discourse of gender equality and trends toward increased opportunities for individuals.

The ideological polarisation between left-wing and conservative parties combined with political parties that stress narrow social interests have frustrated and obstructed the potential for social innovation in Italian society.
In addition, political affiliation and patronage, originating in social relations between relatively small but influential groups and political interests, have been distinctive traits. These particular social and political processes have produced an institutional closure distinguished by a specific weakness of state institutions in terms of ability to implement political reforms. It was not until the mid 1990s that the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity was established; however, the social ministry does not have a separate budget. An equal opportunity office was also established.

Welfare programs were developed late but rapidly in the 1970s and early 1980s in a discontinuous and unplanned political process. Without being part of a conscious welfare-political strategy and “failing to attack the underlying logic of the social institutions they were directed against” (Melucci 1996, 266), the coverage of social protection for workers expanded over time in modified versions to encompass larger social groups. In the 1960s and 1970s, political pressure from women’s groups resulted in important improvements. The rapid modernisation of Italy, workers demands for social citizenship, and influences from social movements all over the western world created the “opportunity structure” that addressed feminist demands (Dahlerup 1986, 4-5). Although women were and still are grossly underrepresented in Italian politics, neither Catholic conservatives nor left-wing political parties could neglect the political demands stressed by women’s organisations. From the late 1960s, seemingly progressive but incoherent policies were introduced that directly affected childcare and women in the labour market. The following issues were addressed: equal pay agreements (1962-63), public funded childcare for children in the age group 3 - 5 (1968), public funded crechès (1971), a new maternity leave (1971),

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26 The overall coverage for the age group 3-5 in scuola materna is above 90% (ISTAT 1999, 275-277). The high coverage is related to the emphasis on education within the concept of scuola materna and thereby to the state responsibility. Children are entitled to this service. The monthly fees are generally low but vary depending on locality and provider.

27 The law on childcare was brought forward by trade unions and women’s organisation and placed the costs for asili nido (childcare for children under the age of 3) on the state and local governments. Before the law, the costs for childcare were covered by employers who had more than 40 women employees. With the new law, the financial pressures were transferred from employers to the public, modifying the image of women as a cost for firms and enterprises (Saraceno 1998, 183). The local public responsibility for the supply of asili nido makes this care service rare and comparatively expensive. Parents pay a part of the costs on a sliding scale based on income. The monthly fees vary between different childcare institutions. The national coverage is 9.4% of 0-2 years old children, of whom 78.6% of the mothers are
the right to use contraceptives (1971), civil divorce rights (1974), the law on parity (1977), and free abortion (1978). Furthermore, in the late 1970s the income-tax system was changed from taxation of joint earnings of married couples into a system of separate taxation.\footnote{Some of the new rights were in fact the abolishment of old fascist laws that had remained untouched and transferred into the post-war Italian Republic. As for the law on separate taxation, it was actually promoted by the Catholic Church and Catholic party in favour of the traditional family. The Church feared that the introduction of divorce rights, for taxation reasons, would increase the number of divorces. It can been argued that the new tax law in fact is a disadvantage for male breadwinner families and favours two-income families (Saraceno 1998, 7).} Although feminists and women in public employment played important roles in the development of social services and the formulation of services as social rights (Bimbi 1994, Saraceno 1994, 1998), women’s labour market participation never achieved political priority. Instead, women have received protection as workers when identified as mothers. As in Germany, women’s employment has been perceived as a personal or family choice or compulsion rather than an individual right that requires public support.

The Italian female employment rate is variable. Although female employment rates have increased, it remains among the lowest in Western Europe. Increased female unemployment rates are due to increasing numbers of women seeking employment and the rigid labour market. There are enormous differences between social subgroups within the female population. Age, educational level, family status, and residence are powerful stratifying factors. The North-South differences are striking as well. In 1998, the female employment rate in the South was 20% and the unemployment rate 32%. In the North, the pattern was reverse (ISTAT 1999, 473-474). The poverty rate among families with the head of household employed is about 8.5% but increases rapidly if this person leaves employment or is in search of a job (ISTAT 2000). Female employment rates are closely connected to family poverty. The highest poverty rates are in households headed by women; more than half of these are elderly women and a fourth are single parents (ISTAT 2000). One-fifth of all Italian families live in relative poverty (ISTAT, 2000)\footnote{The definition of relative poverty is calculated as a two-person family with monthly expenses that are equal or below the medium expenses of one single person in Italy. To calculate the expenses of larger families according to this measure an equivalence scale is used that considers the economy of scale (ISTAT 2000).} and more than two thirds of these families live in the southern parts (Mezzogiorno) of the country, corresponding to one-fourth employed (ISTAT 1999, 275-277).
of all families in the area (ISTAT 2000). The absolute poverty rate\textsuperscript{32} presents the same pattern and emphasises the structure of poverty as related to families with children in the south of the country. In 1999, more than 76\% of families in absolute poverty lived in the South. The most striking development is that in the North the poverty rate among families with children and/or elderly has been reduced in the last three years whereas in the South it has increased or at the best remained unchanged. In the region, the number of unemployed women seeking work is much greater than the number of employed women (ISTAT 1999). Only a few individuals are entitled to subsidies connected to their unemployment status (Reyneri 1997, 49).

Evident demographic changes and transformations of family patterns have drawn much attention within Italian social research and national politics. The female share of the active labour force is increasingly composed of young unmarried women and of working married women without children. Unmarried women between 25 and 29 years old who are employed has increased from 15.9\% to 23.1\% between 1990 and 1998. In the same period, the number of married women without children, aged 30-35, who are employed increased from 6.5\% to 11.3\%. Simultaneously, the number of employed married mothers decreased from 35.7\% to 28\% (ISTAT 1999, 271). Although women are 70\% of part-time workers in Italy (OECD 1999, 197), overall part-time employment is not widespread (about 13 \%) and there is no strong connection between women’s working hours and dependent children (Addabbo 1997). The impact of familialism makes care for elderly and other members of an extended family a responsibility of the family. Many elderly live with or close to their younger relatives. Care provider benefits exist but correspond to a symbolic contribution to the costs rather than a substitute for income.

Several studies fortify a public view of Italian women as one of difference, both as a difference between men and women rooted in biology or social relations producing gender inequalities or even oppression, and as differences between groups of women. Both types are described as firmly established in geography, beliefs about motherhood, social rules for reciprocity, and socio-economic inequalities (Siebert, 1987, Knapp 1991, Giantempo 1994, Leccardi 1998). However, despite low official female participation rates, various surveys indicate that Italians look positively on

\textsuperscript{32} The absolute poverty rate is calculated on the needs of an individual or a family such as expenses for food, housing, and other necessities (ISTAT 2000).
female employment. A majority are in favour of expanded social services to families instead of financial transfers (Palomba 1995, ISTAT 1999, 279).

Combining employment with care responsibilities, or just to organise everyday care and household work, is by most families solved through a patchwork of kinship, social services, and the purchase of private, often unofficial services. A majority of children in the age group 0-10 are taken care of by grandparents on a regular basis (Sabbadini 2000, 23). Many elderly women are care providers for older and younger relatives and often indicate that this work is frustrating and exhausting and that they would prefer better care services and would prefer to remain employed (Supplement till Europas kvinner 1997). Employed women perceive more gender equality (Bimbi and La Mendola 1999) and an increased number of Italian women prefer combining family and children with paid work to traditional homemaking (Sundström 1999, 2000, ISTAT 1999, 271-272, Sabbadini 1999, 10-12). The importance of economic independence from family members or from local social assistance through paid work is also repeatedly emphasised by single mothers (Gardberg Morner 2000). Although there are signs that indicate an increasing interest among men to spend more time with their children, housework is still seen as a female responsibility (ISTAT 1999, Bimbi and La Mendola 1999).

There are marked differences between women with different educational backgrounds. Highly educated mothers are more positive about combining employment with children than are other groups of women (Sundström 2000). They also return to work after childbirth more often than women with lower educational backgrounds (Saurel-Cubizolles et al. 1999) and prefer institutional childcare to other solutions (Sabbadini 2000, 24-25). Without denying the existence of cultural differences in attitudes and behaviour between different social groups, the possibility to return to work after parental leave is undoubtedly an financial question to which higher educated and better paid women are better prepared. Because of their professional status and their higher salaries, they gain more by returning to work than women with lower salaries and less stimulating work. In addition, the advantages of higher incomes out weigh the costs of childcare.

In the 1990s, these features and their possible trajectories for the welfare state and society as a whole have become one of the most debated themes within social policy research in Italy. They are also of increasing importance in political discussions on both a local and a national level. In 1998, the government signed the “social pact for development”, which reaffirmed its strong commitment to new and active labour market policies and to the
reformation of the traditional two-track system of active and passive policies. Increased female labour market participation has become a national political goal. It is difficult to say what political impact the growing number of female members of parliament may have on the change of policy direction as compared to the influence of demographic and economic trends and ideas. Women’s political representation has never been a major issue in Italian debates. In 1997, 11.1% of the parliament members were women. The female representation at a local level is somewhat higher (Del Re 1999, 26). Still, with the fall of the Christian Democrats (DC) in the early 1990s and the entrance of the former Communist Party (PCI), now Left Democrats (PDS), into the government, a new socio-political platform was built. Three of the major welfare political themes are closely related. First, the polarising effects of the current distributive character of social policies on various socio-economic groups are increasing. Second, the possibilities to reform existing social policies, introduce family policies, and reduce high unemployment rates through labour market policies are under debate. Third, the family network and reliance on other family members for services and financial needs is emphasised. This dimension is closely connected to the division of labour between men and women. The economic and moral pressure on women, from both the private and the public sphere, to shoulder the care responsibility for family members is high (Bettio and Villa 1996, Bimbi 1998). In 1996, the demands for reforms in welfare policies resulted in a legislative proposal, which in the spring of 1999 had not been approved by the parliament (Politiche Familiari del Governo 1996-1999, Turco 1999). The main part of the proposal suggests monetary increases in financial subsidies to mainly poor or large families and the introduction of new and less targeted benefits and services.

Suggested reforms do not openly challenge the sexual division of labour but suggests increased services and financial support for families. The difficulties and disagreements are manifold, reaching from conflicting notions about what constitutes a family and the actual causes of changing family patterns to controversies about the priority of social reforms and the introduction of and level for minimum income support. The latter was recently introduced as a national project in a limited number of Italian towns. Debates include the definition of criteria for the division of costs and responsibility between the government and regional and local authorities as well as between the public and private sectors and employers.

33 In some towns, local regulations for minimum income assistance already exist independent of national policies.
Individual autonomy is opposed to Italian family values. Right-wing arguments demand increased income-related support to the traditional family but with the principle of familialism left untouched. Left-wing arguments tend to favour social services for people in need of care. The traditional understanding of the significance of solidarity and subsidarity is hence to some extent put into question and new, or revised, interpretations are main threads through the debates that demand public institutions, labour unions, and employers to take greater responsibility for creating change.

Meanwhile, within a larger frame of resisting rigidity and bureaucracy, collaboration and changes occur on other levels in society. There are examples of public and private workplaces that in various ways support employees with young children. There are also various models of innovative local social policies that have come into practice through the acknowledgement of needs of specific social groups or as tools to reach particular socio-political goals. The large social and economic differences between regions and their citizens have become more exposed. In addition, it is difficult to apply national universal policy solutions without producing penalising effects on certain social groups. On the political scene, arguments for a federalisation of the country tend to underline the local differences and therefore the need for increased regional autonomy in taxation policies and legislative rights. The counter-argument claims that the standardisation of rights financed using specific national funds decreases the local differences in economic resources.

Today, the lack of comprehensive national legislation, definitions, regulations, and tools for control are combined with local autonomy to define social policies. Municipalities are obliged to support individuals in financial need. Services, such as childcare for children below 3 years of age, school-meals, and elderly-care are available according to political prioritising and local financial means. Social services are therefore likely to be highly selective or very expensive. All care services require the family to fill the gaps and to connect different services. The ambivalence about family policies and the deficiency in national policies, guidelines, and financial tools economically and legally constrain local politicians while at the same time they have relative freedom to introduce their own political interpretations of what needs to be done. By showing an increased interest in social and family policies, local entities substitute lacking employment policies with social policy measures mandated from the national level (Domenicantonio 1998). The absence of national guidelines

34 The measures taken are actions that combat family poverty rather than family or
notwithstanding, recent studies indicate a variety of experimental local social policy initiatives (Saraceno 1998, Trifiletti 1998).

The Italian interviews

The public and political ambiguities about welfare policies in general and social policies and the problems of the South in particular, combined with the low capacity among political institutions to absorb, incorporate, and represent public interests impede the development of coherent policies. Different local and regional demographic, social, and economic circumstances have resulted in a far-reaching heterogeneity in welfare policies and there are marked local differences in service supply. While the municipalities in the study perform a variation of services and welfare policies they also present important differences in political priorities and hence also in policies aiming to reduce the care burden for women and families in general and support women’s financial autonomy in particular. To define these welfare policies and services as mainly residual is to fail to recognise important aspects of the underlying structures and values. The combination of categorical and universal components notwithstanding, the fragmented and contradictory characters of different measures of social policies leave important holes in social protection and services for large groups of citizens.

On a local level, female politicians are not as prevalent in Italy as in Germany and Sweden, but Italian female politicians are active in social policies. Among the planned six interviews, four were women but only two, both representing left-wing coalitions, were actually interviewed. The other two represented Forza Italia in Polo coalitions and did not agree to interviews but sent representatives. According to both the female and the male respondents, the gender of a politician could not be seen as a determinant for the type of policies promoted. This statement is probably best understood in the light of the quite apparent presence of political conflicts between left-wing and right-wing parties and the often very loud and speculative political debates in the local as well as the national public media. Political conflicts present different responses to various social, structural, and economic problems and there are shared values about privacy of the family, the low priority of gender equality issues, and an ambivalence towards different means of public support aimed at individuals and families. Most respondents identified the situation as a cultural problem that results in unemployment policies. To reduce poverty among unemployed, unemployed persons have been transferred into systems of early retirement or disability pensions (Saraceno and Negri 1994).
gender inequalities. The cultural problem was described as men suppressing women, men requiring women to act like men, or undervaluing and underestimating gender differences and female virtues and differences in local cultures, which results in overall socio-economic injustices and more specifically also in gender inequalities.

I believe that [political] measures that go in depth with structures can contribute to a, I would say equity rather than equality. Because we have to depart from the idea that in our country, similar to the rest of the world, there are two genders: men and women. And one can not speak of equality between individuals that are different in needs and claims. But what needs to be done is to see that diversity does not turn into injustice, that is that one gender becomes disadvantaged compared to the other. As long as national laws are unaware of both the ways women see and perceive their lives and tasks, and as long as national laws do not understand their [women’s] contributions, we will continue to make laws that do not respect both female and male citizens. I think that especially in the filed of social policies there is a specific sensibility that comes from the female culture, in my opinion, women bring with them life experiences that most certainly would be a resource. (Naples)

The underlying values and the actual policy measures in the different towns can be identified as results of both political ambitions and of local gender relations and as effects of the socio-economic preconditions of each town.

The chief aim of social policies in Italy was generally regarded as being primarily a poverty measure. Beyond that, female relatives were perceived as natural and necessary care providers. As shown below, to varying degrees all the people interviewed considered the family as the main provider of goods and services and that this was a moral value that should be protected. Moreover, familialism was recognised as interfering with the introduction of universal or targeted social policies. The conflicts between the position of the family in welfare policies and the lack of political instruments to support families or individuals were viewed as visible problems in all towns and as issues that seldom were questioned. In all municipalities, the individual’s needs—especially among the elderly—to live in social relations with
close family members was emphasised as a human need and an essential necessity for his/her well being.

The general political ambition, which has never been put into question, is that the main responsibility for individual welfare lies with the family. Of course, when we speak about handicapped or children at risk, but from there to assist social needs with services or financially is beyond the political sphere. There are interventions [for individuals or families with specific needs] on a sliding scale from home help to day care institutions. If possible, the handicapped person, or a minor, or the elderly remain at home with some home assistance or has a teacher come a couple of hours a day. To give support in the home is the best thing to do. (Turin)

Especially for the elderly we have activated a service that gives assistance to elderly in their homes. In addition we have introduced an financial contribution to families that keep the elderly within the family, that is for those who renounce putting their elderly relatives in institutions, precisely to influence and reduce the numbers admitted to institutions. Because, as we all know, it is, so to speak, a thing not all to well satisfactory for the elderly because very often they become distanced from their families of origin and from their neighbourhood. (Naples)

Because the right to social services and financial assistance is based on income from the individual or from the extended family, social services are not available to everyone. The economic calculations of income for access to care or care benefits vary between the towns. In most municipalities, it was unclear whether the income of an elderly person was calculated based on pensions or on incomes of relatives. In the majority of towns, the financial difficulties for families providing care to the elderly was a familiar theme presented and discussed with ambivalence and sometimes in ambiguous terms. It seemed to be, as the person interviewed in Turin said,

It is an open problem, this with the reimbursements. A somewhat ticklish problem, this of how much the family has to contribute, but I would say, it ought to be [based on the income of] the elderly person and not on the income of other family members, such as adult children or other relatives. (Turin)

In Bologna, in-home assistance for the elderly is calculated based on the income of the elderly and assistance in institutions is based on the income of the extended family. In Verona, all care for the elderly was calculated on basis of the extended family. The income of the extended family was the criterion for how much care work could be requested from the family. That
is, whether the elderly would be offered to participate in activities arranged by the public social services or pay the actual costs for institutional care. Only individuals or families with extremely low incomes would be offered public services of any kind or reductions of costs. Naples recently initiated the implementation of more coherent services for children and the elderly, which indirectly supports women in their daily care work. Naples also showed political ambitions concerning the public responsibility for social services for the poorest and people with the greatest needs. However, it should be made clear that the economic resources available for these services in Naples were extremely limited and hence in practice clearly directed to the socially and financially most disadvantaged groups.

Now, before long, emergency telephones will be introduced. It is a thing adapted to the telephone through which the elderly person is connected directly to an emergency number in order to obtain a range of assistance. We also have activities directed not only to elderly with needs for instance summer sojourn that last 14 days. We have about 3000 elderly that participate in the summer sojourn. We also have day recreation activities for elderly in two elderly day centres. In collaboration with the voluntary associations we also have other activities in two city zones that reach from sport to health conferences and over to more lively things such as dancing, music, guided visits. There is hence a wide range of activities directed towards the elderly. In addition, and in association with elderly and voluntary organisations we have introduced the project ‘citizen grandparents’ [Nonni civici], by which we have engaged elderly as a type of supervisor outside the schools. Out of this, other intergenerational contact activities have been born aiming to support the communication between the generations. (Naples)

All the interviewed people were ambivalent about families taking care of small children or the even the more demanding care of elderly family members while giving up the advantages of an income. Most often, this came forward in complaints about the costs, the shortage, and the insufficiency of care services for elderly and for children under the age of 3. In Italy, placing an elderly relative in a care facility is expensive and such a step could put families in financial difficulties. On a sliding payment scale and only for very specific and needy groups—such as mentally or physically disabled people, children at risk, or frail elderly daycare—assistance is offered. In these cases, only the basic needs of the individual are protected. In the interviews, a need for an increase in individual care services and basic financial security were noted. The discussions and arguments mirror a maturing awareness about the fact that families and especially women are stressed by overwhelming care burdens, financial restraints, and the loss of a former income and future pensions. For both men and women, savings would diminish the risk of ending up in a similar situation of financial and
emotional dependency on family members. However, decreasing savings because of income losses due to care obligations severely reduce a family’s and an individual’s financial security. The logic behind the present system of social policies was summarised as a zero sum game for the municipalities. In Verona, the situation was described as desperate and an ironic tone was used to explain the situation. 35

[W]e intervene with care for elderly if they are alone, or in difficulties, if these occur within the family. Unfortunately, we tend not to intervene because there is a reliance on the family resources to take care of the problems with the elderly person. Unfortunately, the number of our elderly has increased and therefore our resources are all, let’s say engaged, in the emergence of care-taking of the needs among elderly that are alone, that is without relatives. Only in rare cases do we manage to add [to the service offers or activity programmes] an elderly that co-habits with his or her children. (Verona)

The towns realised that it is more expensive to pick up the pieces after a family is experiencing economic hardship than providing some economic assistance for the care of elderly early on. Because support for government sponsored relief was not present, families were left with few options. According to some, women were forced to give up their jobs in order to care for elderly members of their family. The reduction of one income not only reduces total family income but also curtails the possibilities for individuals to save for future needs.

We should intervene more often in families that take a considerable honour in keeping an elderly in their home. We should be more directed toward these families that perform this workload. Income level cannot be the only access criteria to a service. The combined income you have only if two [working adults] are able to go to work and produce this income. If we don’t permit this and withdraw one of them from the labour market in order to compensate [for lacking public services or economic assistance], they cannot provide economic resources for the family. (Verona)

The ambivalence present in all interviews waivered between moral ambiguity about the implications of subsidiarity and familialism and concerns more closely related to the definition of “deserving” and “undeserving” target groups. In other words, the reasons for individual or family service needs or financial stress was taken into account and valued. Although not outspoken

35 The person responsible for social affairs and a representative for Forza Italia refused to be interviewed. Instead a person in a decision making position within the administration was interviewed.
as clearly as in Turin and Naples, all interviewed people were concerned about intergenerational relationships and the dissolution of family ties due to modernisation and loss of traditional values. Most of all, the problems with elderly institutions as an undignified and unworthy way to treat the elderly were brought into focus. In Turin and Milan, social services were clearly directed at families or individuals with well-defined needs. In Milan, the growing service needs among “normal”, or “non-problematic” families as compared to “weak” or “fragile” families (famiglie deboli) were observed but the political response about this new phenomenon was to maintain social policies that address the people with the most needs. The emphasis is on the family as a social actor of fundamental importance and as an economically valuable producer of “relational assets” (beni relazionali) were stressed (Comune di Milano 1997, 1). The political ambition of Milan most clearly emphasised the values of subsidiarity and familialism. With reference to the national legislation, care needs were expected to be financed and provided for by the family and were hence dismissed as objects for local social policies or local political concerns. The direction of policies in Turin appeared slightly more ambivalent. With an apparent awareness about the pressure put on families including a disabled person and the rapidly growing numbers of frail elderly, the political ambition to increase social services resulted in new homes for the elderly.

Only in Bologna was the system of subsidiarity and familialism clearly considered an obstacle. Subsidiarity and familialism as manifested in the Civil Code was seen as a national obstruction to Bologna’s prime political goal, the free choice of the individuals through universal social policies. The town councillor of Bologna expressed the need for a national discussion about subsidiarity in terms of the costs for families, individual self-determination, and in relation to public costs. She regretted the almost complete national public and political silence in this area. Verona, however, leaned towards a two-tier system of social policies with one tier directed at the reduction of poverty through service assistance and the other tier directed at economic and social service support for maintaining the traditional family. In Bologna, services directed at the elderly in need of care and women’s right to paid work were promoted. Housing loan programmes with favourable terms were offered to young couples and low-income families. Economic support to complement parental leave was established to encourage men in these groups to take parental leave. Although based on different political perspectives in Verona and in Bologna, it was argued that public costs could actually be reduced if social services or benefits were increased to larger groups.
From my point of view, this is a very delicate issue because we need to arrive at that point in which it is defined that this is a time-limited public cost to an individual in economic need. If a family is forced to put two elderly relatives in a home for elderly they are in a financially bad shape. The family will be in need of economic social assistance. We will have to pay, almost always. Very few families have the dynamic to support elderly in homes. It’s a problem of relative poverty. This way families with medium or high incomes are impoverished. (Bologna)

According to the Bologna arguments, although a difficult task, individuals in economically precarious situations need assistance from the public sources and this should be considered a citizenship right and as a way to reduce the risk of perpetual poverty for families. The high public costs for public assistance was the main fear in Verona and perpetual poverty was primarily discussed in terms of the protection of traditional family values. According to several interviewees, female labour market participation was considered an economic necessity forced upon families, threatening to dissolve “genuine” values and family ties. In many Italian families with a husband and wife who are employed and who have a large care burden, they address their care needs by hiring private home assistance such as domestic help, childcare providers, or assistance for elderly relatives. Such jobs are usually performed by immigrant women because they accept work under less advantageous conditions than native Italians would accept.

Almost no comprehensive statistics or evaluations of the services produced by non-governmental organisations were available in any of the towns, possibly with the exception of Bologna. However, other studies show that these organisations mainly produce social services that are targeted at traditional needs in specific housing areas and show a tendency to block innovative methods or the identification of new social problems outside their traditional spheres (Trifiletti 1998, 22). Consistent with the idea that social services are primarily for individuals or families with the greatest economic needs, the lack of subsidised social services for the largest social groups—often referred to as normal, or non-problematic, families—was not regarded as a social injustice. Rather, new narrow-defined groups with particular needs, such as individuals suffering from Alzheimer’s or children with specific diagnoses or extraordinary home conditions were identified as people with needs. Bologna showed clear political ambitions to extend the social service offer to non-problematic individuals and families, beyond the definitions of specific economic, social, or medical needs. Attitudes and policies ranged from encouragement of increased gender equality through women’s paid labour (Bologna) to a more narrowly defined policy of support for poor families to help them become more self-sufficient through
paid work and less dependent on public financial aid (Verona, Turin, and more reluctantly Milan). In Verona, ways to also support “non-problematic families” to keep up traditional family lifestyle were under political scrutiny. Although the political discourse in Naples supported the increase of social service offers in order to meet a variety of welfare issues, the main effort was directed at social services and subsidies to offset the harshest effects of poverty.

In general, left-wing politicians put more emphasis on universal care coverage, or at least on welfare policies directed at larger social groups, while centre-wing and right-wing respondents suggested more targeted social policies. This was especially emphasised in connection to care needs among disabled persons and the elderly. One of the concerns used in public debates during the period of the study, and by the persons interviewed, was the need to re-evaluate care work and place it as an important social asset and resource. In the left-wing use of the expression, it was combined with arguments in favour of supporting families economically through increased social services and financial redistribution in order to increase individual or family independence. In the right-wing use the term combined with arguments promoting a traditional family and the moral obligation for family members to support each other socially and financially. In the latter case, the public responsibility would be concentrated to economic redistribution and subsidies to families and sometimes with care facilities to relieve the pressure on mainly women. In reality, and as mentioned above, the Civil Code and the local conditions of the public economy influenced the extent of the local welfare policies.

The issue of social services and whether they are best produced by private organisations or through public institutions brought about several statements concerning the public economic advantages related to the non-governmental sector and the negative sides consisting of large variations in quality and lack of insight and control. People with the financial ability to choose other types of care services would do so.

Well, I think that the disadvantages so to speak, for as far as the public services are concerned, surely are the rigidity in the offer and the exaggerated costs that in one way or the other is paid by the user, the collective. The advantages are of course the quality that many times, at least in a majority of cases, is more controlled, better standardised and with a secure professionalism. The advantages with the private services are those of a larger flexibility, of a larger adherence to the user, in some cases of lower costs. The disadvantages are not to have established rules when it comes to professionalism, control, aims and direction etc. Hence, I believe that the task
for the municipality of Naples is not so much to administer the services as public services, but much more to promote services, also mixed public-private ones, and public ones in collaboration with the private sphere. Thereby the municipality is given the role of offering good quality services, guaranteeing co-ordination and control in the cases where there is an activity taken up that is supported by the municipality and in collaboration with the private. (Naples)

In all municipalities the ambivalence was evident in the choice between economic subsidies and an expansion of social services. Although the costs for services from a local perspective may appear outrageous and simultaneously run the risk of stimulating demands on a widening of access rules, the actual costs for economic subsidies were perceived to be higher and more exposed to improper use. In order to ameliorate public influence of the quality of the social services offered and to increase the control of the actual needs of individuals, all municipalities tend to reduce the number of financial subsidies, previously the most common used method, and to increasingly rely on service offers. This standpoint was not always in line with regional laws, giving families the right to economic compensation for keeping an elderly relative in the household:

If our object, the head of a family, who receives the money, is a person capable of using the money right, most probably he will do so, but especially in those, let's say weak cases, there is little guarantee for how such an economic intervention will be used. (Verona)

Through a national program introduced in 1999 that was directed at specific disadvantaged regions, families with small children in Naples are entitled to a minimum income. According to the local regulations, families are also entitled to certain benefits if they take care of their elderly relatives in the family household (nonno in famiglia). It was not clear to what extent the authorities actually used this benefit as an administrative tool to reduce family poverty by evading the more restrictive rules for social assistance.

As far as childcare was concerned, national regulations guarantee childcare for the age group 3 to 5. In Naples, such pre-schools covered almost 50% of the children and in the other towns the coverage was close to 100%. The availability of care for smaller children varied more, from almost none in Naples to more significant services in Bologna. In none of the five towns was the coverage close to that for the older pre-school children, with large numbers of families on waiting lists. In many respects, Naples represents the particularities of southern Italy. Naples has a history of poverty, corruption, and abuse of political power and the public at large has little faith in politics. Social policies have been extremely fragmented although since 1997 the left-
wing local government has tried to assemble private and public initiatives to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of social policies. The scarcity of resources in social services, combined with a large number of marginalised households, promote services for only the groups with the most need. However, the political intentions were to develop a number of services for more groups.

I think we have to think of a mix of things, also the reformation of the law for assistance, for the services that have been discussed in Parliament. We have to aim at having series of responses and of opportunities because one can not standardise, let’s say, one offer for all. In some cases the family has financial needs in other cases there is mainly a service need. Some may have the need for a psychologist. Hence, let’s say everything has to be measured against the needs of the particular family and we need to have the possibility to answer to their needs. It is as if we would have a little toolbox with varying tools with which we could intervene according to the needs and the urgency of the specific family. This will increasingly be a task for and the functioning of the municipality. The institutions [mainly the national school system was referred to] should do much more to give the children the best opportunities, and not to continue to load on the families things that the schools do not succeed to solve. And hence become a more complete school that does not give any reasons to worries and in a way that families do not have to assist the children also at home. As far as the municipality is concerned, we should start a range of services so that the children, outside the schools have the right to play, the right to space and to perform activities beyond school-work. Socialisation games, playfulness, films, sports, and many other things that the municipality can suggest and realise. (Naples)

In Naples today, most services are for economically weak persons or families at no or a low cost for the user. Due to the financial shortcomings and to reduce misuse and mistrust, the method chosen in Naples was to assist preventative programmes, performed by volunteer organisations, and to encourage collaboration between public services and private organisations at very low public costs. The projects were conceived as increasing citizenship rights and welfare for children and elderly and as indirectly supporting women with care responsibilities. The main ambition was to reduce poverty and increase the quality of life, especially for children, by offering more services to address their needs, and by doing so, supporting families with various services and tools for intervention. The services offered by volunteer organisations were often only composed by daily meals for the youngest children or helping schoolchildren crossing heavy trafficked roads near schools.
While elderly care in all towns was quite clearly connected to the national regulations surrounding the Italian principles of subsidiarity and familialism, the question of childcare services was perceived as a subject connected to individual choices and family decisions in which the public had very little motive to intervene. Still, all the respondents emphasised the lack of childcare for children under the age of three, the rapidly growing demand for such care services because of women’s increased labour market participation, and the problem of a growing black market of service offers. The childcare fees in the public sector are based on income but the tariffs for volunteer childcare vary in each town. Informal childcare includes help from relatives, mainly grandmothers, baby-sitters, and housekeepers living with the family.

Because care issues were above all understood as family issues to be decided upon in the family, women’s employment is regarded as an individual choice or a family decision. The care question was primarily regarded as a private matter that only in specific cases became a public issue. In line with the issue of elderly care, these particular cases are mainly related to poverty issues and to children or families with special economic, social, or medical needs. In some cases, childcare services were not connected with family income. Instead, the access was related to the incomes of other applicants. The family with the lowest income was given precedence. To offer parents without public childcare a more reliable service than private baby-sitters, Verona planned to organise childcare providers on a more controlled and regular basis.

[I]f the families manage to pay for it, good, if not we may be able to contribute to this, to avoid that families find themselves turning directly to the private market or confront the problem with maybe female students or persons that are maybe not qualified. (Verona)

The growing number of employed women was interpreted as both a change in value orientation and a sign of increasing numbers of poor families with children. Except for Bologna, the tendency among women to remain employed after having children was by a majority of the interviewed not regarded as a positive change. Instead, it was interpreted as a negative trend and threat to traditional family values. More young or married women entering or re-entering in the labour market was seen as a sign of growing individualism or increased economic hardship. Although present in all interviews, the pressure for women to find work was emphasised in Verona and Milan, representatives with the neo-conservative party Forza Italia. As discussed previously, the role of the family as a service producer per se was emphasised in all towns and in Verona policies that support the socialisation
of families and individuals into their normative roles were emphasised. Overall, working women with no immediate financial difficulties were required to solve their care problems on their own by using public childcare or elderly care, private babysitters, housekeepers, and help from relatives. Only in Bologna and to some extent in Verona, this was identified as a problem of gender equality, for families and for the person in need of care as it constricts families to decide whether the wife’s income from employment covers the cost for care. A woman that remained a housewife was considered a luxury that only a few families could afford. Still, women’s economic dependence and possible precarious situations in families in general and in cases of family disrupters was clearly discernible to the majority of respondents.

[Being a housewife] is also a luxury that a woman cannot permit herself to have. Because in a reality like ours, where we have lots of separations and divorces, I say that it is dangerous for a woman just to be in a weak position from the point of view of income, she must in my opinion, always have an autonomous income. (Verona)

The overall high unemployment rates, with large regional variations, were described by some as a false picture because of the large number of people with unofficial incomes. It was not altogether clear as to what extent the black labour market was considered to cover even larger unemployment rates or if the official unemployment rates were understood as covering the fact that many of those registered as unemployed had tax evading incomes from unofficial employment.

I think that in Naples, like in many other towns, but here in a special way, there is a black labour market. Surely also women are represented in this black labour market, for instance work closely connected to households, decentralised working tasks so to speak, assistance within families, unofficial employment in family firms. This of course exists and it exists in very strong and forcing ways. In fact, the unemployment data that we have are, in my opinion, a bit false because we have about 25% of the labour force registered at the employment office. But of course there are also large numbers of people active in the black labour market that do not emerge. (Naples)

Some local differences in relation to women’s work performed in the large unofficial or quasi-official labour market came forward. Although widely used and largely accepted among most Italians, informal work was by several respondents emphasised as a female and/or immigrant problem for the local community. In Turin, people who were discovered having additional illegal incomes lost their economic subsidies. In Verona, the attitude was more pragmatic and related to the local structure of small
enterprises and their specific market conditions. It also revealed the belief that women work with traditionally female low-paying jobs that naturally belong to the informal labour market. In addition, the number of immigrant workers in this area was supposedly high. The absence of social protection for persons with the type of jobs enumerated below, regardless of nationality, was not really considered a problem by any of the other respondents. Still, one could argue that in Verona social policies were adjusted to this reality.

For a person that has no handicap, that is, is able to work, we calculate for sure (an income of) Lit 200 000\(^36\) as a presumed income. Because we believe that a person, let's say, is capable of finding unofficial jobs and earn at least 200 000 lire a month, at least! Cleaning jobs, taking care of children or elderly, hospital services, night work in hospitals. Here a lot of people do it, and they make even more money. It is not right to encourage them if they don't want to do it (laughter). Of course they don't bring their pay cheques and we don't force them to because if we insisted they would lose their jobs. The workplaces are small, painters, upholsterers, cleaning, removal firms, care services, etc… they change, are seasonal. We know that they will never become regularly employed; it may be because of the costs [social insurance and taxes expenses that fall on the employers] or for changes within the job-offers. (Verona)

Except for a few small-scale programmes for labour market introduction of single mothers in some towns, very few local policies are aimed to increase women’s employment opportunities in general but were directed to support the re-entry of men, affected by layoffs in large industries. In Turin, national subvention schemes were used to insert specific disadvantaged groups, like the long-term unemployed, single mothers, or persons with social, physical or psychological handicaps, into “socially useful or adapted jobs” (lavori socialmente utili). The local government compensated firms that guaranteed to employee a certain number of people with weak labour market attachment. This or similar systems of labour market policies were also partly used or under political consideration in Bologna, Verona, and Milan. A strong cultural and political unwillingness to promote women’s labour market participation was emphasised by the two female respondents. Despite the legal support to promote gender equality in the labour market the resistance to employ and promote women was described as ingrained, both in the political field and among employers.

Part-time work was not a highly prioritised political topic by any of the interviewed although it was considered to be increasing in importance due to

\(^{36}\) Lit 200,000 is approximately equal to 1000 Swedish Kronor, or about 110 Euro.
growing demands, mainly from women. The low political priority may be related to the fact that part-time work is only an option for people in families with more than one income, and hence not immediately related to poverty risks. None of the respondents could think of any local private employer who offered possibilities to part-time employment to their employees in order to meet their need for flexibility. Instead, part-time employment in the private sector was believed to be used primarily to reduce production or company expenses, most often practised in relation to female employees and against the preferences or needs of the employees. Instead, part-time employment was considered a possible option mainly for public employees, due to their shorter working hours. Still, organised formal demands from public employees were seen as ignored rather than supported by the public administration.

The difficulties are many. A part-time worker is considered an obstacle, someone that does not remain in the organisational machinery. Because often, in the private sector, part-time is used as a necessity, not as a benefit. (Bologna)

To convince employers to accept part-time employment contracts, some of the interviewed mentioned the need for national policies to intervene and offer small and large companies some type of economic compensation.

In conclusion, the overall aim of local social policies in Italy was primarily to initiate or extend policies aimed to relieve the pressure on care providers and to lessen the impact of dependency for persons with care needs in a family. The main objective in this area was families with heavy care responsibilities for disabled and/or elderly relatives. All interviewed emphasised the necessity for people in need of care to be offered a possibility to contribute to the family expenses and hence to be granted a more dignified and a less dependent position within a family. This was principally given by means of social entitlements as vouchers directed at people with economic needs that are to be paid to relatives or to care providers in exchange for their efforts. While the majority of the respondents referred to the national statutory of subsidiarity and familialism, neither women’s employment nor social services were discussed in terms of universal citizenship rights. The expansion and broadening of social services or economic benefits that encompass larger groups were instead argued for in association with the protection of the traditional male breadwinner family with women taking the main responsibility for family care.

Setting out from very different economic conditions and to varying degrees expressed in ideological terms, Turin, Milan, Naples, and Verona relied on
the principle of subsidarity and focused their social policies on the people with the most needs. Naples presented ambitions to expand social welfare to a wider sphere of citizens. Because only a few local public welfare policies existed in Naples and comparatively large numbers of individuals or families live under financial and social constraints, the actions taken relied on small public economic means and close co-operation with volunteer organisations. According to the respondents, socio-economic difficulties, dominant cultural notions, and historical experiences explained the state of affairs. The awareness of and the considerations around demographic changes, changes in family patterns and men’s and women’s work orientations versus orientation towards family issues were by most seen as a consequence of economic hardships placed on families.

Politicians in Verona had chosen a somewhat different route. In their concept, “non-problematic” male breadwinner families were the targets of increased access to public economic support and service offers. The social services and economic benefits were supposed to become more deliberately constructed along the idea of increased service support to wives as homemakers or secondary earners with a full-time working husband. Although an increasing number of single mothers needed to engage in paid work, very few policy measures aimed to assist this group in combining employment and care responsibilities were in place. Bologna had worked out policy programs specifically aimed to support formal labour market participation, for both men and women, offering different programs in social and family policies to give financial assistance to low-income citizens and families.

Hence, with the exception of Bologna, policies that encourage individual autonomy, gender equality, or female labour market participation were not among the primary political goals in any of the Italian towns. Public demands to support larger social groups economically or through services were referred to the national government. Women’s difficulties entering and remaining in the labour market were re-directed to employers who were regarded as carrying the main responsibility for the encouragement of better part-time employment opportunities and flexible working hours. The question of men’s care obligations was totally absent. Bologna, with its more structured view on social issues and comparatively well organised and more coherent social policies, provided different ways to address these issues. While still clearly directed at low income groups or groups with specific care needs, social policies in Bologna were more consciously directed at gender equality and citizenship rights by spending relatively large amounts of money on social services and economic redistribution. Hence, and despite
the constrictions in the Civil Code about family obligations, Bologna was more supportive of individual independence than the other towns investigated.

SWEDEN

Demands on gender equality has influenced Swedish welfare policies since the 1930s, with the explicit aim of increasing economic, political, and social equality between men and women in all spheres of life. The right to work and income protection are high priorities in Swedish welfare policies and women’s right to work is linked to the national commitment to full employment and active labour market policies. Labour policies dating from the 1960s that discouraged women from entering the labour force were replaced with policies that promoted a female work force. Laws promoting gender parity were introduced in the pre-war and post-war periods and were paralleled with gender differentiated policies for family responsibilities such as the introduction of married women’s and mother’s right to remain employed, child allowance, and maternity leave. Most welfare reforms with explicit gender equality connotations were introduced or expanded in the 1970s. In 1971, separate taxation for husband and wife was inserted. Maternity leave was transformed into parental leave in 1974 and abortion was legalised in 1975. In 1977, an agreement between employers and unions with respect to equal opportunities was established. In 1979, parents of small children were given the right to reduce their working hours from eight to six hours a day and the Equal Opportunity Act was introduced, which prohibited gender discrimination in the labour market. Children older than one are covered by a childcare guarantee but for economic reasons most municipalities have introduced barriers that restrict the range of public daycare for children of unemployed parents.

Most of these legislative changes have been expanded to include longer operating hours for childcare facilities and for larger groups of children. Today there are very few legal requirements that demand individuals provide support to family members. Family responsibilities do not entitle heads of households to tax relief or supplements. Individual monetary or service needs are instead understood as a citizenship right based on residence or citizenship rather than marriage or family responsibility and are as such expected to be met by the public institutions. Benefits constructed around citizenship or national residence neutralise the effect of marital status and offer far-reaching replacements of paid work for care responsibilities. An additional purpose is to achieve equality in terms of social status and geographic residence. The policies include national universal labour market
policies, educational guidelines, and social and family policies in combination with regional policies and subsidies for structural costs. Therefore, and despite autonomous communal self-government, the impact of diverging local policies and economies on individual access to social rights and services is relatively low but the availability and costs for social services vary substantially between municipalities.

From a historical perspective, the development of the Swedish welfare state, the growth of female employment and demands on gender equality are connected. Influential feminists and feminist movements have been able to smooth some of the sharp edges that result from masculine political discourses based on the male point of view and to connect demands for social equality to gender (Hobson and Lindholm 1997, Kulawik 1999, Florin, Sommestad and Wikander 1999). In addition, the social democratic governance in the 1960s promoted public services rather than transfers to private households or non-profit organisations. Formal institutional veto points and policy legacies interfere and impede the German and Italian governments ability to introduce new or increase existing public funding and tend to produce a more selective distribution of transfers. In Sweden, the expansion of public social services seems to have been more easily combined with demands from women’s organisations. The universal policies have resulted in less economic and socially stratifying effects and more “women friendly” policies (Hernes 1987).

More employed women directly and indirectly use the expansion of the public service sector, offering both new job opportunities and access to social services that enable them to combine family and work. Regardless of the fact that the transfer of private care responsibilities to paid public activities was not primarily motivated by a desire to promote gender equality, it had positive implications for women. Although the responsibility of childcare, state funding subsidises for construction and operating costs, is placed on the local governments, services must conform to standards and norms set by the national government. Together with licensed childcare providers, who perform public childcare in their homes, employees in daycare centres are for the main public employees, entitled to work-related social benefits. The same is true for most institutionalised elderly care. Care

37 In 1939, the right for employers to dismiss pregnant women, mothers, or married women was abolished. In 1947, a law on wage parity in public employment was introduced. In 1960, parties in the labour market, SAF (The Swedish Employers’ Confederation) and LO (The Swedish Trade Union Confederation), agreed on wage parity in private enterprises. In 1950, both parents become guardians to their children.
for elderly is not seen as a family obligation and even though care services are not entirely an individual right, entitlements in Sweden are more likely to be regarded and treated as a right than in Germany or Italy.

Undoubtedly, women’s organisations both within and outside the parliamentary system, from the 1930s, have provided strong political forces that have resulted in relatively high levels of gender equality today. In addition, the Moderate Party, which today contains both social conservative and neo-liberal elements, lost much of its influence on policy formation and the radical Liberals and Social Democrats in the 1930s and since the Second World War and into the 1970s has influenced policy formation.

Women and their organisations do not represent a homogeneous group, as shown by Florin et al. (1999), and women disagreed on several important issues in the late 19th century and in the wake of the welfare state from the 1930s. The most striking observation is that various women’s organisations, albeit some with sharp disagreements, managed to co-operate against a concentrated and powerful male resistance. The ideological emphasis by some women’s groups on female difference has for instance not led to the elevation of the housewife but rather to a stabilisation of a gender segregated labour market. Although this obviously is a concrete example of gender power relations in the labour market and in Swedish society as a whole, it is in line with some women’s groups that agreed with women’s right to paid work but also argued for specific female skills and opportunities that would help with care responsibilities. In the last 30 years, the number of women in national and local politics has grown and in 1998 women were 43% of the parliament members and 42% of the municipal council members. According to Forsberg (1998), there is no clear relationship between women in politics and women-friendly policies today and there is no clear association between right-wing or left-wing parties and the number of women elected to parliament from each party.  

At the turn of the 20th century, Swedish women are 48% of the total labour force in a labour market that is both horizontally and vertically gender segregated. On average, women work 33 hours a week while men work 40 hours (RFV 1998a). Whereas the large majority of men work full-time in the private sector, women are equally divided between private and public employers. Almost 50% of women work full-time and 22% work long part-time for long periods and in low or middle positions (SCB 2000). From

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39 Long part-time defined as more than 19 hours a week.
the 1980s, women’s labour market positions reflect four interrelated themes. The first theme concerns the gender segregated labour market and wage differences. The second takes up the costs and responsibilities for care. A third question is men’s and father’s rights and responsibilities with respect to offering care to family members. The fourth treats a general decrease in working hours.

The many aspects of the first topic will not be addressed here, but are inherent in the following issues. The second issue is again a hotly debated theme from the beginning of the 1990s. Like many other European countries, Sweden was struck by an economic crisis and strong liberal voices were raised to reduce public spending and to expand the offer of social services produced and marketed by the private sector rather than the public sector. It resulted in an increase of private but publicly financed choices for childcare, elderly care, school care, and medical care. The right to public childcare was limited by municipalities that restricted the number of children who qualified for childcare. For example children living with at least one unemployed parent were in some municipalities no longer entitled to attend publicly financed childcare. Another effort to reduce public costs for childcare was presented in 1994 when the conservative government introduced care benefits for children under the age of 3 as a prolonged parental leave. Although presented in gender neutral terms, the low replacement rate laid open the reform’s construction along gender difference and along a mother’s financial dependence on a male breadwinner. The reform was abolished by the left-wing coalition that came into government later the same year.

In the spring of 2000, universal pre-schools provided for at a maximum income related fee for children between the ages of 1 and 5 was proposed by the social democratic government. Several pedagogical advantages associated with bringing childcare closer in line with a free educational system were noted to be the result of such a program: to increase unemployed parents’ possibilities to accept gainful employment with the care-problem solved, to diminish the financial reasons for women to reduce their labour market participation, and to abolish differences between childcare, today varying greatly between municipalities. With respect to the last purpose mentioned, it has been proven that local income-related fees for childcare have a high marginal effect on low-income families. This is caused by differences between municipalities in the absolute price levels for childcare services and by the relative differences in costs for high-income families and families with lower incomes. Such economic inequalities are reduced in municipalities that apply the maximum income related fee, which is subsidised by government grants.
In the 1970s, the “political fatherhood” (Ellingsæter 1999) was introduced in connection to equality discourse, including not only a formal equality in working life but also power relations in society as a whole and in reproductive work outside the labour market. By the end of the 1980s, men’s parental leave became a major political issue. In 1995, a “daddy quota” was introduced that prescribed one month of parental leave for each parent that cannot be utilised by the other parent. The official arguments in favour of parental leave for fathers include a father’s right to develop a close relationship with his child and strengthen the relationship to the child’s mother through sharing family responsibilities. The benefits to the individual (father) include developing their social competence such as ability to solve conflicts and to problem solve, skills commonly sought after in the labour market. It is not clear, however, how much the “daddy quota” has influenced men’s behaviour. In 1988, 23% of fathers took 6% of the total parental leave. In 1997, their share had increased to almost 31% and their claim of parental leave had increased to 10% of the total number of days (RFV 1998b). As was the case in Germany, attitudes and behaviour do not correspond. A recent study shows that most people agree that parental leave should be shared between the parents but that economic circumstances rule the decision (Edlund et al 2000). However, the same study concludes that economic factors are less important. Instead, residence and the relationships between father and mother in combination with age, educational level, workplace, and profession seem to determine behaviour.

Finally, employers, unions and the parliament are discussing the potential of decreasing working hours. The debate includes issues such as the gendered division of labour in all social spheres and consequences resulting in inequality in terms of economic outcome of social rights for men and women. The question is whether shorter working hours for all influence men’s and women’s behaviour towards a more equal sharing of domestic work and reduce gender discrimination in the labour market.

Obviously, the official approach is one of actively trying to change gender inequalities and attitudes concerning family relations and in workplaces. A withdrawal of the public from its dominating position in the performance of care services has occurred with arguments such as the need to increase individual choices, to increase private initiatives, and to reduce public spending. This process has been met with different attitudes among men as

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40 Parental leave consists of 360 days with an insurance coverage of 80% of income and 90 days with a flat rate benefit.
compared to women. As shown by Svallfors (1996, 1999), the general support for welfare politics is high though connected to class affiliation. Less educated individuals encourage state intervention and more educated individuals are ambivalent about state intervention. When looking at women and men another pattern emerges. Independent of educational background women are more in favour of economic redistribution and public care than are men, who prefer a redistribution of economic benefits to families with children to increasing spending on public social services (SCB 1994). In addition, the elderly prefer care services from public institutions than care services provided for by family members (Rostgaard and Fridberg 1998, 178).

Attitudes about working women largely correspond to female labour market participation but reality presents a gender arrangement in which women are also the main providers of care and household work. While full-time housewives are rare in Sweden, most women and men prefer women to work full-time before they have children and when the children have left home. Although men are slightly more in favour of full-time work for mothers, the most advocated behaviour is that women reduce their working hours when the children are younger (Sundström 2000). Despite the fact that there are very few gender differences in how family and employment should be combined, other studies show that women often feel discontent in how the allotment of money and paid and unpaid labour within a couple is distributed. While women often have the main responsibility for housework and everyday finances, men put more effort into paid work, specific traditionally male jobs in the household, and larger investment decisions (Ahrne and Roman 1997, Roman and Volger 1999). Roman (1999) argues that the maintenance of male marital power is best explained by men’s greater access to normative and economic resources but that high levels of marital conflicts indicate a weakening of male power due to increased female financial independence and changes in relations between men and women.

The Swedish interviews

At a first glance, and in contrast to the other two countries, a woman’s right to work was taken for granted by all interviewed and the obligation to render it possible through care services was clearly put on the national and local political agenda. Women’s economic independence was nearly unanimously emphasised as the most important factor for achieving gender equality. To achieve this goal, good and sufficient care facilities and job opportunities were given as decisive components. Women also strongly emphasised their political participation and access to political power and influence. A third
issue of significance was the gender-segregated labour market, producing different professional career possibilities for men and women and different wage standards due to the feminisation of specific types of work. The need to encourage men’s involvement in family work was noted as well.

Irrespective of geographic or political situation, the majority of Swedish women are employed and public social services are available to a comparatively high degree. In the interviews, geographical differences in attitudes about issues connected to gender equality did not occur in any obvious ways. Rather one could trace this new born interest among male politicians in issues related to social services, women’s right to employment, and men’s right to take up care responsibilities in the family. The impression was that all respondents, male politicians in particular, experienced the economic cutbacks that their constituency experienced and its negative influence on individuals and families. This is not to say that women did not have similar experiences but rather that the men seemed more struck by the occurrence as a new and unfamiliar phenomenon. The economic cutbacks in the public sector combined with the high unemployment rates that marked the 1990s provided a condition for these new insights among men and are most likely related to changes in gender arrangements in which growing numbers of men engage in family care activities on a daily basis. The clearest differences noted in the interviews were related to the political standpoints between left-wing and right-wing arguments and policies concerning the provision, performance, and costs for public care services. In short, the debate addressed whether and to what extent social services should be treated as a citizenship right or as a commodity that should be offered under market adjusted conditions. In the latter case, the goal was to make labour market participation more of a free choice as it would be free for everyone to make their own profit calculation with respect to using social services and weighing it against alternative costs, solutions, and gains.

The pros and cons associated with the debate about social services and service providers are not gender neutral; however, they are closely connected to women’s labour market and income, the limits for public responsibility for care provision, and underlying values related to gender relations and gender arrangements, citizenship rights and individual obligations to relatives. Left-wing parties defend social services as a citizenship right. Arguments for the marketing of social services are mainly to be found with liberal and right-wing political parties. The main reasons to favour privatisation of social services are to increase individual freedom of choice, to reduce public costs, to render a more just distribution of costs and services, and to rely on market forces for the development of the best or
optimal product. In Nacka, governed by the right-wing Moderate Party, the inhabitants in need of childcare are offered vouchers from the municipality, the amount based on the recipient's required hours of care services and is hence not income related. The recipient can choose from private or public childcare facilities that are offered in the municipality or else turn to authorised childcare providers elsewhere. The customer, in other words the family, pays the costs beyond the coverage of the voucher.

We clearly define that the role of the municipality is to render it possible for families to work and to choose among public and private childcare facilities. They then choose among childcare arrangers, within the geographic area of the municipality or elsewhere, the type that best suits the family. It contains a pronounced ‘freedom of choice’ way of thinking. Instead of public financing and production of services, in this model, individuals in need of care services are, or should be given, a flat rate voucher by which the choice of care institution is free and where the user pays for potential additional costs. The higher the price, the more people demand of quality and while the price regulates the demand it reduces the risk for “over-use”. (Nacka)

“Over-use” implies that parents may use childcare services more than their actual need in order to make financial gains by using publicly subsidised services that are not adjusted to market prices. Moreover, it embodies an element of a moral criticism about parents who at public cost are expected, or suspected, to prioritise work and career beyond explicit financial needs and ahead of taking care of their own children. The term also carries an indication of economic injustice towards families who do not use public social services but perform childcare themselves. These families were considered to gain relatively less from tax-financed services. Stressing elements of social and economic injustice in the re-distributive construction of care services, childcare was considered a subvention to those in employment that consequently leave part-time working parents with less subvention and one-breadwinner families without any public support.

To further promote the freedom of choice and the reduction of public spending it was argued that parents should be given the possibility to use the voucher as a benefit or payment when taking care of their own children as self-employed care providers or to enable hiring childcare providers. The possible gender segregating effects of the proposal, such as the financial rationale of families to decide about which of the parents should be the main user of the care benefit, was dismissed as a family matter and a subject irrelevant to the political discussion. Instead the conflict between women’s presumed preference to be the main care provider and demands from the labour market were stressed.
It is a question of organisation to make it possible [for families] to avoid a one-sided job splitting in families because men statistically for different reasons have higher incomes in professions where it have been easier to achieve it. Some people are of the opinion that they would like to spend more time at home. Normally, women feel frustrated by not having the financial ability to stay at home. But you shouldn’t for a long time let go of the contact with the labour market and your profession. Even if there are, of course, many men that would wish to have the possibility to take more active part in his children. (Nacka).

The proposal of a childcare voucher was discussed by other respondents and is a controversial idea in Sweden for at least five reasons. First, the benefit level proposed would be given to parents regardless of their previous labour market attachment and hence would not be synchronised to other rules guiding the social security system for replacement rates. Second, despite the gender-neutral appearance of the suggested reform it raises the suspicion that mainly women would opt for the care voucher. Although the amount of monthly payment suggested in Nacka would correspond to employment income (as compared to the short-lasting care benefit from the mid 1990s that did not correspond to income), the gender relations and gender arrangements visible in the parental leave and part-time work statistics indicate that very few men accept the role as main care providers. For both men and women, receiving a care voucher would imply losing labour market experience and opportunities to re-enter employment and hence running the risk of being financially disadvantaged in both the short and a long term. Third, as was the case in Nacka, a care voucher for families with children supports the opinion that birth rates have gone down because of women’s double workloads and that a care voucher would convince women to have (more) children. Other possible explanations for decreased birth rates include more time spent in the educational system and worsened labour market conditions. Fourth, the hiring of childcare providers touches on another closely related and much debated issue in Sweden about the availability and social and economic consequences of private household services. In addition, there is controversy about conflicting interests of gender and social classes, gendered jobs, evaluations of work tasks, conditions of tenure, and social rights with respect to hiring childcare providers. A statement from Luleå reflects what all respondents except the Nacka respondent expressed:

On a local level, we have not discussed care benefits but the debate is present on a national level, including suggestions that parents should be paid to stay home to take care of their children. To me, the idea that the society should pay me to stay home and take care of my children is absurd. I think it is of tremendous importance that parents are supported in their possibilities to
remain in their jobs and at the same time are able to bring up children. For this reason, my party [Social Democrats] argues that, and would prefer to see, a prolongation of the parental leave. To me, care benefit or tax relief is the number one situation where a woman loses, whatever course she takes. The risk for women to completely lose attachment to the labour market is obvious. And we know what it means in terms of being financially dependent, in terms of having a low pension and overall of having a subordinated position in relation to a husband. It is from the perspective of gender equality that we do not recommend it. We know that the way to gender equality is to have an economy of one’s own. Unfortunately, that’s the way things are. (Luleå)

Fifth, it has been argued that an introduction of care benefits or care vouchers reinforce social segregation through reduced financial public support in the remaining public services. Following this argument, segregation through differentiation of care services may occur if public money is transferred from the production of services to the distribution of vouchers. Public money, it is argued, would support the financing of the private social service sector. Added to income from service fees, private social service offers may achieve a profitable position and become more attractive to high-income earners. Low-income earners would be left with the only option of a low-budget public alternative. Therefore, several respondents expressed the concern that a freedom of choice would actually result in an absence of choice, with a generally reduced accessibility and quality to social services and particularly to public services. This fear applies to both social and geographic segregation.

Overall, in the municipalities governed by coalitions or left-wing parties there was no firm resistance against existing or proposed non-governmental initiatives to social services but rather a suspicious attitude towards the amount of possible public economic gains was expressed. Another objection concerned the administration of changes of ownership that might occur. The reluctance was related to a social service perspective resulting from public demands for universal care, the municipalities’ ultimate responsibility for the provision and administration of social services, and the possible effects of privatisation on users, employees, and municipalities. Especially in Jönköping, the concern for discontinuance in the social services supply was emphasised. The main question was how a municipality should handle a possible business bankruptcy, new ownership, and service offers in sparsely populated areas in relation to the users.

As accounted for in the previous section, the economically and socially stratifying effects of locally divergent and high prices for childcare have
made the government propose an economic support plan for municipalities that accept set prices for public childcare. Among the interviewed, left-wing politicians applauded the proposition as they were convinced that such a policy would reduce economic inequalities produced by variations in price setting and encourage women with low incomes to increase their labour market participation. National economic support was also seen as a possibility for public reinvestments in childcare.

The largest thing that has happened to families with children, if we succeed in implementing it, and I hope we can, is the maximum income related fee. It is a real subsidy for families with children. They will gain a situation that is enormously improved, also those with low incomes will gain very much. In my opinion that is a much better way to go compared to care vouchers as suggested by Nacka. Increased care benefits are also important, the previous race in care benefits shows now in birth rate figures. A safer labour market and better conditions make people more ready to have children, and even a second and a third child. It would be political suicide not to accept it [the maximum income related fee]. It is an advantage in the ability to compete. The dream situation for me is that the neighbouring municipalities do not carry it through. Then we will have a queue for childcare in Katrineholm, I wouldn’t mind that. It will also become much cheaper for families, especially in the municipalities surrounding Stockholm, with childcare fees that would be unacceptable in our municipality. We could never charge such fees. (Katrineholm)

Right-wing politicians, on the other hand, fear an increased misuse/over-use of childcare services if the price-regulating mechanism looses its influence on family decision making with respect to its financial planning strategies.

It will create very large, increasing costs for the municipality and which will push other services aside. Schools, old age care will be struck in the process of prioritisation by the lowered costs for childcare. Today people settle with 27 or 32 hours of childcare a week. People will demand full-time childcare! Of course it will push other services aside! (Nacka).

Although certainly not absent, the moral and socially stratifying implications connected to the expectation of women’s responsibility for unpaid care for family members did not come through as clearly in Sweden as in Germany and Italy. The official discourse followed the line of full employment for both men and women. However, the inherent assumptions directly or indirectly expressed by the interviewed were quite apparent depending on the respondent’s political affiliation, right-wing or left-wing. During the economic recession in the 1990s, municipalities came to rely more heavily on close relatives for some care needs for the elderly and the respondents were convinced that an increasing amount of care was performed by family
members without economic compensation from the public. Although no one knew the exact extent to which elderly rely on family members for their daily needs, the growing number of elderly and the substantially reduced number of persons with public assistance indicate that someone else is doing the job.

The whole restructuring of the public medical service and elderly care in the last years has so to speak transferred the responsibility. Fewer elderly ask for and receive home care today and they receive it from elsewhere. One could imagine that relatives do a bigger contribution today really, than they actually did 15 years ago. They greatly contributed all the way, but less people with minor needs receive public care today in Sweden as a total. In my opinion, the main responsibility rests on the public. It should not be put on relatives to bear the responsibility to arrange for childcare and elderly care. The society, on the other hand, cannot substitute for much. The fact is that relatives make out a much larger part of the care for elderly in this society, although one is often led to believe otherwise in Sweden. One presumes it to be true for other countries but not for Sweden. Large efforts are performed, will be performed, very large efforts. There is a completely different emotional part in the efforts done by relatives, which can never be replaced by society. (Gothenburg)

Predominantly female respondents were convinced that very few women would give up employment to care for close elderly relatives and emphasised the necessity of care services as a citizenship right and a precondition for women’s labour market participation. They argued that more public money should be spent on services instead of distributed as financial compensation for care providers, as suggested by conservatives. The main reasons for this view was the avoidance of a position of asymmetric dependence between care providers and people in need of care and a dismantling of public social services and its universal character. Finally, it would lessen the likelihood that women would have economic losses by reducing their labour market participation while accepting a flat rate care benefit.

Within the discourse dominated by representatives for conservative political parties, the care for elderly was defined as primarily a moral obligation for relatives to address. The public services should step in only when specific professional or medical needs are confirmed and alternative possibilities are excluded. Along this line, vouchers should therefore not be used to pay assistance for family members, but only to buy care services on a free market. This argument differed somewhat from reasons that support childcare vouchers, by which parents were to be given the possibility to become self-employed care providers. On the other hand, the possibility to employ relatives as care providers for people in need of more extensive care
already exists as a legal alternative. 41 Both right-wing and left-wing political parties believe that no one should be left without access to good standard social services, but the conservatives were more willing to promote the development of services at different price levels for different social groups.

The gender segregated Swedish labour market and women’s difficulties in reaching income levels that would actually make financial self-subsistence possible was by the respondents connected to social services. Nacka argued for a privatisation of social services as a way for women to increase their income. Based on the assumption that women would gain larger influence in a private workplace as compared to a public one, their possibilities to promote a professional career and raise their incomes in traditionally female workplaces would, in this view, increase considerably. The other municipalities, familiar with but not actively promoting private initiatives, had chosen to raise salaries in typical female public workplaces. This was done by a re-evaluation of their work tasks, comparing them with those of typical male jobs with similar demands on qualifications and skills. In addition, people mentioned unsuccessful programmes aiming to attract men to typical female jobs in the social services. The purpose of these actions was to promote gender equality by heightening the attractiveness and indirectly the salaries in traditional female workplaces.

Increased labour market flexibility was a recurrent issue. In Sweden, the issue of flexibility was connected to the reconciliation of work and family. Given the already high degree of flexibility and numbers of social services the respondents related the topic primarily to the heavy burden faced by families and parents to gain economic independence and in combining work and family responsibilities. Many of the respondents referred to the growing number of studies showing that the number of people suffering from stress and work related illnesses are increasing. As mentioned above, in Nacka the issue was also related to decreasing birth rates. Again, a freer use of the care vouchers was suggested as a way to politically approach flexibility as a family policy, rather than as a matter of labour market or social policies in a wider sense.

Employees in the public sector predominantly in left-wing municipalities had been given the choice between reduced working hours, from eight to six

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41 Persons entitled to extensive home care may choose to be cared for by a relative. A care provider that is also a relative is employed on the same conditions as other home care providers or nurse's assistants working for the local government or county council.
hours a day, with the same income, or with increased income but the existing numbers of working hours maintained. The assumption made by the administration had been that employees, in predominantly physically and mentally demanding care jobs, would choose a reduction of working hours. On the contrary, most of the consulted chose to increase their income. The conclusion drawn by the interviewed was that financial hardship, rooted in low salaries, convinced most of the employees to opt for higher incomes.

Finally, the topic of women’s political representation and men’s participation in care work and other related processes furthering the improvement of gender equality was discussed and accepted in Sweden more than in the other two countries. Only conservative respondents maintained that men’s increased participation in family work was a private and not a public matter or a political issue. Still, also consistent with the conservative line of policies there was strong support for national regulations supporting publicly financed care facilities and far-reaching family policies. Liberal and left-wing respondents argued for care services of high quality and for an increase in length of the parental leave, including components that actively encourage men to take up more family responsibilities. Among these, male respondents emphasised men’s right to care for their children but that the normative pressure on men from the social environment under which they live put obstacles in the way for such changes. For example, local traditional patterns of gender arrangements and different work cultures were tied to dominating types of local male workplaces. Female respondents, on the other hand, were more inclined to relate equality to women’s participation in the public sphere and gender equality was often referred to as largely consisting of and depending on women’s economic independence. Only by participating in the labour market, and partly relieved from family responsibilities through extensive social services, could women demand and make progress in increased equality. The presence of gender conflicts in the interaction between men and women and the necessity for women to make their claims through collective action was emphasised.

I think it partly depends on the presence of social conservative traditions in Jönköping, and partly on the fact that the Jönköping county is a typical industrial region where men work in collective male environments that render a development more difficult. That’s the way I think it works. In mixed workplaces with a different structure maybe these discussions are recognised in a different way. (Jönköping)

I think gender related issues come up more easily when women are politicians. When dominated by men, I think it is difficult. But I think that questions about gender equality come more easily to women. Where there are
many women represented, care services achieve a more prominent position. It is hard to work with questions concerning gender equality as a woman among a bunch of men that are not interested or go against you. (Gothenburg)

From a local political perspective, we want to offer the inhabitants good childcare, open for all children and good quality nine-year compulsory schools. Of course, childcare must offer men and women the possibility to take up together their responsibilities both at their work places and in the families. The basis for independence for me, for an independent women is to have a job. To be given weekly spending money from a husband is not to be independent. Women in such a situation cannot decide over their own lives in the same way. They are economically dependent of someone else. We ought to encourage men to take a more active part in their children, make them understand that they are important. (Uppsala)

These last quotations from three municipalities governed by centre-left coalitions sum up the Swedish case. In many respects, the Swedish story deviates from the other two countries. For one, women’s employment was the normative platform for all respondents, at least at the level of political correctness. It was considered to positively effect national and local market economies as well as private finances. For most respondents, especially female respondents, it was also identified as the main way to combat gender inequalities, both on a national level and in a family. The majority of respondents referred to human and citizenship rights with respect to perceptions of gender inequalities and of women’s interests as conflicting with overall patriarchal gender cultural patterns. Because access to care services were understood as a citizenship right and a baseline for public responsibility, the large cutbacks in public financing that have struck particularly hard on such services were by most regretted as a setback for both social and gender equality. The institutional settings for care services, encouraging women to work full-time and men to take up family responsibilities, were regarded as vital instruments for establishing gender equality. These welfare instruments were said to be counteracted by vivid gender cultural features where the interplay between men and women in most situations of social interaction set gender power relations, driving men and women into traditional gendered roles. The conservative standpoint and line of policies put its faith in labour market forces as a starting point and the most important instrument to achieve social equity. While the emphasis is put on the individual’s capability, under given conditions, to make rational choices in relation to his or her ambitions conflicting interests between social classes or men and women are regarded as irrelevant.
What differed most clearly among the Swedish respondents were the political and gender cultural implications of the social policy measures suggested to back up the combination of care and employment and their view on care services as a social right or as a commodity with a market price. The question of “outsourcing” and privatisation of social services was one of the main themes brought up by the respondents. The principal arguments focused on the individual’s freedom of choice, universal care provisions, and socio-economic redistribution combined with the possible advantages versus disadvantages for women to be privately or publicly employed.

The emphasis on care services as a market item or as a social right imply different possibilities for the reconciliation of work and family, encouraging different gender arrangements among different social groups. Among the respondents this was mainly discussed in terms of changed behaviour among women depending on costs for care services, some of them fearing that fees adjusted to market price settings would produce segregating effects and convince low-income groups of women to reduce their labour market participation for economic reasons. Again, relating to gender cultural patterns of power relations women were seen as putting themselves at risk by giving up their labour market attachment and increasing their economic dependency on a family breadwinner or on social assistance for the benefit of performing unpaid care within the household.
SUMMARY

As shown, there are large variations within and between the countries as to what is understood by social policies and their actual or expected contents. It remains unquestioned, however, that the financial situation of families and women’s access to social citizenship continues to be conditioned by the public treatment of issues concerning care. On a local political level, the shifts in the national political discourse are known and changes in attitudes and behaviour related to women’s labour market participation among individuals are familiar subjects. However, the objectives for implementation or suggested policies to support publicly financed care services or care within the family, gender equality, or simply women’s labour market participation vary not only between the three countries but also within them.

In post-war Germany, Italy, and Sweden, gender relations have largely been understood as a relationship based on mutual but unequal dependence because of differences in gender-specific skills and qualities with hierarchical power relations due to access to money and political influence, time, ability to act, and normatively accepted behaviour. In Germany and Italy, and to a lesser extent in Sweden, gender relations have been conceived as an unquestionable natural or divine unequal dependence founded on assumptions about male superiority with the family as the main sphere for care of children and elderly. In all three countries, but especially in Italy, the need for national politics to pay attention to the increasing economic stress in families with children was emphasised. Although growing female employment rates were acknowledged together with rising demands on public care services, the normative understanding of women as prime care providers prevailed among the local politicians in Italy and Germany who suggested a continuation of women as main care providers, plausibly providing for a secondary family income. While less accentuated in Germany than in Italy, the tenor of public social policies and services as mainly directed at the economically or socially weakest groups underlined the family oriented nature of this sphere of welfare policies. Together with the family oriented political and legal bias the view of the role of local social policies as being principally an instrument to blunt the harshest effects of poverty also created legal and practical impediments for introducing social policy programs of a more general character.

From the point of view of the German equal opportunity offices, a firm conviction of the necessity for women to increase their financial
independence through paid work was tied to the practical difficulties of combining marriage and children with an employment situation that actually provides a sufficient income. Throughout, political reforms were requested that would involve both programmes for economic redistribution to larger groups of families with children and improved supply of social services to render the reconciliation of work and family possible for German women. This view was met by rather tepid or even weak interest from local politicians. Although the political respondents used the newly introduced care insurance fund and the expansion of the public provision of childcare as examples of improvement in support of women’s labour market participation, issues of gender equality, in terms of conditions for women’s labour market participation or otherwise to achieve autonomy, were not discussed in any detail. Instead, built in power balances within marriage laws were noted to illustrate that women were not left without legal instruments to defend their economic security, especially in cases of divorce. Similar to Italy, changes in gender arrangements were understood as being fundamentally a private issue to be dealt with in families and hence not primarily a political matter. Women’s financial independence through paid work was regarded as a local political topic only when risking to transform costs for public assistance, for instance in the case of single mothers. Even if several problem areas obstructing women’s possibilities to be in employment were mentioned, they were regarded as lying outside the scope of local policies. Instead they were either referred to as dependent on national political decisions or to considerations between employer’s organisations and labour unions. From this perspective, growing numbers of private childcare providers, childcare co-operatives, or companies leasing care services for their employees most likely mirror changes in gender relations on a micro level, with two working parents in need of organised childcare not provided for by public assistance.

The most prominent variations in attitudes between the different German towns were related to the representation of political majorities and their contacts with the local equal opportunity offices. It is in this respect that the mutual understanding and collaboration between equal opportunity offices and the local political offices demonstrated the potential power to bring normative issues into public discussion. By highlighting specific events, cases and acts, gender inequalities may be illustrated and elucidated, provoking public discussions to stimulate the promotion of gender equality. Furthermore, in order for the equal opportunity offices to act as advocates, both personal and economic resources are required and their legitimacy needs to be endorsed by political organisations. The existence of such structures appeared to be more of a reality in Göttingen, Frankfurt, and
Bremen than in Paderborn and Stuttgart. In the former three towns, some discussions about two-earner families and childcare needs were brought to the political arena. In all the towns, political resistance was described as male dominated, concentrated, and rather impenetrable. Efforts to initiate discussions about men’s care responsibilities into local political spheres or other organisations were met by solid resistance that by many of the respondents was experienced as hostile, arrogant, and oblivious. However, in a prolonged time perspective of co-operation between equal opportunity offices and local political institutions such procedures can be expected to produce increased national variety in political and public attitudes, gender arrangements, service offers, and ways of working within and between private and public organisations and institutions in different towns.

In Italy, regional autonomy is quite far-reaching and institutional changes in social policies on both a national and a local level are more fragmented than in Germany and Sweden and often directed at very specific groups of elderly, children, or disabled in need of care. Apart from the extensive coverage of childcare for the age group 3-5, care services were not offered on basis of citizenship but were rather connected to income and specific needs. Due to constraints in the local public economies, there were no rights or guarantees for access to social assistance but the availability was related to the relative situation among other competing applicants. Queries concerning public intervention through social policies and services to gain increased gender equality in the labour market or social rights were generally met by political disinterest. With conceptions of gender equality as good as absent but with a vaguely formulated critique of the principle of subsidiarity, claims on increased public spending directed at larger groups of individuals or families were suggested. Women’s labour market participation was not interpreted as an equality issue or as an indication of changes in gender relations, but as a functional and economic strategy used by families. The accumulated private costs for families with care responsibilities provoked some respondents to argue for changes in national and local social policies to address “non-problematic” or “normal” families, enabling these to retain an acceptable economic standard with lower input of paid labour. The perception of normality suggested a male breadwinner family without social or economic stigma and with a housewife taking care of family members in the home. The strengthening of financial benefits to wage earners with family responsibilities was suggested, combined with enlarged access to social services to aid families with heavy care burdens. The opinion that there are more or less “deserving” groups in need of social services or assistance influenced arguments in favour of services and tax relief, connected to the employment of a male head of household, and against
economic subsidies such as poverty relief. These and similar statements indicated an ambivalent political ambition to widen the access to local social services and to include larger groups into welfare policies in order to improve the economic situation for the average Italian family. The main reason for not pursuing demands on social policies or social rights was the desire to keep the close relationship between generations and the fear of breaking up family ties, described as both cultural value and as a socio-economic necessity. Departing from assumptions about women’s “natural” social skills and family values, increased access to social services was feared to threaten traditional family patterns and family ties across generations and family values. References were also made to the masculine connotations in labour market policies and workplaces in which persons with care responsibilities have no ability to negotiate.

As elsewhere but more prominently in Italy than in Germany or Sweden, Italian individuals or families with different incomes but the same needs of care services may find themselves confronted with very different local realities. It is difficult to define what constitutes a family and the limits of individual rights. Although more and more Italian women say they want to combine children with employment, the possibilities for women with care responsibilities to stay in the labour market largely remains a question of social class. Highly qualified women with good incomes may solve their care responsibilities through a combination of public services and the informal labour market. Poorly qualified women use their family members for their own care needs and because they have fewer options in the formal labour market work they often work for more highly educated women by providing care services.

Different views were noted about women as natural care providers. The local social policies in Italy addressed inter-generation relations, gender relations, and gender arrangements and addressed female and family situations, which at times were precarious. However, the themes were not primarily addressed as gender inequality issues but rather in functional terms. In Verona, political attempts were made to enlarge the sphere of social policies to include larger groups and to include families who had no immediate economic or social needs. The overall purpose of new policies was to maintain a male breadwinner family by providing economic and service support to “normal” and “non-problematic” families as “deserving” groups. These were contrasted to other groups such as immigrant women, single mothers, or poor families, who were questioned for the cause of their status and regarded as less “deserving.” In Turin and Milan, social policies were intentionally directed at the most poor and needy groups. The reliance on the family for
individual care relied on traditional ideas of familialism as the best route for individual independence, supported by social insurance obtained by a male breadwinner. Contrary to the other towns, female employment was actively supported in Bologna by extensive social service programmes, mainly childcare for children under the age of 3 and benefits directed at men on parental leave. It could be suggested that the policies promoted in Bologna represent an employment-oriented, feminist, left-wing strategy in which individual welfare is protected by universal public policies. Being the economically most disadvantaged town, Naples is hard to put in any of the categories. The ambition was to increase the general welfare of mainly children but the economic situation admitted only low social expenses and obliging in situations in which basic and urgent human needs were identified.

The Swedish respondents strongly supported gender equality through paid work and individual economic independence. Prevailing gender inequalities were generally identified as existing within a cultural frame of male dominance that could be reduced through political actions. Forceful national policies in support of female labour market participation were emphasised as being of particular importance for women’s opportunities to achieve autonomy and reduce gender related economic and social inequalities. The argument is a further elaboration of the traditional left-wing political theory with respect to class and power relations in which paid labour is both the source of economic inequalities and a way to increase individual independence. The social democratic ambition to level social and economic inequalities has been used to favour feminist demands for gender equality and female labour market participation. Women’s right to work, universal benefits, and access to social services is regarded as a citizenship right and was not seriously put into question by any of the interviewed, although it was most strongly emphasised by the left-wing female politicians. If anything, it was the socio-economic effects of price-setting mechanisms for social services and the scope of the public sector as compared to private initiatives that were debated.

The over-representation of women in public employment in Sweden put focus on an ambivalence that was not present in the German and Italian interviews. Whereas being in public employment historically has been favourable in all three countries, as compared to employment in the private sector, gender segregating aspects of public employment have surfaced in Sweden. It has been argued that women in public employment have lower incomes and fewer career possibilities than in the private sectors. On the other hand, the majority of women in the public sector are active in care
professions. It is not clear whether it is the combination of gender and professional status or public or private employment that has guided this development, but most signs indicate that gender has been the determining factor for gender income differences. Although men and women may have similar qualifications, men tend to have higher income, irrespective of employment sector. A relatively long process of professionalisation of care occupations notwithstanding, care work on a professional basis in Sweden has not fully succeeded to distance itself from the notion of women as natural care providers and secondary earners.

None of the Swedish municipalities presented any coherent or far-reaching lines of action in support of men’s right to care but settled with praising individual men who actually realised their rights among the public employees in their own municipalities. Instead, left-wing politicians raised demands on more comprehensive national regulations in support of men’s right to care. Normative understandings of gender and gender arrangements were present in two opposing directions. In one direction the achievement of gender equality through women’s paid work, sustained by social services and in combination with policies supporting men’s family responsibilities, was taken for granted. The most clear and well-articulated defenders of these arguments were female left-wing politicians advocating gender equality through women’s economic independence and in collaboration with local and national policies and public administration. In the second direction, public spending on social services was contrasted with the conviction that a gender arrangement primarily is a private issue, the division of labour to be decided upon within a family, and that women would gain economically from the privatisation of public social services and workplaces. While both approaches claim to defend gender equality, the conservative neo-liberal model saw the best opportunities for achievement in a free market. In larger towns and municipalities, demands on varied supplies of social services, a less vulnerable labour market and high public spending on social expenditures, support arguments for privatisation of social services. It is probably not a coincidence that this view was most actively promoted and realised in Uppsala and Nacka in the area close to Stockholm. Within the conservative neo-liberal model there was an essentialist conception of gender differences, with women choosing care ahead of employment when faced with an economically realistic option. Because of their true but thwarted desires to care for their own children on a full-time basis, women found it difficult combining employment with childcare and this was identified as the heart of the matter. The embedded gender cultural assumptions suggested women are too tied up in the labour market either due to their career ambitions or due to financial constraints. This produces a
negative demographic trend. Increased costs for families with children were therefore identified as something that should be publicly compensated and it was proposed that families taking care of their children at home on a full-time basis be financially compensated at a comparatively high level. It should be added that the proposal would not cause additional costs to the municipality. Because of public monetary support provided directly to families, demands on social services were expected to decline.

The left-wing alternative assumed public social services as combining three prerequisites for social equality in general and for gender equality in particular. First, public services constitute the largest female labour market. Second, public employment was understood as an advantageous power situation for women as compared to private employment, offering women better opportunities for collective action and more secure terms of employment. Third, according to this view a reduction in public social services would presumably expose women to the dominant effects of an essentially patriarchal society in which groups of women would be expected to rely on a husband’s income and perform unpaid care. Reduced and deteriorated public social services were feared to promote increased social inequalities between groups of women that can afford private services and groups that cannot.

In Sweden, the restrained economic situation has resulted in downsizing of public social services. This has resulted in an increase in services provided by the private sector and non-governmental initiatives. The demand for the development of alternative social service institutions indicates that the two-earner family model continues to be the preferred gender arrangement. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss if and how the compensating effects and the use of such services as compared to public services carry any aspects of social division or stigmatisation. It seems beyond doubt, however, that the combination of national welfare policies and local policies do affect women’s options for increasing their financial independence from male breadwinners.
CONCLUSIONS

Welfare state policies and their public institutions strongly influence what constitutes the private sphere, the family, and what it is to be a man or a woman, young or old, married or single, mother or father. National policies provide opportunities to local politicians and it is equally apparent that political affiliation—left-wing or right-wing—correlates with how different welfare policies affect gender relations. Within each nation differences, in attitudes seem to be mainly associated with political affiliation and less with geographical location. Gender also seems to have a bearing on sensitivity to issues connected to care provisions and female autonomy. Independent of political belonging, female politicians were more disposed to identify unequal gender power relations and to regard women’s employment as emancipating, with access to social services as an essential condition. Local circumstances, such as economic and demographic structures, are related to historical experiences and intervene with the way local policies develop over time. The relations between gender culture, gender order, and gender arrangements are therefore not straightforward but are interrelated in a complex pattern of power structures and social relations such as those between men and women, political parties, public institutions, and the parties in the labour market. Furthermore, they are connected to social groupings such as class, age, and ethnicity. Dominating patterns of gender arrangements and the gender order inherent in welfare policies mirror these interrelations.

Although all three countries in their national policy programmes seek to promote an official positive view of gender equality and underline the state budgetary importance of women’s increased labour market participation, on a local level these ambitions run into several obstacles. Among the most influential aspects are the ways in which gender equality is supported in national legislation and how such legislation is counteracted or accompanied with regulations in other spheres of welfare policies in each country. One crucial element is the overall aim of welfare policies. In Sweden, the ambition to reduce social inequalities, promote equality in citizenship rights, and access to individual welfare has been effected with the tools of universal social policies and full employment policies that include the incorporation of women in the labour market. Gender equality has largely been placed on par with individual economic self-sufficiency. A comparatively large redistribution of taxes into social services has both relieved the pressure on women to perform family care and create a large female labour market. Overall, the Swedish political response to gender equality issues was to
bring out and emphasise the two-earner and two care-provider family model. Whereas women have gained a foothold in the labour market, men have not yet entered the sphere of family care on equal terms with women. This in turn was used to explain the indications of gender discrimination in the labour market and the range of female part-time work and its negative consequences for women’s social rights. In contrast to German and Italian respondents, Swedish respondents presented the most explicitly formulated policies against gender inequalities. Local focus was primarily on the importance of offering a sufficient supply of social services to facilitate the combination of work and family. The political stumbling-block to local policies was both one of underlying gender ideologies and one of methods. Especially in the centre-left and left-wing governed municipalities a connection was drawn between the price setting mechanisms for care services and female labour market participation and between female employment and policies supporting men’s family work. In the liberal and right-wing governed municipalities, a free market for social services was expected to further a positive upward trend in the wage setting mechanisms for typical female workplaces and reduce the income gap between men and women. In addition, a more liberal service market would leave families with a larger range of options for where, how and to what price care should be performed within and outside the family.

The German and Italian welfare policies are less extensive and more explicitly directed at the idea of a male breadwinner family with policies that support programmes directed at an individual’s or a family’s social or financial needs. Moreover, and apart from the domination of work related social security schemes, the family oriented dimension is coupled with the opinion that social policies, especially on the local level, above all constitute instruments to mitigate the effects of poverty. To improve governmental control over social spending there has been a common tendency in all three countries to narrow access routes and connect them to labour market participation and subsidarity, or by transforming economic benefits into public care services or vice versa. At the same time, particularly in Italy, new and well-defined groups with care needs have been included in social assistance programmes. When these or similar measures are put into practice they particularly affect women as prime carer providers and as workers or as recipients of care. It is true that in Italy women’s labour market participation was regarded as the best way for women to achieve a certain degree of independence but not as a political project to be performed per se. In the actual local political discourse in Italy, the growing number of women in paid work was recognised as a method increasingly used by families to add a second income to the joint economy. Changes in gender arrangements and
their prospective requirements or consequences were not part of the political awareness or strategies for political action. The combination of increased social services and women’s labour market participation was directly or indirectly identified as a threat to family values and seen conflicting with cross generation family networks. Instead a traditional extended family model with a male breadwinner and a wife as care provider was recommended, for which the state should offer increased economic and service support in order to relieve families from the economic burden and work load. Demographic issues related to low birth rates and increasing numbers of elderly with care needs were discussed with reference to insufficient family incomes, suggesting that women’s paid work was actually the heart of the problem, producing a precarious situation for women with care responsibilities. Because women had to provide incomes, they were prevented from performing family care obligations. For these families both economic transfers and increased service offers were suggested in order to maintain the traditional family pattern. For families regarded as less honourable, such as female headed households with children or families with grave social or economic problems, economic subsidies seemed to loose in importance and increased social services to facilitate women’s labour market participation was the new route in social politics. There were hence strong implications of normative discourses of normality in terms of deserving and non-deserving social groups connected to access to social rights. The notion of unequal gender power relations and its consequences in and for the society as a whole were largely rejected. The paradox created through these policies is that poor women will gain larger possibilities to enter the sphere of social rights while married women living under more adequat economic circumstances will see their chances to autonomy reduced. If women were to demand increased access to social services and other measures to facilitate employment and reduce the care burden, their arguments could be used against them by influential groups to point out misdirected individualism that gives rise to family disruption.

In Germany, families have only recently achieved the right to childcare, giving way for a family model of a full-time working husband with a wife who works part-time. Of course, in none of the countries were these suggested models regarded as unproblematic or accepted by all respondents but they focus the dominating ideas and arguments presented in the interviews. Demands from the German gender equality offices for more extensive care facilities and for a debate about men’s duties and right to provide care seem to lie in wait, calling for more serious and thorough political discussions, work places, between the parties in the labour market, mass media and in society as a whole.
The local socio-political intentions related to gender equality and women’s social citizenship rights varied within the countries. Within the framing of social policies related to local circumstances, gender cultural expressions in political arguments for gender equality were closely interlaced with conflicting ideas about social equality and individual and public responsibilities for compensation of unequal individual resources. To some extent in Germany and Sweden, but especially in Italy, the formulation of national guidelines in some areas of social policies is coupled with the regional and local freedom to pursue and promote their own local policy strategies. Even so, the national principal lines in social policies have the effect of putting a brake on the development of more generous local social and family policies. In Sweden, the reverse is true. There are less visible traits of local variations because of the elements of universal care and connected centralised rules in many areas of social policies. Instead, national welfare policies in general restrain local implementations of more selective or restrictive social policies. Hence, the legal relationships between central, regional and local political, distributive and administrative levels are significant. Centralised political actions that favour gender equality need to be clearly formulated and combined with financial support in order to be implemented. Furthermore, it is crucial that fundamental principles and ideas behind attempts to achieve changes of gender relations are accepted on a local and semi-local level as they to a large part rely on the willingness among individuals or groups to co-operate.

Dominant patterns of power relations between men and women are questioned in different ways and to varying degrees. It is interesting to note that the gender arrangements, by the respondents described as the most commonly occurring family strategies among couples in each of the countries and municipalities, were referred to as resulting from the promoting or constraining aspects of the institutionalised framing of the actual welfare state. At the same time, and somewhat contradictory, gender relations and gender arrangements were understood as cultural and normative beliefs present on ban individual, local, and a national political level as well as in the labour market. The strong influence of such cultural beliefs were thought of as counteracting political initiatives in support of gender equality, explaining why women, voluntarily or involuntarily, tend to cease or reduce their labour market participation and take on care responsibilities whereas men do not. For instance, in Sweden women take on the main responsibility for family care despite existing policies that provide men opportunities to take part in family work. This is caused by unequal power relations and gender cultural beliefs that reach deeper than
the range of policies. In Germany, on the other hand, increasing female employment rates, especially among women that combine work with care responsibilities, were identified as changes in women’s value orientation, including a critique of male superiority. The introduction of part-time childcare services was therefore regarded as an ambiguous step forward, with the side effects of putting women in a labour market position that prevent them from threatening gender hierarchies in workplaces and households. The reluctance among politicians in Germany to regard a further expansion of social services as a public responsibility could cause conflicts between gender equality offices and their employers who are the local politicians. Many respondents called attention to the difficulties debating women’s rights in local political settings. They referred to experiences of indifference, lack of obliging, or an oppressive hostility that they themselves and many other women encountered when gender equality issues were at stake in politics or at workplaces. The need to bring gender issues to public debate was emphasised in order to achieve better conditions for men and women to discuss and negotiate in politics, at their workplaces, and in their homes.

There is no obvious or necessary relationship between women’s labour market participation and altering of gender roles. However, a connection exists between labour market participation, individual income, and the attainment of social rights and benefits. Today women and men who do not take part in the labour market do not achieve most of these rights and benefits. In addition, policies that insure women through the recognition of family care through marriage strengthen women’s economic dependence of men. The maternalist strategy adopted that demand a care or a housewife salary to compensate or confront masculinist legacies reflect struggles against the devaluation of traditional female tasks, and at the same time withdraw women from the public sphere. Despite agreements with the assumption that a housewife salary would give women a larger economic autonomy, without giving up the task as full-time care providers, the vast majority in all three countries rejected the idea. In Sweden and Germany, the reluctance was based on the assumption that compensation levels would be low and further remove women from the regular labour market. In addition, a housewife salary was regarded as public spending, giving economic compensation to individuals for taking care of their own children and other family members. According to the respondents, such tasks should not call for economic reward and would not bring any positive return for the public as financier of such expenses. In Italy, contradictory to the principle of familialism and in accordance with dominating gender cultural models, the introduction of family benefits connected to male breadwinners was
regarded as fitting well into the work related social policies in support of family welfare. These rationales reveal the political importance given to formal labour market participation for the access of social benefits, with the normative weight put on men as main breadwinners. Here the family continues to be regarded as an economic unit in which money is fairly divided between its members and the ideology of familialism that defines care as an act of solidarity or love and not as labour. Gender arrangements and the individual economic consequences are thereby placed outside the scope of political and public spheres of interest. From this point of view, the proposed care provider’s wage in one municipality in Sweden is gender neutral in its formulation and in the level of economic substitution. Although the importance of an individual income from work for access to social rights is acknowledged in the proposal, the expressed assumption was that women would be most in favour of the care provider wage.

Clearly national differences in women’s labour market participation and the treatment of the relationship between paid work and care cannot be explained by gender cultures alone, such as what is understood as the most desirable or normal behaviour for women and men. Neither is it sufficient to refer to welfare policies as visible evidences or justifications for the existing gender order as expressed in the formal institutionalisation of gender relations in different societal spheres. Rather, it is a reflection of both and gender arrangements can be described as the relation between men and women in the family that mirrors parts of how economic and political power resources and relations are gendered in each society as a whole. In this study, the overall picture in all three countries is one of changing values to an increased interest in social policies and social citizenship rights. This concern does not necessarily or primarily departure from experiences of increased female labour market participation or ideas about gender equality as equal rights to work, to social rights, or to autonomy. Rather, it emanates from ambitions to reduce some effects of poverty by making welfare states more inclusive or by addressing issues of individual subordination, dependence or deprivation deriving from existing welfare policies or marital legislation. While poverty for several reasons strikes hard on various groups of women and children, gendered connotations of social policies slip in through the back door of welfare political discussions.

Although corresponding social problems were identified in all three countries and the respondents posed very similar questions concerning public intervention in social matters, including gender equality, their arguments for political responsibility or policy solutions pointed in quite different directions. In addition it seemed that the political and gender
specific composition of decision-making structures influenced the presence of gender related issues in local policies. The political standpoints and the suggested changes or retention of a given gender order were strongly influenced by power relations, including the normative, almost essentialist, notions of gender and conceptions of gender cultural patterns. In a prolonged time perspective of relative local autonomy and with the influence of local political majorities and institutions combined with varying degrees of economic resources, it may result in increased national diversity in service offers, public attitudes, gender arrangements, and ways of working within institutions between different towns.

To assume that gender is constituted through the mediation of cultural practices is only partly true. The significance of culture and discourse notwithstanding, material and relational structures such as access to resources like money, knowledge, family and friends, empower or restrict men and women in their everyday lives. While gender relations are not fixed but change over time and through interaction between the different analytical levels, the understanding of gender among individuals and in welfare states and its institutions may be displaced and shifted. This study has shown that there are signs of both cross-national convergence and of country-specific patterns in how political and labour market institutions might respond and adapt to shifts in individual behaviour that simultaneously influence and are influenced by changing gender relations. The strength and the location of such social processes vary between societies depending on power relations and the dynamics in institutional settings and political practices.
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APPENDIX

Letters of presentation and questions posed to the interviewed persons in Italy, Germany, and Sweden

All’ Ass
Del Comune di

Padova, 16 dicembre 1998

Gent. Assessore,

La dr. Eva Sundström, dottoranda in Sociologia all’Università di Umeå, Svezia, sta conducendo una ricerca su “Welfare State e attitudini nei confronti di donne, famiglia e impiego in Italia, Germania e Svezia”, avendo come tutor il Prof. Stefan Svallfors.

Attualmente essa è in Italia, ospite del nostro Dipartimento, e collabora alla ricerca da me diretta “Genere e diseguaglianze”, la quale è parte del progetto CNR su “Distribuzione del reddito, diseguaglianze, esclusione sociale” all’interno del Programma Strategico CNR su “Governance e sviluppo economico”.

La dr. Sundström, da me consigliata, avrebbe l’intenzione di approfondire il suo lavoro intervistando alcuni Assessori ai Servizi sociali di Comuni italiani, sul tema “donne e lavoro retribuito”.

La versione italiana della ricerca confluirà nella parte del Progetto CNR di cui io sono responsabile e il testo prodotto sarà messo a disposizione dei Comuni che hanno collaborato al nostro lavoro.

Le saremmo molto grate se accettasse di incontrare Eva Sundström per rispondere alle sue domande. La dr. Sundström telefonerà alla Sua segreteria per fissare un appuntamento.

Le allego, intanto, la traccia di intervista. Sperando che il nostro progetto possa interessarLa, la ringrazio anticipatamente.

Distinti saluti.

Prof. Franca Bimbi
docente di Politica sociale

dr. Eva Sundström
In Italia esistono generalmente solo pochi provvedimenti di politica sociale che offrono un sostegno alle donne, agli uomini e alle famiglie nei loro impegni e responsabilità familiari. Inoltre, sono pochi gli esempi di interventi di politica sociale e sul mercato del lavoro che agevolano in qualche modo la conciliazione di tempi delle donne e degli uomini, tra impegni famigliari e lavori per il mercato.

Sulla esistenza e sulla necessità di tali politiche, e sulle loro differenti prospettive, Vi invitiamo a rispondere alla nostra inchiesta.

Nell’ambito dell’intervista a cui vorremmo sottoporVi, ci proponiamo di trattare i seguenti temi:

- Nel Vostro Comune, in quale modo si agevolano le famiglie nel loro impegno di prendersi cura dei bambini e degli anziani, in termini di sussidi economici e servizi pubblici? Che tipi di esigenze sapreste indicare nel contesto? Quali sono gli ostacoli?

- Secondo Voi, quale tipo di responsabilità per l’assistenza e la cura dei cittadini spettano al Comune e quale alla famiglia? In che modo pensate sarebbe meglio aiutare le famiglie? (aiuti economici come esenzione dalle rette, minimo vitale sussidi, bonus per servizi, offerta di servizi quali assistenza per l’infanzia, istituti per anziani, scuole, orari flessibili di apertura delle strutture pubbliche, assistenza domiciliare)? Che tipi di esigenze sapreste indicare nel contesto? Quali sono gli ostacoli?

- Quali vantaggi/ svantaggi ritenete vi siano in relazione rispettivamente alla gestione pubblica e privata dei servizi sociali? Come sono distribuite le due componenti nel Vostro Comune?
• In quale modo vengono finanziati i servizi sociali (interamente da coloro che ne usufruiscono, dal Comune, dallo Stato)? Qual è il Vostro parere su questo tipo di soluzioni?

• Le donne sono normalmente più competenti rispetto alla cura della famiglia. In che modo pensate si debba sostenere questo ruolo e, eventualmente, quello paterno?

• Nel Vostro Comune, in quale modo si favoriscono le donne nell’intraprendere un’attività lavorativa e nel restare nel mercato del lavoro? Che tipi di esigenze sapreste indicare nel contesto? Quali sono gli ostacoli?

• Quali sono, secondo Voi, i provvedimenti più importanti da prendere per raggiungere una maggior eguaglianza tra uomini e donne?

RingraziandoVi fin d’ora per la collaborazione, Vi porgiamo cordiali saluti.

Dr. Eva Sundstrom
Research design

Attitudes towards Family and Gender Roles in Germany, Italy and Sweden

Research Project by Eva Sundström, PhD and Professor Stefan Svallfors, Umeå University, Department of Sociology, 901 87 Umeå, Sweden

Financed by the Swedish Council for Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (HSFR) and the Swedish Council for Social Research (SFR).

Since the late 1980s, gender and women’s relationship to the welfare state have been highlighted in several studies and national and international official reports. The gendering structures of welfare policies in general and social policies in particular have been accentuated. In short, these studies show that female access to social rights, and hence to full citizenship rights, differ between countries through the construction of labour market policies, social policies, and family policies. Therefore, women’s relationship to the modern welfare state tends to be more complicated than that of men.

In the framing of this specific research project attitudes about family and gender roles are investigated. The survey data used is collected by the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) 1994, “Family and Changing Gender Roles” including, among other things, attitudes about female labour market participation and family life, responsibilities for and division of household tasks. Parts of the questionnaire are also used in the German ALBUS.

The selection of Germany (only the former Federal Republic of Germany), Italy, and Sweden is based on the essential differences between the German, Italian, and Swedish welfare state’s delivery systems and dimensions of social and labour market policies. Furthermore, there are important diversities in definitions of what constitutes a family and family obligations and what is considered as private versus public responsibilities.

The main conclusions drawn from the survey are that the composition of each national welfare regime seems to influence attitudes about women, employment, gender, age, educational background, family, and labour.
market status. These attitudes affect these values in important ways. A further conclusion is that changes in value patterns about working mothers place new demands on social and labour market policies to adapt to this change.

To achieve a deeper understanding form the comparative perspective within this research, we map similarities and variations from national and local political standpoints and problem definitions in relation to female labour market participation, care responsibilities, and social citizenship rights. During 1999, Eva Sundström conducted interviews with local councillors responsible for social affairs in five large and medium sized German, Italian, and Swedish towns.
The rising number of employed women has created new demands on family-friendly policies that allow for the reconciliation of work and family in Germany. As such, we may mention accentuated demands on more flexible childcare and school hours, but also on social and labour market policies in general.

- Im Anbetracht der Existenz und der Notwendigkeit neuen politischen Richtlinien und ihrer unterschiedlichen Perspektiven möchte ich mit diesen Fragen gezielt volgende solziopolitischen Themen behandeln.

- Wie werden in Ihrem Bundesland/in Ihrer Gemeinde Familien bei der Pflege von Kindern und hilfsbedürftigen Angehörigen (Senioren, Behinderte usw.) unterstützt, gibt es finanzielle Beihilfen und soziale Einrichtungen (Kinderhorte, Kindergärten, Altersheime usw.)?

- Gibt es Bedürfnisse, die dabei nicht, oder nicht ausreichend, berücksichtigt werden? Wird zum Beispiel dem Bedürfnis nach Teilzeitarbeit Rechnung getragen?

- Welche Art von Hilfe, Beistand und Pflege ist Ihrer Meinung nach Aufgabe der Öffentlichen Einrichtungen, und welche geht zu Lasten der Familie?

- Auf welche Art und Weise könnten die Familien Ihrer Meinung nach besser unterstützt werden:
finanzielle Hilfe (wie z.B. Erlaß von Zahlungen wie Steuererleichterungen und Ermäßigungen, Mindestunterstützung)

Service-Leistungen für Kinder in den verschiedenen Altersgruppen (Horte, Tagesstatten, Hausaufgabenhilfe)

für Senioren (Altersheime, Hauspflegedienst usw.)

flexible Öffnungszeiten der Öffentlichen Einrichtungen (Behörden, Schulen, Kindergärten usw.)

Gibt es Unterschiede zwischen den privat und öffentlich geführten sozialen Dienstleistungen? Welche sind Ihrer Meinung nach die Vorteile und welche die Nachteile.

Wie werden soziale Dienstleistungen finanziert (ausschließlich von den Benutzern, von der Gemeinde, vom Land oder Bund)? Was ist Ihre Meinung von diesen Lösungen?

Frauen sind normalerweise stärker in der Familienführung und-fürsorge engagiert. Wie sollte man ihre Rolle unterstützen und auch die des Vaters?

Wie werden in Ihrer Gemeinde Frauen beim Einstieg oder Wiedereinstieg ins Berufsleben unterstützt? Wie können sie auf dem Arbeitsmarkt wettbewerbsfähig bleiben?

Welche wäre Ihrer Meinung nach die wichtigsten Maßnahmen, die zu einer erhöhten Gleichheit zwischen Mann und Frau führen würden.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Hilfsbereitschaft.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

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Presentationsbrev

Inom forskningsprojektet 'Välfärdsregimer, könsideologier och attityder – jämförelse mellan Sverige, Tyskland och Italien’, finansierat av Humanistiska och Samhällsvetenskapliga Forskningsrådet (HSFR) och Forskningsrådsnämnden (FRN), har attityder till kvinnors förvärvsarbete analyserats.


Med vänliga hälsningar,

Eva Sundström                   Stefan Svallfors
Doktorand                      Professor
**Intervjufrågor**

- På vilket sätt stödjer man i Er kommun familjer med omsorgsansvar för barn, gamla eller personer med olika typer av funktionshinder? Täcker kommunens serviceutbud behovet av barnomsorg, äldreomsorg, andra typer av vård och omsorg? Förekommer alternativa lösningar som privata serviceföretag, ekonomiskt stöd till familjer eller individer med omsorgsbehov?

- Finns det enligt Er omsorgsbehov som inte eller inte tillräckligt blir tillgodosedda? Kan eventuella effekter tänkas ha någon relation till anhörigas val av arbetstider?

- Var går gränsen för det offentligas ansvar för vård och omsorg och var tar anhörigas skyldigheter vid? Anser Ni att stat och kommun borde ta på sig ett större ansvar eller borde man hellre kräva mer av anhöriga?

- På vilket sätt tycker Ni att individer och familjer skulle kunna ges bättre stöd:
  
  Via ekonomisk hjälp (t ex skattelättnader eller ökade bidragsandelar).

  Bättre/mer service och omsorg till barn i olika åldersgrupper.

  Bättre/mer service och omsorg till äldre anhöriga.

  Ökad flexibilitet i öppettider och tillgänglighet till hemservice och offentliga serviceinrättningar som skola, barnomsorg, äldreomsorg.

- Finns det några skillnader mellan de offentligt förvaltade och de privat organiserade sociala serviceutbuden? Vilka är enligt Er fördelarna och nackdelarna med ett blandat respektive homogen utbud av sociala tjänster?

- Hur finansieras sociala tjänster (uteslutande av användaren, av kommunen av staten)? Hur ser Ni på fördelningen av finansieringen?
Det är oftast kvinnor som står för huvuddelen av omsorg inom och utom familjen. Hur bör man bäst stödja kvinnor i deras arbete och eventuellt också män inom omsorg och omvårdnad på arbetsplatser och i hemmen.

Hur stöds kvinnor i Er kommun vid inträde eller återinträde på arbetsmarknaden? Finns särskilda åtgärder för att öka deras konkurrenskraft i arbetslivet?

Vilka anser Ni vara de viktigaste åtgärderna för att öka jämställdheten mellan kvinnor och män?

Ett varmt tack för er medverkan,

Eva Sundström