

The Role of Old Ideas in the New German Family Policy Agenda

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Abstract

German family policies have changed significantly in recent years. They have moved towards a gender neutral “dual earner model” and stressed the need for “social investment” in children, who are seen as rare and valuable human resources. Scholarly accounts of these recent developments have pointed to a range of factors explaining the turnabout in German family policies, among them the role of ideas in the policy process. Yet, the ways in which ideas become influential have remained unspecified in analyses of institutional change. Above all, the critical role of *duration*—the incubation period prior to major policy change—has been neglected. Drawing on John Kingdon’s classical study, we argue that ideas (policy alternatives) need time to develop. We suggest that in varied permutations the policy ideas enacted in recent German family policy reforms had been around for some time and were *familiar* to policy advisers and decision-makers. Smaller policy adjustments during the last three decades provided occasions for discussing these ideas and assessing the details of policy design. When enacted, policy ideas get the opportunity to become *mature*, and tested. In turn, they provide opportunities for policy learning and become *politically resonant*. This article explores how policy ideas about cash transfers to families, policies to foster maternal employment, parental leave, and public support for childcare have become familiar, mature, and politically resonant, and by that token influential in shaping recent reforms.

Zusammenfassung

Die deutsche Familienpolitik hat sich in den letzten Jahren bedeutend verändert. Das zeigt sich vor allem in der Entwicklung hin zum Geschlechtsneutralen „Ernährer-Modell“ sowie der Betonung der „sozialen Investitionen“ in Kinder, die als seltene und wertvolle menschliche Ressourcen angesehen werden. Beobachter dieser Entwicklungen haben auf eine Anzahl von Erklärungsfaktoren hingewiesen, und hierbei vor allem auf die Rolle von

Ideen im politischen Prozess. *Wie* diese Ideen ihren Einfluss ausüben, wird in den Analysen über institutionellen Wandel allerdings oft nicht hinreichend spezifiziert. Vor allem die *langfristigen* Effekte von Ideen sowie die kritische Rolle einer „Inkubationszeit“, während derer sich das politische Gewicht neuer Politik-Konzeptionen langsam herausbildet, sind bislang unbeachtet geblieben. Anknüpfend an die grundlegende Arbeit von John Kingdon argumentieren wir im vorliegenden Beitrag, dass Ideen und Politik-Konzeptionen *Zeit* zur Entfaltung ihrer Wirkungskraft benötigen. Wir zeigen, dass die den jüngsten familienpolitischen Reformen zugrunde liegenden Politik-Konzeptionen in leicht modifizierten Erscheinungsformen bereits längere Zeit vorhanden und den Entscheidungsträgern durchaus vertraut gewesen sind. Die kleineren familienpolitischen Reformen der letzten drei Jahrzehnte haben Anlässe geschaffen, die neuen Ideen zu erproben und zu diskutieren. So reiften gangbare Politik-Konzeptionen heran; Politikler:innen von anderen Ländern lieferte Informationen über ihre Umsetzbarkeit, bis die neuen Ideen mit der der Zeit auch in Deutschland mehr und mehr Resonanz fanden. Dieser Aufsatz analysiert die sozialpolitischen Traditionsbestände und Diskussionen um das Kindergeld, um Müttererwerbstätigkeit, Elternzeit und Elterngeld, sowie öffentliche Unterstützung für Kinderbetreuung und zeigt dabei die wichtige Funktion von *Vertrautheit*, *technischer Ausgereiftheit* und *politischer Resonanz* für die Wirkungsmacht familienpolitischer Ideen.

1 Introduction

German family policies have changed surprisingly and profoundly in recent years. Change culminated in 2007, when Federal legislation introduced a 14-months wage replacement benefit for childcare (*Elterngeld*), thereby replacing the old (1986) parental leave scheme, which had rather explicitly encouraged parents (in fact mothers) to stay at home and care for their children. The reform increased parental leave benefits and tax subsidies for childcare markedly and was bolstered with massive funding for (state- and municipal-level) investment in childcare facilities, especially for very young children.¹

Reconciliation between professional careers and raising children (von Wahl 2008: 299), support for the dual-earner family (Wüst 2009: 10), and social investment in children as European

¹ Good accounts of the specific policy changes can be found in: Henninger et al. (2008), von Wahl (2008), Blum (2010 in this issue).

societies' most valuable future assets form the centerpiece of the new family policy agenda. Measures intended or already enacted pertain to a wider range of policy fields including tax policy, education policy, activating labor market policy, pension policy, and even family law and child support regulation. Spanning this diverse spectrum is the theme of improving the country's human resources. In family policy its manifestation is in the declared goals of increasing birthrates, especially of parents with academic degrees, securing skilled labor, and improving gender equality in employment opportunities. The parental leave benefit partially compensates parents who leave formal employment to take care of their infants for their income losses, but this period is kept as short as possible.

For many observers these changes towards "sustainable family policy"² represent a milestone in German family policy and "a clear sign of changing rationales", "a decisive departure from West Germany's historical male breadwinner model", and a remarkable move towards dual earning. They also imply a greater reliance on services in Germany's hitherto cash-transfer heavy welfare state. Most importantly, current reforms are altering the goals and the social groups in the center of attention of family policy intervention. Rather than redistributing resources and supporting needy families, the new parental benefit targets parents working in well-paying jobs. It is designed as income replacement, calculated as 67 percent of the parent's net income prior to the parental leave. For the first time German public policies like parental leave or the extension of early on full-time childcare "unambiguously [aim] at reducing female career interruptions and increasing men's involvement in the child-rearing domain." (Erler 2009: 129). This objective has also become visible in the 2007 reform of post-divorce alimony and child support rules. That reform significantly weakened rights formerly attached to the marital status by stipulating that the needs of the youngest

² For details about the concept of sustainability in German family policy see Ahrens (2010 in this issue).

child and her mother are prior to those of the divorced wife³ and her children, thereby expecting women to look for a job immediately after separation and divorce.

Eventually, German women will find it harder (if not impossible) to claim state support as wives and mothers when they are needy but not employed, and harder not to resort to self-help via employment. Social rights are increasingly granted not to the status of parenthood *per se*, but to the parent-worker in gender neutral ways and regardless of marital status. Therefore, we can speak of a “farewell to maternalism” (Orloff 2006) and farewell, also, to the family as we knew it (Ostner 2010). As a corollary to the “farewell to maternalism” the new parental leave program also seeks to encourage fathers to take time off and do their share of full-time childcare. Somewhat paradoxically, at first sight, it also urges both parents to re-enter formal employment rather briefly after the birth of their child, leaving their infant in the custody of professional care workers. Yet, this prescription is well in tune with new EU-European child policies; they may eventually lead to what Jensen and Overtrup (2004: 825) have identified as a general trend towards “institutionalizing” children and childhood in our societies. Hence, the “farewell to maternalism” appears to be part and parcel of a broader “farewell to parentalism”, the higher care involvement of many fathers notwithstanding.

This article analyzes the normative and conceptual roots of the move toward the “adult worker model” (Lewis 2001). “Ideational lineages” are significant in this move, because the policy change implies an important redefinition of rights and responsibilities among family members as well as between families, the state, markets, and the wider society. It has also given a new (liberalist) twist to the principle of subsidiarity, deeply entrenched in the (West) German multi-level institutional setting. The recent policy change revitalized the question of who is primarily responsible for delivering a particular kind of service, and who should be

³ The law is written in gender-neutral language, yet in reality affects mostly married women after separation and divorce. For the time being, it may involve serious hardship for women who divorce after a longer-time homemaker-carer marriage and do not find a decent job.

service or care provider of last resort. As our contribution demonstrates, controversies in policy fields related to the family had more or less explicitly revolved around complex issues of subsidiarity. From the late 1950s onwards the federal government stood against the Bundesländer and the municipalities. The churches warned against any erosion of the idea of the family as private sphere, family and welfare organizations challenged advocates of stronger state involvement in childcare and youth activities, each time appealing to the idea of subsidiarity (Westphal 1975, Kuller 2004, Jordan 2005, Münch 2007, Münch and Hornstein 2008). Subsidiarity therefore constitutes a good vantage point for studying significant changes of German public policy. The new parental leave scheme strengthened families' attachment to the labor market in a "work-first" fashion, as did recent activation strategies for needy families and the long-term unemployed. New child policies have begun to detach children from particularistic linkages with their families of origin. Reforms have severed connections with older meanings of subsidiarity and introduced new ones. As we will show, ideational change in family policy started as early as the late 1950s when the child allowance (for the third child) lost its function as a family wage supplement, and employers were no longer expected to pay for it. It continued when some Länder (with social democratic governments) challenged the 1961 Constitutional Court ruling, which stipulated that the state was a service provider of last resort, while church-based and secular welfare organizations (insofar as they supplemented rather than replaced the family) providers of first resort (Münch 2007).

Scholarly accounts of the recent developments have pointed to a range of factors explaining the turnabout in German family policies. Structural driving forces such as the pressure of socio-economic and demographic change and the repercussions of population ageing are rarely missing in the causal narratives (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006, Henninger et al. 2008). However, knotty issues about the timing and the cross-national variation of large-scale reorientation in family models are immediately called to mind in the context of such arguments. Why is it only recently that most countries are willing to respond to the demo-

graphic challenges that demographers have pointed out as potentially problematic as early as in the late 1950s (Kuller 2004)? Political explanations, focusing on changes in the institutional constraints, decision-making dynamics, or actors in charge reform decisions concentrate on more proximate causes that do not have this problem. They add valuable insights into the causes of family policy change, but they have their own problems. Family policy has posed a challenge to class-based arguments (Winter 1988, von Wahl 2008: 28), and researchers have tried to uncover the partisan dynamic of the changes. Political parties in favor of “modernizing” family policies may have been the driving forces behind reforms (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006: 323, Leitner forthcoming 2010), but in the German case such an account would need to explain why some of the major players in the family policy field have changed their minds. The major political parties have converged on identical policy proposals (von Wahl 2008: 30 f.), forming the supermajority that could produce the far-reaching and expensive policy changes, but how did they come to agree on a definition of problems and solutions in the first place?

At some point most of the explanations refer to cognitive and normative factors—changing family models and changing ideas about the family and the proper role of the state in supporting the family (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006: 320, Henninger et al. 2008: 307, Blum 2010 in this issue: 13 f.). Arguments about changing ideas share the problem of timing to some extent (Mätzke and Ostner forthcoming 2010b): The diffusion of new gender- and family norms and new understandings of the desired balance between work and family have been going on for a long time. Why do gender equity issues manifest themselves in policy change after the turn of the millennium? How, specifically, has diffusion come about in so many different countries, and why did the German response occur so relatively late? Moreover, arguments about changing policy positions on the part of the major actors in the field are fraught with validity-issues: It is hard to get a reliable sense of the depth and the precise nature of shifts in preferences and attitudes, harder still to assess the causes of such shifts. Changing expectations and behavior on the part of indi-

vidual mothers and fathers may be not the cause, but the consequence of policy changes, merely reflecting the grinding traces of fiscal austerity and welfare state restructuring that most Western welfare states have been experiencing for three decades by now (Cox 2000).

Policy ideas *per se*, therefore, are less straightforward as explanatory variable than it often seems. Their role has to be specified in both their effects on policy change and the temporal structure of these effects. This is the goal of our contribution. It will spell out the relationship between the development of policy ideas and the manifest policy changes Germany has seen even before the remarkable changes of recent years. We argue that while policy change can occur rather rapidly and unexpectedly, innovation in the realm of ideas almost necessarily takes time. This critical importance of duration—an incubation period prior to major policy change—has not received much theoretical attention in the literature on institutional change, but it is in fact a familiar theme in studies of policy development. For instance, in his famous study of agenda setting in the United States' federal government, John Kingdon insists that agenda setting to a large part takes place in the realm of ideas—persuasion and learning, instead of pressure and influence (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 17, 125, similarly Béland 2005), and he repeatedly reminds us that ideas need time to develop: “A policy proposal (...) has to go through a gestation period. It takes a number of years” (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 128). Social reformers and policy specialists need time to try out their ideas on others (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 116), and policy innovation requires a set of policy ideas to draw on, which is mature (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 131 f.), familiar to a certain extent (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 82, 141), and politically resonant (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 132 ff.).

Our paper will demonstrate just that. In varied permutations the policy ideas enacted in the recent German family policy reforms had been around for some time. They had been discussed in earlier policy debates, and policymakers were familiar with them. We show how this familiarity has evolved over time. Smaller policy adjustments in the last three decades' family policy development provided occasions for discussing these ideas,

exploring their underlying normative commitments and assessing the details of policy design. This prepared the ground for the more profound change of direction that we have seen in our recent family policies. With new policies enacted, discussed and evaluated, we can then observe a set of themes and policy ideas that form a repertoire for the stabilization and further development of the new family policy agenda.

The next section (2) outlines the place of ideas in explanations of public policy and then discusses the conceptual significance of duration—the lengthy process of policy experimentation and normative re-orientation—for explanations of the more recent policy changes. The relationship between policy change and the change of ideas about family policies is a reciprocal one, though, in which ideas provide a toolkit of reform proposals, but at the same time new policies also engender innovation in policy ideas. Section 3 highlights policy ideas at the core of the Germany’s traditional family policy model. In section 4 we show how incremental policy change in German family policies, which had started to modify the traditional family model as early as in the 1970s, discursively prepared the ground for the bolder steps of innovation that we have been seeing in recent years. In doing so, we identify the major transformation that both the long-term policy development and the recent policy turnabout have introduced into prevailing ways of thinking about family policy. In a sense section 4 outlines the toolkit of new policy ideas on which future steps of policy innovation can draw. Section 5 summarizes the key conceptual and substantive points made in the paper.

2 Old ideas in public policy innovation

2.1 Ideas as explanations of public policy

A large literature about the role of ideas in political and institutional dynamics seeks to specify the causal contribution of ideas in policy-innovation. This literature also indicates how difficult it is to determine precisely how ideas become politically influential (Jacobsen 1995, Yee 1996). A number of “causal pathways”

(Goldstein and Keohane 1993) figure prominently in this literature:

- (1) Institutional structures of policymaking and policy legacies make the political systems of countries predisposed, to different degrees, to adopt new ideas (Hall 1989: 10 f.), so that the political power of ideas is in part a function of the political system's institutional permeability.
- (2) Ideas inform policymaking, but they unfold this influence (only) through actors, that is, *bearers* of innovative ideas who act as policy entrepreneurs and agents of change (Stiller 2009, Mätzke and Ostner forthcoming 2010b) or as epistemic communities (Haas 1992, Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 121 ff.), developing and disseminating policy alternatives.
- (3) Policy ideas also have effects by shaping preference formation (Jacobsen 1995, Schmidt 2002), the development of a collective consciousness (Béland 2009: 568), and by influencing the way in which policy problems are being framed (Campbell 1998). That way they impose unity and a common perception of the problems (Hall 1993: 279) in fragmented policy fields.
- (4) Policy ideas can even mediate between the general public and political elites (Campbell 1998, Pfau-Effinger 2005). Ideas are embodied in mass attitudes, and policy-makers respond to the pressure of public opinion, so that welfare institutions are to a certain extent a reflection of micro-level practices and preferences (Ullrich 2003) as well as group-identities at the micro-level.

The causal pathways of ideas' influence all support the claim that *especially* in the family policy field cognitive and normative factors play an important role. Two main arguments support this claim: First, family policy affects people's private ways of life immediately. It is inherently normatively charged (Blum 2010 in this issue: 3 f.). Assumptions about the proper shape and function of the family (Moeller 1989) and the role of state intervention are especially pronounced in the case of the family. This is partly due to the fact that *legal* regulation, family law, child support regulation, even issues like reproductive rights are so closely related to the policies of supporting children and parents. Partly it

also reflects the fact that public discourse and discursively maintained norms establish a genuine micro-macro link and mediate between social practice and political intervention (Campbell 1998, Ullrich 2003, Pfau-Effinger 2005).⁴ Secondly, strewn across many policy fields⁵ as it is, family policy needs a tool to induce coherence and align actors. In Germany coordination among different units in the federal bureaucracy is a critical task to be accomplished by family policy reformers. It requires government officials in different ministries to engage in coalition building often across party lines (Ostner forthcoming 2010). Re-alignment of positions is also necessary within the major political parties (Beck-Gernsheim 2007: 857 ff.). Framing family policy problems in a specific, pervasive and shared way is such a tool for accomplishing these (re-)alignments.

Policy change is more likely when policy ideas are shared by majorities in a broad field of actors, and creating coherence among the positions of diverse actors is one of the functions of policy ideas. But actors need *time* to get their act together. One time-consuming task in policy development is policy learning (Hecló 1974) and observation of international examples. International diffusion of ideas, for instance, lends powerful support to an agenda of policy change. Ideas that have been tried out elsewhere (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006: 327-332) proved to be influential in Germany precisely because this provided the new policy conception with some degree of testing. The 1970 equalization of the rights of children born out of wedlock was informed by the Swiss and also by the example of socialist East Germany (Münch 2007: 682). Early childhood schooling (reading) experiments in the US-Head Start program might have been a catalyst for (West) German pre-school experiments in the 1970s and 1980s and the incremental transformation of childcare into an

⁴ Something that is not so widespread in policy studies, where individuals are mostly conceptualized as mere policy-takers, while the relevant agents, who can influence policy outcomes, are organizational actors. In family policy, by contrast, the outcomes of policy measures crucially depend on people's attitudes and individual mass behaviors.

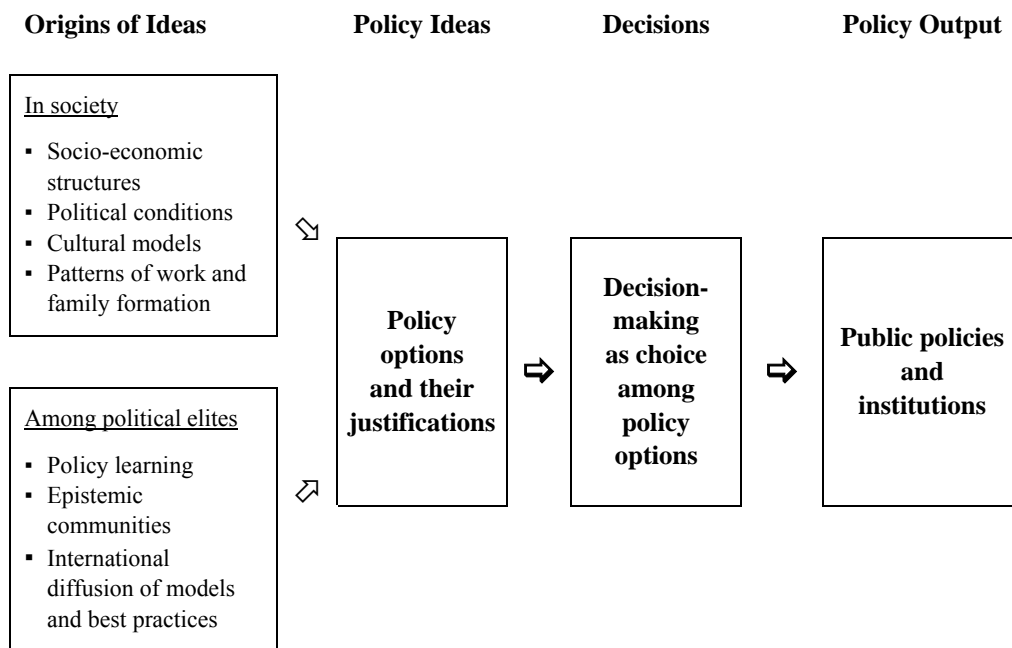
⁵ E.g. Family law, cash support, building an infrastructure, fiscal, health and educational policy

“educational” service (Kuller 2004: 294-5). More recently the Swedish parental leave scheme set the example on which the 2007 German one was largely molded (Wüst 2009).

2.2 Policy debates as arenas for the development of new ideas

Policy ideas can thus be a resource in the construction and further development of public policies and institutions. This is the understanding about the role of ideas in policy innovation that most of the arguments reviewed in the previous subsection would subscribe to. Ideas are politically influential, because they inform political decision-making, policy output, and ultimately institutional development. Figure 1 illustrates this understanding of the role of ideas in policy formation.

Figure 1: Ideas as causal pathways



Policy ideas are proposals about suitable means of political intervention and the justifications of such proposals. John Kingdon (1995 [1984]) refers to policy ideas as “policy alternatives” or “items on the decision agenda”. They can be observed by analyzing policy design and intended results of political intervention, as well as the reasons put forward in decision procedures and

reform decisions. This understanding of the role of policy ideas and their role in the formation of public policy has important conceptual consequences.

Policy ideas partially have their roots in *civil society*, that is, to some extent they reflect preferences and practices endorsed by citizens and their organizations. A broad spectrum of civil society actors⁶ – interest organizations, the social partners, the churches – exert powerful influence on family policy.⁷ Policy ideas can also originate in changing preferences of policy related *elites* (see Figure 1). In both cases they become manifest, and influential in the policy process, in *lawmaking communities*, i.e. among policy experts, who ultimately write the rules and regulations that shape the reality of family policy benefits (Mätzke and Ostner forthcoming 2010a). Actors “on the inside of government” exert a more direct and more specific influence on policy goals and the design of policy alternatives (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 67 f.) than civil-society actors do. Neither agenda-setting, nor policy formation are processes fully controlled by any particular actor (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 73), and the cast of actors immediately involved in policy formation is rather broad. It includes the political parties (von Wahl 2008, Leitner forthcoming 2010), career bureaucrats (see the classical statement by Heckscher 1974), academic experts (Raphael 1998, Ostner 2010), or elected officials (Hall 1993: 287, Kingdon 1995 [1984], Ostner 2010). The Constitutional Court is also a major player in the family policy field (Gerlach 2000). In the German ‘multi-level’ case, one must also consider federalism and the possibility that new ideas will have been developed by *Länder*-level actors, politicians and

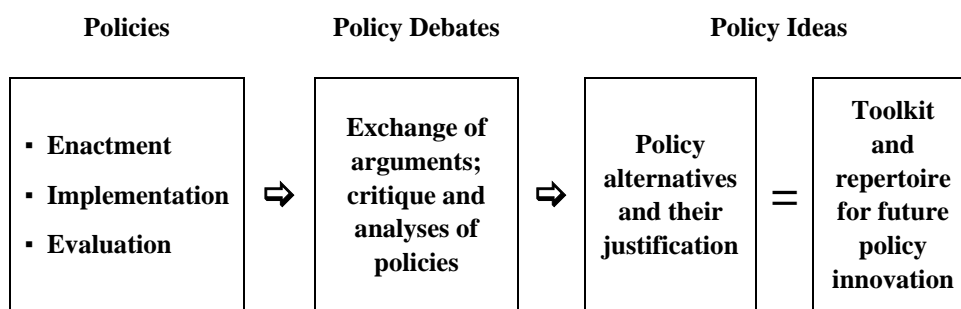
⁶ The distinction between societal and more narrowly political levels on which discursive change can manifest itself is explained in greater detail in Mätzke and Ostner (forthcoming 2010a).

⁷ Karen Hagemann (2006) recounts the powerful influence of church-based welfare organizations on childcare policy; Sonja Blum (2010 in this issue) reports the growing interest of the social partners in the latest Austrian and German policy changes. As argued above, individual behaviors on a mass scale can exert formidable pressure upon policy makers [see Schoppa (forthcoming 2010) for an argument along these lines about Japanese family policy].

policy-related elites, often in competition with those of the federal governments (Kuller 2004).

Given this character of policy ideas as residing in the realm of political decision-making, and existing in the minds of policy experts, there is an additional, and reverse, causal dynamic at work in the relationship between policy ideas and public policy-making. Here ideas are not so much inputs, shaping contours of political controversy and the design of public policies, but instead they are themselves the result of policy debate. Policy change and the deliberations surrounding it, even if change takes the form of small and insignificant steps, provide opportunities and an arena for discussing new ideas, testing arguments, and gauging the political feasibility of reform options. Over the course of policy debates, ideas then become entrenched in the discursive repertoire of a polity. Akin to what Ann Swidler (1986) says about the role of culture in a community, policy ideas overtime form a toolkit – a set of alternatives and arguments on which policymakers can draw in reform initiatives. It is this reversed causal influence, running from policies to policy ideas that we seek to explore in this paper. Figure 2 illustrates the structure of the argument.

Figure 2: Policy ideas as *results* of policy debate



In the historical narrative we will first examine the *policy lineages*, that is, the origins in earlier policy controversies, of the most important policy ideas that have helped shape the recent change in family policies (section 3). Then we take stock of the repertoire of ideas and policy conceptions on which family policy reformer will be able to draw in future policy changes (Section

4). Before that it is necessary to discuss the role of time and duration in the reciprocal relationship between policy ideas and public policies.

2.3 Little strokes fell big oaks: The role of duration in the policy effects of ideas

It needs time to develop policy options that are both practicable and palatable for majorities among the politically influential actors. Thus, although *policy change* can occur rather rapidly, the *policy ideas* enacted need a period of incubation. John Kingdon (1995 [1984]: 128) frequently speaks of “softening up” the field of positions and opinions. It follows, somewhat paradoxically, that the policy ideas that do make it onto the innovation-agenda are more often than not rather *old ideas* (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 141)! And this is necessarily so:

Wholly new ideas do not suddenly appear. Instead, people recombine familiar elements into a new structure or a new proposal. This is why it is possible to note “There is no new thing under the sun” at the same time change and innovation are being observed. Change turns out to be recombination more than mutation. (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 124).

Specific policy alternatives have a tendency to be not new at all. New is only the boldness with which policymakers become serious and seek to implement the “recombined” policy package at large scale. And that boldness requires policy proposals that have been tested in their feasibility, policy conceptions that resonate politically, and reform conceptions with which majorities among lawmakers and the broader policy community are roughly familiar. Old ideas, not the brand-new ones, fulfill these requirements.

This points to the crucial element of duration in the politics of reform. New policy ideas do not appear suddenly, but instead need time to develop. Duration as a constitutive element of policy change has not been fully explored in the institutionalist literature. This holds for both writings on cognitive explanations of policy change, and for the burgeoning scholarly work on temporality in historical institutionalist reasoning. In that literature scholars have paid a lot of attention to the factors of timing and

sequencing (Pierson 2004, Streeck and Thelen 2005), that is, the temporal positioning of events and developments relative to other events and developments. Furthermore, time pressure in the context of electoral cycles or with regard to substantive policy challenges has been identified as playing an important role in pushing reforms onto the political agenda.

Duration – the sheer passage of time, allowing issues, policy challenges, and policy alternatives to develop, also plays an important role, one that has rarely been explicitly conceptualized. Streeck and Thelen (2005: 19-30) hint at the causal weight of duration in all the types of gradual transformation they discuss. In most of them the time period sets the stage and provides the opportunities for active endeavors of redefining, altering, defecting from institutional settings and their behavioral norms, whereas the passage of time itself carries little causal weight. Duration is salient in the mechanism of exhaustion, depicted by Streeck and Thelen as one of the types of gradual institutional transformation (p. 30-32). Pressures for change gradually pick up force over time, when the advantages of once beneficial sets of institutions erode. As the mechanism here is depletion of resources (p. 32), the type does supply a convincing explanation for the buildup of policy-momentum, but one that only applies to settings, in which (material and political) resources and their finite supply indeed play the crucial role. Mounting financial pressure, unsustainability of a certain level of average incomes and social standards, financing gaps in social insurance systems under the pressure of demographic change; these all offer convincing accounts of situations where policy momentum has built up over time and duration has played an important role in the explanation. But this explanation does not offer a more general causal story behind the policy effects of duration. It captures only cases in which policy challenges indeed stem from financial problems. Family policy is no such field. In fact, the new policies we consider all amount to greater burdens on public finances, so slow-growing financial troubles are no convincing rationale behind family policy innovation. Here we need a substantive idea of the process that might lend causal weight to the passage of time and explains slowly growing pressure for policy innovation.

This process, we submit, works through the political power of discursive change. In an adaptation of John Kingdon's account of "when an idea's time has come" we argue that discursive change becomes politically influential when it renders policy ideas familiar, mature, and politically resonant.

Familiarity: It is the first condition of successful policy innovation. As the next section will show, policy discourse of some duration can deliver it. Kingdon reminds us that this is an outgrowth of the fact that a new agenda is a recombination of old elements:

If alternatives change not by mutation, but by recombination, there will always be familiar elements in the new combination. And if the softening up process is as critical as we have claimed, it would be exceedingly surprising if wholly new ideas suddenly appeared on the scene (...) and immediately received a serious hearing. When the time for action arrives (...), it is already too late to develop a proposal from scratch. It must have already gone through this long process of consideration, floating up, discussion, revision, and trying out again. (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 141)

Incremental policy change prior to major reform plays an important role here. It gradually familiarizes policymakers and publics with new concepts and ideas about the family, which start out rather inconspicuous, but in principle can assume much more extensive readings.

Maturity: In addition to the familiarizing function, the long lineages of family policy proposals helps render policy proposals more "mature": They allow for "the gradual accumulation of knowledge and perspectives among the specialists in a given policy area" (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 17). This permits specialists to observe international examples (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006: 318) and commission research to secure their "technical feasibility" (Kingdon 1995 [1984]: 131). The parental leave benefit, for instance, implemented a policy design that was tried out in Sweden (Wüst 2009: 9 f.). Its formula of income-related social benefits, moreover, is a long-established feature in Bismarckian social insurance schemes (Opielka 2008: 33, Wüst 2009: 10); in fact, cash transfers to families (the child allowance) even started out

as an employer-financed scheme akin to social insurance (Nel-
leßen-Strauch 2005: 22).

Political resonance: The lengthy family policy debates finally allow actors to develop their political muscle in support of innovation. The pressure of EU-demands has not impressed German policymakers right away, but it has developed some urgency over time.⁸ Decades of family policy discourse also facilitate the socialization of policy entrepreneurs and decisionmakers, who come of age and grow into their positions of influence in the context of these debates (Ostner forthcoming 2010). It allows for the formation of coalitions and (national and international) policy communities across the boundaries of formal policy fields. The cross-cutting nature is one of the aspects of the family policy field that necessitate this “normative and cognitive glue” stewed in lengthy policy debates.

All these processes of cognitive reorientation, realignment, and policy learning take time. This is the place of duration, as a conceptually important element in explanations of policy innovation. By the time large-scale policy innovation reached the political agenda after the turn of the new millennium, a set of ideas was available, which was politically resonant, familiar to the actors involved in the making of social policy, mature and well-developed in its technical details. The following section provides empirical evidence for our emphasis on the importance of ideas and their policy lineages.

3 The “old” German family policy

We start our narrative by briefly highlighting core policy ideas of Germany’s traditional family policy model, as it was most clearly developed in the immediate post World War II decade. This serves as a point of reference for demonstrating, in the then following subsection, that by the 1960s political perceptions and public sentiment had already started moving away from the old

⁸ External pressures also gained momentum more forcefully as a consequence of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty and the Lisbon process initiated in 2000.

image. *Policy*-manifestations of this gradual transformation were rather limited and hesitant, granted, but we argue that they were relevant for the recent reforms in that they familiarized both policymakers and the public with alternative images of the family and alternative ideas about the roles of fathers and mothers. The 1990s and the new millennium added significant changes in social⁹ and political structures and produced imperatives that made it more urgent to develop some of these alternative ideas into workable public policies. This pressure contributed to the opening the window of opportunity for politicians and policy experts, who could then appeal to older ideas, hitherto hidden or rejected, and use those as templates for reforming existing family policies (for a detailed application of Kindgon's multiple streams approach see Augustin-Dittmann 2010 in this issue).

In the comparative literature German family policy is often portrayed as the prototype of the conservative model (Lewis 2001, Kaufmann et al. 2002). This image largely prevailed – especially in comparison with the Nordic countries – all the way through the 1990s. Descriptions of German family policy development routinely include a narrative of all the smaller steps in the policy field's history, often starting with the liberalization of family law in 1972 (Bleses 2003: 563 f., Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006: 321-326, von Wahl 2008: 33 f., Blum 2010 in this issue: 5 f.). Yet, conclusions are rarely drawn about the conceptual significance of this longer policy history, and the prevailing image remains one of “conservative”, status-reproducing, not quite modern, gender-inegalitarian policy design. What are the main features of this “old” model; to what policy challenges was it a response, and what were its normative underpinnings?

The old German family policy model, cast in underlying norms, policies, and practices during the 1950s and early 1960s, had developed against the backdrop of the post-war situation. That situation comprised a great deal of political and social instability, especially in the immediate post-war years (Hockerts 1986). For the German majority, who suffered the nearly total

⁹ Demographic change, migration to Germany, and German unification all have altered the composition of the German population.

collapse of their society, the family represented the last resort and moment of stability (Kuller 2004). This explains the widespread yearning for (social) security and political and social stability, among the general public (Braun 1978) and political elites alike; it also accounts for West Germans' retreat into privatism and their "depolitization" during the 1950s (Joosten 1990). Demobilization (after the social dislocations of fascism, total war, population displacements and occupation) and stabilization of society (Moeller 1989: 137) were the most pressing tasks, re-privatization of the family, state protection of it as an institution (Wuermeling 1963) but high expectations in its social and ethical functions were among the principal means of meeting this challenge.

A triple repudiation (Schulz 1998, Hagemann 2006: 233) – of East Germany's, Nazi-Germany's and the Occupation Regime's stances toward family policy, which all envisioned an interventionist stance – accounts for the particular conservatism and privatism of the early Federal Republic's policy ideas (Joosten 1990: 38). Moreover, the political constellation of postwar West Germany (the dominance of the conservative CDU/CSU in the Federal governments during the 1950s and early 1960s) provided the unique opportunity to install family policy as a political arena where key actors, often related to the churches, had some leeway to draw upon older policy ideas developed in social catholic and French political thought. The "family wage" and employer-financed child benefits (Kuller 2004) are examples of such older policy-conceptions. Chancellor Adenauer founded the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs in 1953 to some extent in order to appease the clerical (mostly catholic) wings of the CDU/CSU, which resented his coalition with the liberal party, the FDP (Kuller 2004: 328).

Social Catholicism provided important ideas and features of the old (West) German family policy model and therefore offers a good starting point for a closer look at subsequent changes of policy ideas. It can be described succinctly by two guiding principles: "subsidiarity" and "relationalism". From its very beginning (in late 19th century), Social Catholicism had merged the "social question" with that of workers' capacity to have and sup-

port a family (consisting of four people). It continued to do so in tacit accordance with the dominant reformist trade unions' and with social-liberal views of the time. It based state intervention in family matters on the principle of subsidiarity. According to social catholic teaching solidarity precedes subsidiarity. Solidarity (redistribution) as well as state regulation are needed to enable persons and groups (e.g. the social partners) to collective self-help. The wider community including the state is allowed to support families, however, only in ways that further familial self reliance and self-help. Subsidiarity explains why "social catholic" social policies (including family policy) typically favor the "family wage" (historically first in France) and supplementary cash benefits over services. The latter are seen as depriving families of their original tasks. Entitlements pertain to relations – status, corporations (e.g. occupational ones), the social partners, married couples, parents – not to individuals per se, hence the lack of individualizing policies. The principle of subsidiarity precludes measures (like full-time public childcare) that jeopardize self-help capacities of those closest to a problem (e.g. parents to the child), hence the extreme reluctance to take over some of the families' tasks (such as childcare) in the public realm. Subsidiarity underlines priority of the smaller unit or smaller scale relations, over the wider community and the state. It also emphasizes the importance of the family wage rather than individualized incomes, and the priority of cash transfers to married couples and families over publicly provided social care services.

The Social Catholic view of the family was, therefore, familiarist, in Rémi Lenoir's terms (Lenoir 1991: 146, Mätzke and Ostner forthcoming 2010a). It conceived of the family as the basic unit of social organization and assigned important ordering and stabilizing functions to it. It did so most importantly by formally restricting individual agency, mostly on the part of women. Cohabitation was outlawed, divorce extremely restricted, as was the access to modern forms of contraception, and married women willing to leave the home for paid work needed their husbands' consent for doing so.

This family model was simply assumed and enforced with predominantly restrictive (negative) measures. Egalitarian dis-

courses on more “positively” supportive policies to govern relations within the family were silenced as quickly as fiercely. They had to wait until the mid 1960s when the CDU/CSU, too, began to rethink principles of German marriage and family laws, and the power of Catholicism slowly eroded. The image of the model family, influenced by Social Catholic ideas, was partly a “normality fiction” (Moeller 1993: 144, Becker 2000: 183 f., Kolbe 2002: 51), not quite reflecting the volatile and disordered reality of family structures especially in the immediate post-war years. But such normality-fictions were (and are) important policy instruments. The legal and political regulation of the labor market in the decades up to the 1980s was also governed by partially unreal notions of the “normal professional biography” (Mückenberger 1985), and both normality fictions had the typical double meaning of socio-political norms: They were partly descriptive, but partly also prescriptive, seeking to impose images of a desired normality.

Policymakers did have an early perception of social problems and social inequality along the lines of family structure (Wuermeling 1956). Municipalities were confronted with an ever increasing demand for public full-time childcare up to the mid 1950s. High rates of lone working mothers, the lack of proper food for children, the lack of housing, combined with run-down infrastructure, unsafe streets and strenuous family conditions contributed to the demand (Kuller 2004: 289). The municipalities and the churches tried hard to meet the demand; they partially did so in order to avoid having to send needy children to children’s homes and separate them from their parents. Political opinion and public sentiment were still against the idea of providing childcare to support maternal employment; attitudes were generally hostile towards mothers’ paid work (Moeller 1989). Kuller (2004: 291) quotes Hoegner, then (in 1956) Social Democratic Prime Minister of Bavaria, who blamed the search for luxury and consumption (*Genußsucht*), which in his view lured women unnecessarily into paid work. While Hoegner, as many of his political contemporaries, rejected maternal employment and non-familial childcare as misguided “materialism” (Kuller 2004: 292), a group of experts prepared a report (*Gutachten zur Erzie-*

hung im frühen Kindesalter), which emphasized new social risks, no longer related to the war, challenging children and youth and necessitating new pedagogical answers. However, the experts did not yet perceive childcare in terms of “education” (Kuller 2004: 293).

Some of the contemporary observers saw family status-based inequality as replacing class inequality as the politically most salient line of distinction (Winter 1988), but that notion resided more in the realm of political rhetoric and never reflected social realities very well. It did inform family policy making, though. In addition to the tax exemption for children (*Steuerfreibetrag*)¹⁰, the Adenauer-government introduced a French style employer-financed child allowance (*Kindergeld*) for families with three and more children. Tied to employment status and explicitly without class-redistributive intentions (Moeller 1989: 153 f.), this sought to financially support larger families and redistribute income between childless and “child-rich” families, but not between different social strata. The same logic also informed the extension of tax exemptions for children. We see here a rather tight connection between family policy and normality assumptions about the labor market: The “performance based pay” (Moeller 1989: 144) of the male (industrial) worker was supposed to be sufficient for supporting a family of four, without the mother “having to work” (Moeller 1989: 147, Hagemann 2006). As in the French tradition, from which the policy idea (including that of the 1950s “*femme au foyer*”, the female homemaker) was adopted, the child allowance lent support only to families with a father in formal employment, for whom the father’s income was not sufficient. Existing proposals to better financially support needy mothers regardless of marital or occupational status remained unheard (Kuller 2004: 392).

The policy model of family and employment structures outlined here proved to be resilient and slow to change. Long-

¹⁰ The tax exemption (*Steuerfreibetrag*) had been introduced as part of National Socialist population policies in the 1930s. It was abolished by the occupation regime, but quickly re-established in 1946. See Joosten (1990: 50-53), Schulz (1998: 141), Kuller (2004: 330-332).

standing policy ideas such as male breadwinning, female home-making and “maternalism”, as well as old style non-liberalist subsidiarity and non-individualizing “relationalism” had to be overcome in order to arrive at the new family policy model that we have seen emerging in recent years. Resilience to change and slow progress do not surprise us much, given the widespread reluctance to engage in activist social policy intervention and grand experiments at social reform that prevailed in the post World War II period. For obvious historical reasons this reluctance was especially pronounced with regard to population and family questions (McIntosh 1983: 66). When change began, it was of an incrementalist kind, which also comes as no surprise, given Germany’s semi-sovereign state (Katzenstein 1987) with its institutional obstacles to heavy-handed top-down state intervention. Precisely because incremental change is so unsurprising a policy pattern in Germany, the widespread image of German family policy, as quasi “pre-modern” and highly dysfunctional (Esping-Andersen 1996, Henninger, et al. 2008: 289-294) prevailing more or less unbroken all the way until 2002 at which point the policy field suddenly “modernizes” (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006, Leitner forthcoming 2010), is an infelicitous representation. It misses sight of not only the gradual trajectory of policy innovation. Progress here was slow, but we have come a long way since the 1970s, even before the big parental leave reform and new child policies. More importantly, it disregards the effects that these small and ineffective reforms had on the development of family ideas. To these we turn in the next subsection.

4 Incremental policy change and lineages of today’s family policy innovation

The trajectory of incremental family policy innovation is important, because the debates surrounding small reforms have gradually changed the perception of the family, of mothers’ labor force participation, paternal caring obligations, and children’s value for society. They *discursively* prepared the ground for the greater reorientation that we have seen in recent years. New child poli-

cies and reconciliation measures are at the core of that new discourse. In terms of specific policies, the debate centered on (1) child allowances and tax-benefits for children, (2) policies to facilitate maternal employment, (3) the parental leave and benefit scheme, and (4) large-scale expansion of public childcare, including tax-subsidies for the cost of childcare. The following passages demonstrate how these policy ideas attained familiarity, maturity, and political resonance over the course the gradual policy development they experienced prior to the recent changes.

4.1 The child allowance

The child allowance, as stipulated in 1954, reflected social catholic ideas, so it was a benefit supplementing the “family wage” of male breadwinners with more than two (legitimate!) children. The argument for the supplement was based on the idea of an “absolute” family wage – sufficient to cover the needs of a typical family with two children, hence the rule that only families with more than two children were entitled to the benefit. Being perceived as part of the wage and only indirectly a public subsidy to families, the child allowance was employer-financed and administrated by the Federal Ministry of Labor. The Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, in contrast, put forward the policy idea of a “relative” family wage, sufficient for small families with only one child. It therefore called for the extension of the child allowance to include smaller families as well. This also implied that “standard wages” were no longer seen as necessarily providing sufficient incomes for “standard” families. In 1961 the federal government introduced an income-tested and tax-financed child allowance for the second child, which led to tax-financing of (still income-tested) child allowances paid for all children three years later. This policy shift fully broke with the idea of the child allowance as a family wage supplement and released employers from their previous financial obligations, which had resembled their contributions to social insurance funds. It also transformed the child allowance into a prototypical public provision, something that the occupation regime had overturned after 1945 be-

cause of its association with Nazi legacies of selective paternalism.

Child allowances were redistributive both vertically and horizontally. They aimed at compensating low-income families, who did not benefit from tax exemptions (Nelleßen-Strauch 2005: 23). The latter were re-introduced in 1946 and mostly served objectives of fiscal (horizontal) not social (vertical) justice. Their magnitude varied with amount of taxes owed. Child related costs were exempt from taxation, thus privileging the better-off, while also redistributing between childless people and families within the same social class (Kuller 2004: 332-334).¹¹ Social Democratic legislation in 1975 universalized the child allowance, abolished income-testing, and made all children equally eligible. Along with it tax exemptions were abolished, just to be re-introduced in 1983, when the federal government had turned Christian Democratic (Becker 2000: 188-190). Since then the amount of the benefit has steadily risen. It rose drastically in 1996, responding to the 1990 Constitutional Court ruling (Becker 2000: 192, Gerlach 2000), which further strengthened the idea of fiscal justice and society's duty not to tax children's socio-cultural minimum. This signifies a decisive step in the development of child allowance policy: The benefit became tightly associated with children as citizens and their entitlement to a social minimum, and it thereby lost its connection with the breadwinner's wage.

Thus, the tug of war about the objectives and the redistributive outlook of child allowances and tax exemptions (Moeller 1989: 145, Bleses 2003: 562 ff.) kept at least two themes on the agenda of political debate, thus facilitating exchanges of different ideas that policymakers in later reform initiatives could draw on. First, cash transfers for children were the first policy context in which the notion of the family wage (Familienlohn) lost sway. Long before the idea of single-income families was challenged by real

¹¹ Kuller (2004: 334) points to public views that matter-of-factly interpreted the child-related tax exemptions in terms of mere fiscal justice and a matter of desert. This stood in stark contrast with the perception of the tax-financed child allowance as a payment to larger families.

world developments and competing family models, the designers of child allowances saw the necessity of public support for all families. Secondly, the coordinates of policy positions about redistribution among income strata were staked out in the quarrels over the design of cash and tax subsidies. The notion of “solidarity within one social class”, that is, compensation of the cost of children without the intention of redistributing from rich to poor began as a Christian Democratic idea. Social Democrats contested it for a long time, but have taken it up with striking ease when designing the new income-replacing parental benefit. A third question was put on the table in these long-standing controversies, namely the question whether the child’s best interests and well-being can be fully met by providing cash transfers only, even if those transfers are being continuously extended.

4.2 Perceptions of maternal employment

During the 1950s and early 1960s mothers’ employment was conceived of as a necessity for poorer families, or “broken families”, which should vanish over time with growing wealth (Hagemann 2006: 237 f.). However, when part-time employment opportunities proliferated in the 1960s, part-time work was explicitly endorsed. A sequential model of mothers’ part-time labor market participation (after a “baby-pause” of three to six years) became the guiding idea of policies explicitly aimed at mothers’ reintegration into formal employment (Ostner 2006). Such policies were part of the toolkit of active labor market policies practically since its inception in the 1969 labor promotion act (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006: 322). One should therefore more aptly refer to a “modified male breadwinner model” when describing the pre-2007 German reality. The 1970s saw increasing rates of long-term unemployment and growing divorce rates. Against this backdrop feminists argued that married women’s reliance on derived social insurance benefits would lead to old-age poverty. They proposed the individualization of both tax rules and social insurance entitlements (Schwarzer et al. 1987). Perceptions of the relationship between female labor force participation and the birthrate changed very slowly, though, and among policy elites

and the general public the notion of mothers' employment as stifling fertility remained dominant long after international comparisons have revealed the reverse (Hardmeier and von Wahl 2006: 317). Feminist sociologists (Beck-Gernsheim 1982) and economists (Ott and Rolf 1987) were the first to link the two issues. They pointed to lost employment opportunities and correspondingly foregone income that raising children at home may imply.

Debates about working mothers and mothers' work, therefore, were an ongoing theme in the family policy discourse. They informed the design of policy alternatives, but they also were informed by political contest over specific reform measures. They helped establish that mothers' unpaid care-work should not be taken for granted. At the same time they gradually constructed an image of working parents as guiding concepts, on which discussions about parental leave could later draw. Family policy ideas in this context were mostly framed in terms of gender equality, and in many ways focused on the condition of women and that of children, independently of their families' condition. They rejected the familiarist notion of the family as an institution or closely knit association and bit by bit replaced it with that of the family as a group consisting of individual members having individual and often diverging interests (Mätzke and Ostner forthcoming 2010a). This in turn led to new notions of couples' relationships and family lives, now based on the norm of partnership. Public ideas of democracy were to enter marital and familial privacy (Münch and Hornstein 2005: 522) from the late 1970s onwards. On the conservative side this was also as a reaction to female voters' defection from the CDU/CSU. Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic government failed to put these ideas into practice, though, and continued to advise mothers to exit from paid work during the first years after the birth of their children.

4.3 Policy lineages of parental leave

The first incarnation of parental leave was a maternal leave scheme, targeted at working mothers, providing them with dismissal protection and a flat-rate benefit if they decided to stay at

home for four months after the end of their eight weeks of medically-informed maternity leave. This was a Social Democratic enactment of the year 1979. Conceptually it was so closely related to the old maternity leave for mothers in the workforce that it was not a question that this was an ‘in-work benefit’, with an extremely tight employment nexus. In 1986 a Christian Democratic federal government extended the leave to include non-working mothers as well (formally also fathers¹²). This broadened the group of beneficiaries and rendered the benefit universal. At the same time it turned maternal leave into a child-raising benefit, now divorced from the classic target population of working mothers and the original purpose of an ‘in-work’ benefit. Between 1986 and 2001, as maternal leave turned into parental leave and grew in benefit generosity and duration, the connection with the labor market (and the labor market income) further loosened, and the benefit turned into a cash transfer for childcare itself, albeit subject to income testing.

Upon closer inspection, though, it turns out that the 1986 parental leave scheme never fully severed its connection with paid work (Kuller 2004: 342): It still guaranteed the right to return to employment in the former firm within a fixed period. The idea behind the new policy was given by a Constitutional Court ruling that had stipulated equal value of unpaid housework and paid wage work and demanded compensations of (mostly women’s) unpaid domestic work and care, anticipating the notion of the opportunity costs of discontinuous employment. Unpaid work and the opportunity cost of raising children were higher for more highly educated mothers. Sooner or later this rendered the cost of exiting formal employment prohibitive, both materially and immaterially. We can detect here the waning of ideas at the core of the old policy model of the stay-at-home mother. In fact, a first significant transformation of the 1986 leave was launched in 2001, when a Social Democratic reform facilitated various combinations of longer part-time work and receipt of the leave benefit. One option in the parental leave scheme decisively rewarded a short exit from employment and longer part-time combined

¹² As a result of the 1984 ruling of the European Court of Justice.

with some hours of unpaid caring. The 2007 reform of parental leave continued on this policy trajectory toward an increasingly tight employment-nexus. As we have seen, though, this had been strong at the inception parental leave policy, and explicit employment and income related, non-redistributive parental benefits have a long legacy. They ultimately go back to the beginnings of maternity leave benefits, from which they are originally derived.

Conceiving of the parental benefit as an act of recognition and redistribution, rewarding the care-work of parents without close connections to the world of formal employment, one might therefore argue, was a 20 years' episode between 1986 and 2006. It resonated well with other policies that acknowledged childcare, mainly in the field of pension policy, where credits for childrearing were being gradually extended over exactly the same time span. But as a "homemaker's wage", a truly "maternalist" benefit, in which mothers are entitled to state support based on their status as mothers (Kornbluh 1996: 174), it was never a very strongly-entrenched norm of German family policy. The "instrumentalist tinge" of the new family policies, and their rather narrow focus on reconciliation, therefore, have long lineages in the history of German family supports. Michael Opielka (2008) sees the 2007 parental leave fully in the tradition of paternalist state intervention in family matters, and simply replicating in the family policy field the strong orientation toward formal employment that generally characterizes the social insurance-based German welfare state; he also sees evidence for this in the fact that the parental leave subsidy is modeled in the specifics of its policy design on the unemployment insurance benefit (Opielka 2008: 33).

4.4 The discursive residues of childcare policies

German childcare policy has a long-standing tradition originating in broadly acclaimed pedagogical ideas of the 19th century (Fröbel Kindergarten). It was designed to offer children older than three and prior to entering school an environment that enhanced their proper maturation (Reifung). Service was child-centered, part-time and perceived as a supplement to family care

and family education, not as a substitute. Full-time institutional childcare has been extremely slow to shed its association with children at risk (Hagemann 2006: 230, 242). A whole range of factors contributed to the (slow) conversion of childcare into an “educational” issue and a potentially full-time service for working parents and their children.

New ideas on childcare started to develop as early as in the 1950s, when policy experts discussed the question whether the Kindergarten should cater to new social risks and contribute to preparing children for school. Originally only resulting in a few scattered pilot projects (Reform- and Schulkindergarten), education objectives gained momentum under the impression of the Sputnikschock of late 1950s and early 1960s. During these years German policy elites feared to lose out on technological progress global economic competition. The Soviet Union and socialist East Germany became paragons of early childhood education and its feasibility. In 1959 the GDR integrated childcare into the field of educational policy (Kuller 2004: 294). West Germany also looked to the USA and imported manuals on “How to teach your baby how to read” and thus familiarized the public with new theories of early learning. Learning gradually stopped to be solely a matter of proper maturation or of individual and hereditary talent. It could be “engineered” in ways that fostered the cognitive development of children from less socially privileged strata. Policy ideas on and programs for “compensatory education” (kompensatorische Erziehung) thrived in Germany during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they were precursors of recent public efforts to boost early childhood education.

This changed the ideas underlying childcare policy paradigmatically. Childcare came to be perceived as a unique and separate learning arena fundamentally differing from the child’s family context, thus, it was no longer seen as a supplement to the family (Kuller 2004: 296). Left-wing legal experts in the field eagerly advocated the individualization of children’s and young people’s rights vis-à-vis the state, thus propagating their emancipation from parental authority (Jordan 2005: 61-64, Münch and Hornstein 2005: 547, Münch 2007: 688-691). Experts increasingly expressed their doubts about all parents’ abilities to raise and

educate their children properly, and forcefully argued for a larger influence of public institutions on children's upbringing and education (Münch 2007: 686). As a result, a plan for public daycare for all children was drafted in 1971, but the Social Democratic-Liberal coalition ran out of steam and never implemented it. A major reason for this loss of policy momentum was that at the time the ideas still heavily conflicted with constitutional norms of parental rights and authority. Politicians of all political parties among other things feared the financial burden of universal childcare during the economically turbulent 1970s.

From early on, activists of the students' and feminist movements had distanced themselves from existing kindergartens and stressed ideas of political autonomy. They criticized the mushrooming of public "reform kindergartens" as instrumental to immediate socio-economic needs and as correspondingly repressive. Their attitude towards non-family childcare was essentially anti-etatist, thus fostering the longer-term diversification of publicly subsidized childcare including the administratively autonomous *Kinderladen* (Kuller 2004: 296). Ironically, the anti-etatism of the "undogmatic Left" and the emerging Green Party supported notions of subsidiarity, albeit with a new twist (*Neue Subsidiarität*), based on ideas of civil virtues and mutual support beyond the state, the market and the family.

Nowadays full-time childcare is explicitly on the political agenda of all parties. It directly aims at catering to the needs of full-time employed parents and also plans to transform the existing childcare field into a professional educational service for "pre-schoolers". Full-time early childhood education is advertised again in the familiar terms of "compensatory education", especially targeting migrant and disadvantaged children, who are seen as being detached from and wanting education ("bildungsfern", "bildungsarm"). The traditionally lukewarm reception of full-time public childcare might account for the fact that the reality of childcare is still characterized by undersupply, and this in turn has pushed issues of the quality of services into the background. There is continuity in the contested nature of full-time public childcare and public childcare for infants.

This section has looked at the policy history of core issues in the current family policy debate by asking what kind of policy ideas and supportive justifications had surfaced during the development of these policies prior to 2007. It has sought to show old ideas' part in preparing the ground for recent reforms and demonstrated the part of decade-long controversies about family policy in preparing the ground for the recent more significant reforms.

Drawing on John Kingdon's (1995 [1984]) seminal analysis, we have identified three conditions of successful policy innovation. These can be seen as three stages in the political influence of policy ideas ("policy alternatives"), and as explaining four subfields of German family policy development: The child allowance, policies to facilitate maternal employment, parental leave and childcare. As Kingdon suggests, decision makers and their advisers regularly draw upon familiar policy ideas. Familiarity with an idea increases when the policy idea matures, often by being successfully implemented and evaluated in one country or another. Maturity of policy ideas can be significantly furthered via policy diffusion and political learning among policy advisers and policy makers. One might think of the role of epistemic communities, e.g. of scholars close to the feminist movement, who politicized the issue of women's poverty risks or findings on maternal employment and family building. Often members of these communities formed multi-level advocacy coalitions when advising the European Commission on issues of gender, and more recently, reconciliation policies.¹³ In a similar vein the OECD has selectively co-opted scholars from its member states to entice political learning in fields of employment related family policy. The EU's Open Method of Coordination (OMC), although an instrument of "soft legislation", significantly prepared the ground for enacting new (older) family policy ideas. Such phenomena of diffusion mark a third stage for policy ideas in the

¹³ See, for instance, Zippel (2006). On the role of the OECD as an international think tank and its influence on policy diffusion see Mahon (2006).

policy process: a situation of an overall political resonance and “climate of receptivity” for familiar and mature policy alternatives. Table 1 summarizes our findings about the development and influence of policy ideas in the four subfields of German family policy.

Table 1: The slow evolution and impact of policy ideas

Attributes of Policy Ideas	Policies			
	Child Allowances	Maternal Employment	Parental Leave	Childcare
Familiarity	Beginning in the 1970s: horizontal & vertical redistribution, universalism; shift towards children’s best interests	Beginning in the 1970s: equal rights movements; marriage and family law reforms; modification of breadwinner model, maternal part-time employment as new norm and compromise	Working mothers’ leave benefit (1979) [East German reform as implicit policy alternative]; job guarantee for leave-takers	Beginning in the late 1950s: Childcare also as ‘pre-school’ care [East Germany as implicit, US as explicit policy alternative], pre-school experiments
Maturity	1990s: Constitutional Court decision on child’s right to a social minimum, expansion of the child allowance	Beginning in the mid-1980s: female employment as pension policy and population policy	1986-2001: limited universalism; 2001 reform: enhancement of continuous employment via flexibilization of leave rules	1979: Children’s best interest principle; 1990 reform of Aid for Children and Youth legislation (KJHG), children’s right and state’s authority to promote public child-care; state licensed child-care curricula

(Continued)

Table 1: The slow evolution and impact of policy ideas (Continued)

Attributes of Policy Ideas	Policies			
	Child Allowances	Maternal Employment	Parental Leave	Childcare
Political Resonance	Cross-partisan consensus in EU and FRG on child poverty reduction and child-centered social investment: policy options, e.g. “educational investment benefit-voucher” combined with parenting schemes, Basic Income for “citizen-children” (<i>Kindergrundsicherung</i>)	Diffusion of policy ideas and coalition building; 1997 EU Framework Directive on Part-time work, 2001 implemented in FRG; Amsterdam Treaty 1997, Lisbon 2000 and related OMC Employment: targets for maternal employment, 2007, dual-worker, dual carer model	Diffusion of policy ideas and coalition building; 1996 EU Framework Directive on Parental Leave; 2001 flexibilization due to EU directive; expert and cross-partisan consensus support for shorter leaves; 2007 German Parental leave reform [Sweden as explicit, GDR as implicit policy template]	Diffusion of policy ideas and coalition building; 1992 EU Recommendation on Childcare; OECD Babies and Bosses Series; 2003 Barcelona targets on childcare expansion promoted by cross-partisan consensus; 2004 TAG, childcare as employment and educational policy

We have reported a series of smaller and sometimes larger changes. By the 1970s at the latest, child allowance had fully shed its “family wage (supplement)” logic. Perceptions of mothers’ employment changed gradually. Politicians and citizens very slowly, yet decisively in the end adopted the idea that raising children constitutes a risk similar to those of standard workers, hence, justified to receive financial compensation. Policy advisers and decision makers agreed both nationally and internationally that parental leaves should be short and provide financial

compensation in order to reduce the opportunity costs of having and caring for children. From the 1960s onwards children were increasingly perceived in their potential as human resources and future workers – albeit at first by non-hegemonic voices. Proposals to convert childcare into early childhood education de facto largely failed and have remained latent, but resurfaced in recent family policy debates (Table 1).

We demonstrated that policy change, even if it is slow and ineffective, provides focal points around which political discussion can crystallize. That way policy change induces political discourse about not only the policy alternatives themselves, but also the underlying models of the proper family and the proper role of public policy intervention. The process observed here echoes scholarly debates on the role of ideas: Some analysts claim that temporal precedence of ideas must exist if ideas are to be shown as causal factors in explaining policies (Béland 2005: 14). A closer look reveals that the relationship between ideas and policies over time is more muddled, in fact, it is reciprocal (Hall 1989: 369, Cox 2000: 5, Pfau-Effinger 2005: 11): Ideas may help make reform possible – thinkable in the first place. However, policy change may also push ideas on the agenda and keep them there. Sediments of quarrels over small issues form resources and building blocks for later more profound reform initiatives.

5 Conclusion

The policy ideas enacted in the recent German family policy reforms have been around for some time. They had been discussed, some of them even implemented, and policymakers were familiar with them. This familiarity has evolved over time; policy ideas matured and became both viable and politically resonant. Smaller policy adjustments provided occasions for discussing new ideas and exploring the details of policy design. This prepared the ground for the more profound changes of recent years. Our analyses suggested that the relationship between policymaking and policy ideas is better described as *reciprocal* influence than as a causal effect of ideas on policymaking. This mutual stimulus un-

folds over time, and over time it has prepared the ground of large-scale policy innovation. *Duration* has turned out to be conceptually significant.

The working mother has constantly been a figure in family policy discourses; perceptions of her have gradually become more benign. This is a far cry from the full-fledged endorsement of the adult worker model or children's rights to good quality daycare, but it certainly points in the direction. Likewise, even though the 1986 parental benefit turned out a rather poor compensation for families' unpaid childcare services, it has put childcare on the table, as being in need of recognition and something that cannot be taken for granted, because it has involved steadily increasing opportunity costs for women, families and the wider society. This has served to untie the "natural connection" that had formerly been construed between women's concerns and mothers' concerns. The two are not necessarily congruent. Acknowledging this is a legacy of three decades of policy discourse, behind which it is hard to fall back. Under the long-term influence of family policy discourse, policy elites have increasingly recognized independent social rights within families; the character of family policy has been slowly changing into that of a family members-policy latest since the 1970s. While in the German context these are all fairly new ways of thinking about the family, the previous section demonstrated that they are new only in their concentrated, exemplary, model-like form.

Political discourse about the family and family policies, therefore, partly engendered and partly also reflected the policy changes. In these changes shifts to the adult worker model and to the revaluation of children as assets command most of the attention. While many see this as modernization, and associated with emancipatory potential, some of the other trends often go unnoticed: We see a decline of maternalist values, and while this has a gender egalitarian promise and therefore receives not much criticism, to the extent that maternalism entailed an obligation of the state vis-à-vis mothers, the retreat from maternalism is just that: retreat – state withdrawal from public responsibilities. At the same time, though, public responsibilities for the well-being and good education of children are on the increase. And parents' re-

sponsibilities to abide to norms of proper education of their children, provided working hours leave time to do so, are also on the increase. This responsibility, however, is defined in a rather narrow way. It pertains to education and economic independence first and foremost, but this is not necessarily the same as material well-being or even redistribution.

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