

Childcare in Scandinavia: Parental Responsibility and Social Right

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I examine the reconceptualisation and redesign of care of very young children that took place in Scandinavia from the 1970s into the early 2000s.¹ During this period, increasingly, the childcare policy discourse shifted to include not just parental responsibilities, but also the care-related social rights of parents and children. A series of childcare policy reforms has meant a renegotiation and redrawing of the boundaries between the public and the private – between the state and parents. Childcare has been redefined to include a basis on which parents are entitled to make claims on the welfare state.²

As background for the shift in childcare political thinking, I first outline processes significant in generating policy reform, namely the influence of the ‘social democratic tradition’ of the welfare state and its development as a ‘caring state’³ the undermining of the traditional male breadwinner family driven by the rapidly rising labour market participation of women, and the shift in family and gender ideology led by calls for women’s liberation and gender equality. I analyse the 1970s’ new deal in work/family/

¹ The term *Scandinavia* generally refers to Denmark, Norway and Sweden while the terms *Norden/the Nordic countries* include these countries and, in addition, Finland and Iceland. In this paper, however the terms are used interchangeably and refer to Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

² I discuss different aspects of this process e. g. in Arnlaug Leira, *Parenthood Change and Political Reform in Scandinavia, 1970s–2007*, in: Anne Lise Ellingsæter and Arnlaug Leira eds., *Politicising Parenthood. Gender Relations in Welfare States*, Bristol 2006, 27–51; *Working Parents and the Welfare State*, Cambridge 2002; *Childcare as Social Right: Cash for Childcare and Daddy Leave*, in: *Social Politics* (1998), 362–378; *Welfare States and Working Mothers*, Cambridge 1992.

³ Cf. Dag Østerberg, *Individets rettigheter og den sosiale organisasjon [Individual Rights and Social Organisation]*, in: Anne Marie Berg ed., *Nordisk arbeidslivspolitik – hinder eller konkurransefortrinn? [Nordic Work Policies – Hindrance or Competitive Advantage?]*, Oslo 1990, 119–140; Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2.

childcare policies with the legislation of acts of parliament governing day care for pre-school children; the institution of parental leave, including the father's right to care for his newborn child; and legislation of gender equality. I then turn to the second major wave of policy reforms of the 1990s, focusing in particular on the cash grant for childcare advocated as 'parental choice' and the introduction of the 'daddy quota' – a 'no choice' reform – earmarking care leave entitlements for fathers. In Scandinavia, the transformation of parental responsibility for childcare has taken place in parallel with the promotion of gender equality in policy reforms updating the traditional gender contract. In conclusion, I pose the questions: To what extent does responsibility for childcare entail rights for mothers and fathers to make claims on the welfare state? To what extent has the gender compromise of the traditional male breadwinner/female carer family been replaced by new gender arrangements? To what extent has the reformulation of childcare policies succeeded in transcending the gender division of earning and caring? – Drawing upon studies from Denmark, Finland and Sweden, the core material for my presentation is based on the Norwegian experience.

2. Setting childcare policy reform: a Scandinavian backdrop

In Western Europe, the relationship between family and welfare state has taken different forms: family obligations are defined differently from one country to the next, as are the responsibilities of the state in providing for the very young and the very old.⁴ Policy approaches are variously demonstrated in typologies of welfare states as 'caring regimes', with the 'social care regime' of the Nordic welfare states and the 'family care regime' of Southern Europe being the most distinct, and indicating the respective importance of the state and the family as care provider pillars.⁵ Welfare state responsibility for the provision of social care services is the key to understanding the Scandinavian welfare model, argue Scandinavian researchers.⁶ While care regime studies focus on how the needs of care-dependent persons are met, analyses of the rights of citizens as carers illustrate the variation in welfare states' responses to paid and unpaid carers. Since the 1970s and

4 For more detailed overviews cf. country notes in Jane Millar and Andrea Warman eds., *Family Obligations in Europe*, York 1995; Francesca Bettio and Sascha Prechal, *Care in Europe. Joint Report of the "Gender and Employment" and the "Gender and Law" Groups of Experts*, European Commission 1998; Jane Lewis and Mary Daly eds., *Gender and Welfare State Restructuring*, London 1998.

5 Cf. Anneli Anttonen and Jorma Sipilä, *European Social Care Services: Is it Possible to Identify Models?*, in: *Journal of European Social Policy*, 5, 2 (1996), 131–149; Anneli Anttonen, Stina Johansson and Arnlaug Leira, *Childcare and the Gendering of Citizenship*, in: Ruth Lister et al., *Gender and Citizenship in Western Europe. New Challenges for Citizenship Research in a Cross-national Context*, Bristol 2007, 109–136.

6 Cf. Jorma Sipilä ed., *Social Care Services: The Key to the Scandinavian Model*, Aldershot 1997.

1980s, feminist research in Scandinavia depicts a model of the citizen as both earner and carer.⁷

In the Nordic countries of the 1960s and 1970s, wide-ranging processes of societal change influenced reconceptualisation of the work/family/childcare issue as a public policy field. There was ongoing labour market restructuring and tertiarisation of the economy; centralisation and urbanisation; democratisation of access to higher education, political representation and paid employment. Added to this were demographic and family change and, especially, the rapidly changing status of women in the family, the labour market and society at large.

I do not examine the political and social history of childcare policies in any detail here, and only touch upon some of the important cultural and ideological changes. However, I draw attention to some of the processes that contributed to broadening the scope of the welfare state in the 1970s and to preparing the ground for new policy approaches to traditional family responsibilities. There is the mutual influence of:

- the legacy of ‘social democracy’ in the egalitarian, redistributive, universally oriented welfare state, motivating and legitimating expansion and redesign of the welfare state as a caring state,
- the ‘motherhood revolution’, as witnessed in the mass mobilisation of mothers for labour market participation,
- cultural-normative reinterpretations of traditional sex roles and family models, advocated in particular by the new wave of feminism. Calls for gender equality, for updating the traditional gender contract, for rethinking traditional norms and relations between genders and generations added to ongoing democratisation processes offering a new framing for politicising arrangements between the welfare state, the labour market, parents and children.

2.1 The Scandinavian welfare state model: The ‘social democratic’ legacy

Dating from the Bismarckian reforms of the 19th century, the history of the welfare state is commonly analysed as a series of compromises between capital and labour and between welfare and control. Feminist research emphasises that welfare states also imply compromises between women and men mediated through their different relationships with the welfare state, family and labour market.⁸ During the latter half of the 20th cen-

7 Cf. Rita Liljeström, Sweden, in: Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn eds., *Family Policy. Government and Families in Fourteen Countries*, New York 1978, 19–48; Helga M. Hernes, *Welfare States and Woman Power*, Oslo 1987; Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2; also Nancy Fraser, *After the Family Wage: Gender Equity and the Welfare State*, in: *Political Theory*, 44, 4 (1994), 591–618.

8 Leira, *Childcare*, see note 2, 364.

ture, the gender compromise institutionalised in the gender-differentiated nuclear family gave way to new family forms in Scandinavia, and, in the majority, families with dual earners.

The welfare state model referred to as the Scandinavian (or sometimes the Nordic) 'social democratic' model is usually classified as institutional in that it provides a wide range of services and benefits commonly universalistic in orientation and perceived as citizens' entitlements. The characteristics are neatly summarized by Gøsta Esping-Andersen in his celebrated work "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism": "This model crowds out the market, and consequently constructs an essentially universal solidarity in favour of the welfare state. All benefit; all are dependent; and all will presumably feel obliged to pay".⁹ Scandinavian welfare state policies are aimed at providing a safety net for the poorest, but also at creating a more egalitarian society, and it is assumed that the welfare state contributes to a redistribution of economic resources, power and influence between social classes and regions.

Following legislation and implementation of national social insurance schemes in the 1950s and 1960s, the Scandinavian welfare states entered a second stage. Public funding and provisioning of a wide repertoire of services was developed in education, health care and welfare, and, notably, in social care for the very young and the very old.¹⁰ Eldercare was reformed. In addition to the universal old age pension, the state and local authorities were to take more responsibility for the frail elderly, for example, by subsidising and/or by providing home help and care services. Formally, the personal care needs of the frail elderly population no longer had to be met by the family. This was to be the domain of local and central government authorities. The 1970s also saw a further expansion of the 'caring state' with the introduction of a new set of policies for the early childhood years.

It has to be remembered that in the Scandinavian social democratic political tradition the state is not regarded as inherently oppressive. Sometimes the terms 'state' and 'society' are used interchangeably – clear distinctions are not always made. A Swedish social democrat and later Prime Minister coined the term 'folkhemmet', literally 'the people's home', for the welfare state society envisioned in the 1920s and 1930s. The

9 Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge 1990, 28; cf. idem and Walter Korpi, *From Poor Relief to Institutional Welfare States: The Development of Scandinavian Welfare States*, in: Robert Erikson et al. eds., *The Scandinavian Model: Welfare States and Welfare Research*, New York 1987; Stephen Graubard ed., *The Passion for Equality*, Oslo 1987; Hernes, *Welfare States*, see note 7; Birte Siim, *The Scandinavian Welfare States: Towards Sexual Equality or a New Kind of Male Domination*, in: *Acta Sociologica*, 30, 3/4 (1987), 255–270.

10 For more detailed analysis of the second stage of welfare state expansion in Scandinavia cf. Siim, *States*, see note 9; Jorma Sipilä, *Introduction*, in: idem, *Care*, see note 6, 8; Olli Kangas and Joakim Palme, *Coming Late – Catching Up. The Formation of a Nordic "Model"*, in: idem eds., *Social Policy and Economic Development in the Nordic Countries*, London 2005, 17–55; Anneli Anttonen, Alan Baldock and Jorma Sipilä, *The Young, the Old and the State*, Cheltenham 2004.

folkhem metaphor identifies the state as ‘people-friendly’, made by the people for the people, especially for the ‘small’ people of the working classes. Thinking about the state in such terms may be unique to Scandinavia. Obviously, it does not reflect any scepticism against the state, but rather trust – or a certain naiveté – perhaps also unique.¹¹ I will not dwell on the political tradition from which the idea of a people’s home emerged. Arguably, however, it illuminates aspects of a political culture in which the notion of state involvement or investment in childcare arrangements does not appear as all that strange.

2.2 The motherhood revolution

During the second half of the 20th century, ‘full employment’ in Scandinavia came to include the commodification of women’s labour. Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein in the now classic “Women’s Two Roles”¹² pointed to a remarkable transformation taking place in the most highly industrialised countries of the world – Sweden among them – the last reserves of unpaid labour were being mobilised for paid work. Married women were leaving full-time housewifery, unpaid domestic work, care and servicing, adding paid employment to their regular schedule. However, in the 1950s, nowhere was it evident – or taken for granted – that, following the entry of mothers into the labour market, the care of pre-school children was to become a responsibility of the welfare state. In the following decades, increasingly, women gained more reproduction control. Oral contraception and abortion on demand made it easier for women to control fertility and childbearing (Figure 1). Rising levels of education and smaller families smoothed the way for employment outside the home. New models of motherhood were registered first in Finland, Sweden and Denmark, then in Norway, a shift away from the traditional gender-differentiated family model towards employed mother families. As mothers entered modernity, expectations were rising about every adult person being able to provide economically for themselves and their children via participation in the labour market. Paid work enabled the economic provider aspects of motherhood and at the same time furthered the contribution of mothers to the common good through their payment of taxes.¹³

The rising demand for mothers’ labour had generated an increasing demand for extra-family childcare: the time had come for policy reform. Contrary to a common

11 Arnlaug Leira, *The Woman-Friendly Welfare States? The Case of Norway and Sweden*, in: Jane Lewis ed., *Gender and Social Policies in Europe*, London 1993, 49–71, 55.

12 Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women’s Two Roles*, London 1956.

13 For a more detailed presentation of the modernisation of motherhood in Scandinavia cf. Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2; cf. also Marit Rønsen and Kari Skrede, *Nordic Fertility Patterns: Compatible with Gender Equality?*, in: Ellingsæter/Leira, *Parenthood*, see note 2, 53–76.

misunderstanding, nowhere in Scandinavia did the *first* generation of mothers heading for mass employment meet with generous state-sponsoring of services or benefits for childcare. Joining the labour market in large numbers, mothers did not wait for welfare state support, or for fathers' returning home. For example in Sweden in 1965 only three per cent of all pre-schoolers attended public childcare services, whereas 36 per cent of mothers were employed. In the mid-1970s, close to half of mothers of pre-schoolers in Norway were employed, and seven per cent of children in the age group had access to publicly funded services.¹⁴ In Scandinavia, as elsewhere in Western Europe, policy reform was a delayed response to motherhood and family change. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, when the welfare state was expanding as service-intensive, defamilising and care-providing, a growing public sector labour market offered women-typed jobs in public sector employment, in health and educational services, in social welfare and care services and in administrative work. Women became the wagedworkers of the caring state. At the same time, publicly funded childcare services came to facilitate working motherhood by relieving mothers from being the full-time carers of children.

2.3 Gender equality: Rethinking the male breadwinner/female carer family

With women heading for employment and the new feminist movement and ideology gaining ground, the changing of traditional sex roles became a hotly debated issue in the Scandinavian countries, as it did throughout the Western world. The benefits of the gender differentiated nuclear family model and ideology came under increasing scrutiny. Criticism of the unequal position of women in society was being voiced more strongly, and the inequalities women faced – in the educational system, in access to the labour market, in wage-setting, politics, public life, and in work/family arrangements – were rapidly transforming into political concerns. Mobilisation of women into political participation and representation at all levels of government helped put women's issues on the political agenda. National legislation concerning gender equality was passed in all the countries (Figure 1). Promotion of the right of women to economic activity and gender equality in the labour market were principal demands of the feminist political movement of the 1970s, and the need for public funding of childcare services and benefits was argued to that end. In addition, policy reform introduced the 'caring father' as the companion parent of the 'working mother' and formulated the right of fathers to share in the caring of very young children. Care matters were rethought as matters for

14 For Denmark cf. Anette Borchorst, *Danish Child Care Policy: Continuity Rather than Radical Change*, in: Rianne Mahon and Sonya Michel eds., *Childcare Policy at the Crossroads*, New York 2002, 267–285; for Sweden: Christina Bergqvist and Anita Nyberg, *Welfare State Restructuring and Child Care in Sweden*, in: *ibid.*, 287–307; for Norway: Arnlaug Leira, *Day-Care for Children in Denmark, Norway and Sweden*, Oslo 1987; cf. also Leira, *Welfare States*, note 2.

public policy – of great importance for the very young and the very old – and as central to gender equality. In the 1970s, the egalitarian tradition facilitated the integration of gender equality in welfare state policies and served to legitimate state intervention addressing sexual and/or gender differences.¹⁵ Outlining the woman-friendly potentialities of the Scandinavian social democracies, Helga Hernes highlighted the political importance of the egalitarian values. The expansion of the care provider responsibility of the state and local authorities was in line with the egalitarian, solidaristic and redistributive traditions of the ‘social democratic state’. The politicising of gender difference and equality aimed at promoting gender equality of both opportunity and equality of outcome.¹⁶

In summary, ongoing motherhood and family change are parts of the backdrop for the politicising of childcare ‘the Scandinavian way’. Another is the traditional ideological commitment to egalitarianism and universalism manifested in redistributive policies aimed at reducing inequalities between classes and regions, to which a political commitment to gender equality was added in the 1970s.

3. Welfare state childcare: the formative years

The 1970s marked the beginning of a new era in Scandinavian childcare policies, with welfare state recognition that the care of young children entailed both public and parental responsibility, and a moral claim on fathers as well as mothers. A set of work/family/childcare policy reforms and gender equality legislation supported new models of motherhood, fatherhood and childhood (see Figure 1). Care of pre-school children became increasingly politicized, with the state putting forward a new framework regulating the early childhood years. The policy reforms had a bearing on families and labour markets, and gender relations within the family, too. Core programmes establishing the right to *paid parental leave* were put in place, and national legislation placed responsibility for funding and/or provisioning *day care services for pre-school children*, and defining quality standards for the services, with the state and local government.

What it is that has triggered the different approaches of welfare states to childcare policy reform has been the subject of much debate among welfare state analysts.¹⁷ In

15 Natalie R. Ramsøy, *From Necessity to Choice: Social Change in Norway 1930–1980*, in: Robert Erikson, et al. eds., *Welfare*, see note 9, 75–105; Hernes, *Welfare States*, see note 7; Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2.

16 Cf. Hernes, *Welfare States*, see note 7; Elina Haavio-Mannila et al. eds., *Unfinished Democracy*, Oslo 1987; Christina Bergqvist et al. eds., *Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries*, Oslo 1999; Ellingsæter/Leira, *Parenthood*, see note 2, various chapters.

17 For discussions of the ‘social democratic’ influence in promotion of social care services, cf. e.g. Hernes, *Welfare States*, see note 7; Walter Korpi, *Faces of Inequality: Gender, Class and Patterns of Inequalities in Different Types of Welfare States*, in: *Social Politics*, 7, 2 (2000), 127–191; Evelyn

Scandinavia, the ground for a radical new policy approach had been prepared by decades of policy deliberations concerning the collective responsibility for childcare. Calls for childcare policy reforms had been voiced since the 1930s.¹⁸ After World War II, strengthening of state and local government responsibility for childcare became a recurrent theme in political debate. One set of discourses focussed on the government responsibility for the funding of early childhood education and care, another on expanding of maternity rights. In the 1960s/1970s, government-appointed commissions in the Scandinavian countries overviewed the conditions of families with small children and prepared for reform of maternity rights and for increasing state involvement in the early childhood years.

3.1 New standards for the distribution of childcare responsibilities

Legislation introduced important redistributive principles: First, responsibility for care for young children, once defined primarily as a right and obligation of the parents, was redistributed *between* the state and the family, redefined as a joint interest and responsibility to be shared between the parents and the state. Second, in including fathers among those entitled to paid leave of absence from the job to care for infant children, parental leave legislation emphasised the opportunity for redistribution of childcare *within* the family. These reforms had differing orientations: Entitlements to paid parental leave with job security supported *refamilised* care in the early months of the newborn child's life and promoted a *degendering* of parental care responsibilities. The public funding of childcare services was to facilitate *defamilised care* and *degendering* of the breadwinner responsibilities of the parents. In combination, the two policies were to assist the dual-earner/dual-carer family. However, parental responsibilities were not signed away completely, but instead re-interpreted and attributed new dimensions.¹⁹

3.2.1 Childcare services: redistribution between parents and the state

In 1964, Denmark took the lead in instituting public support for universally oriented childcare services, leaving behind the selectively oriented legislation of earlier years. By

Huber and John Stephens, Partisan Governance, Women's Employment, and the Social Democratic Service State, in: *American Sociological Review*, 65, 3 (2000), 323–342.

18 For an early advocacy cf. Alva Myrdal Stadsbarn, [Children of the City], Stockholm 1935; Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* [Crisis in the Population Question], Stockholm 1934.

19 Cf. e. g. Leira, Day-Care, see note 14; idem, Parents, see note 2; idem, Parenthood, see note 2; cf. also Aksel Hatland and Eymese Mayhew, Parental Rights and Obligations, in: Jonathan Bradshaw and Aksel Hatland eds., *Social Policy, Employment and Family Change in Comparative Perspective*, Cheltenham 2006, 79–95.

the end of the 1970s, all four Scandinavian countries had brought in national legislation stipulating the responsibility of the state and local authorities for establishing day care services for pre-school children, in this way expanding state involvement in and regulation of what was formerly the private sphere of the family (Figure 1). With the introduction of extra-parental professional services to supplement parental upbringing in the home, the state and local authorities were to shoulder a larger share of the responsibility and costs of childcare, and to set new standards and norms for arrangement of the early childhood years.

As noted above, family change provided an important incentive for the 1970s policy reform: with rising employment among mothers, the traditional male breadwinner/female carer family was on the wane. Divorce was on the increase, and, with this, the number of lone mother families. When mothers went out to work, fathers did not return to the home in large numbers. The use of nannies, nurses or domestic help for childcare was in decline. As a 'welfare pillar', the family/household was shrinking. The shortage of extra-family childcare services was becoming a more pressing political issue, and in Norway and Sweden concern was being voiced over the quality of informal child-minding. The combination of work and family was managed in different ways. Some parents worked 'parent shifts', taking turns at home and at work; elder siblings and grandparents provided childcare. Private, often informal, arrangements for childcare were common, organised for example via kinship and friendship, social networks, workplace and neighbourhood arrangements, formal and informal job announcements. Mothers and childminders were central change agents in the great transformation of motherhood from unpaid domestic work and family care to paid employment.²⁰ Childcare services were also organised by voluntary organisations, work-places, parent co-operatives. Some childcare centres received public subsidies. Large-scale commercial markets for the production of childcare services had not been established as a solid new 'care-providing pillar'. Voluntary organisations, although historically important and still involved in the provision of childcare services, especially in Denmark and Norway, were not in a position to meet rapidly increasing demand. Following in the Scandinavian tradition, demand was increasingly directed towards the state and local authorities. Local government responsibility for children at risk had long been recognized, and, as noted above, politically, acceptance had grown for more involvement of the welfare state in care provision. Stimulating immigration as an alternative to childcare policy reform was not an important issue.

When the time for change finally arrived, policy reforms were still being contested – advocated and opposed – for a number of reasons. For example, in Norway, although

²⁰ Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2; Anita Haataja and Anita Nyberg, *Diverging Paths? The Dual-Earner/Dual-Carer Model in Finland and Sweden in the 1990s*, in: Ellingsæter/Leira, *Parenthood*, see note 2, 217–239.

public support for childcare services was by some considered advantageous for children and as a means by which to reduce social inequalities between children from different social backgrounds, objections were raised by others, inter alia, because public involvement meant further demands on the public purse. Moreover, publicly funded childcare services represented a challenge to the parental mandate in upbringing. These were regarded as facilitating working motherhood and gender equality and for that reason were both supported and opposed.²¹

3.2.2 Public childcare services: similar and different approaches in Scandinavia

The 1970s' childcare schemes of all four countries were similar in several respects, for example, in organisation and funding and in a decentralised approach with responsibility for the provision of day-care services being placed with local authorities. Making access to childcare services available for all pre-school children whose parents wanted it was a common aim. Important in the day-care philosophies of all the countries was the integration of education and care: publicly funded services thus continued the traditions of the children's asylums and crèches, and the educational programmes of the kindergartens.²² However, there were also notable differences in the 1970s and 1980s, with Denmark and Norway having a larger proportion of private ownership of childcare centres, publicly subsidised and quality controlled, whereas in Sweden public ownership was the predominant form. There were further differences with respect to the form of supply, in that Denmark and Sweden provided more full-time places and supplemented centre-based services with family day care. In Norway, part-time services made up a larger share of provisions, while family day-care services were hardly used at all.

Considering that employment of mothers was increasing in all the Scandinavian countries, the differing importance attributed to meeting the demand for childcare services was striking, with Denmark and Sweden more in favour, Norway and particularly Finland more ambivalent about the new childcare regime.²³ In Denmark and Sweden, working motherhood was from early on supported by large-scale investments in childcare. In these countries, the provision of 'good' day-care services was regarded not only as good for children, but good for the economy as well, which needed mothers' labour. Labour market policies and family policies were more closely coordinated. Denmark and Sweden were more successful in meeting the demands of new family forms, and also in approaching national aims for the provision of childcare, than was Norway,

21 For more details cf. Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2.

22 Cf. Leira, *Day-Care*, see note 14; Borchorst, *Child Care*, see note 14.

23 Cf. for Finland: Matti Mikkola, *Parental Choice*, in: Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn eds., *Child Care, Parental Leave, and the Under 3s. Policy Innovation in Europe*, New York 1991, 145–170; for Norway cf. Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2.

where until the 1990s provision lagged behind that of its Scandinavian neighbours (Table 2). Differences were evident when it came to establishing cash grants as alternatives to access to day-care services, an approach taken first in Finland, as discussed below. – Throughout Scandinavia, however, national legislation of early childhood education and care was a late response to the rising employment of mothers; family and motherhood change preceded policy reform.

3.3 Childcare: redistribution within the family

Adding to maternity rights to paid leave long in existence, in 1974, Sweden was the first to institute paid *parental* leave. Norway and Finland followed in 1978 and Denmark in 1984 (Figure 1).²⁴ Parental leave legislation was a democratisation and expansion of the rights of parents to care for a very young child. Legislation applied to both the public and the private sectors of the labour market, and laid down the entitlements of employed mothers and fathers to care for a newborn baby, with wage compensation and job security. Parental leave schemes combined individual and family entitlements: Mothers retained individual rights to leave at the birth of their child; and fathers gained individual entitlements to paternity leave, that is, time off work around confinement, the so-called ‘daddy days’. Furthermore, use of the greater part of the leave period was formulated as an entitlement of parents together, to be used on the basis of ‘parental choice’. However, the formulation and timing of leave entitlements differed between the countries.²⁵ For example, in Denmark, Finland and Sweden paternity leave was provided with wage compensation. In Norway statutory provision was for unpaid leave, with wage compensation left to negotiations between labour market parties.

The ‘daddy days’, that is, the individual right of fathers to a shorter period of leave at the birth of their child, rapidly gained in popularity and was widely used among Swedish and Norwegian fathers. However, making the use of leave rights the subject of ‘parental choice’ did not result in extensive sharing of caring rights, perhaps because the total leave period was not very long. In any case, it did not prove efficient in transforming fathers into carers. In the 1980s, fewer than five per cent of Danish, Finnish and Norwegian fathers made use of the leave. Sweden was an exception: one in four fathers took the leave.²⁶

24 Anette Borchorst, *The Public-Private Split Rearticulated: Abolishment of the Danish Daddy Leave*, in: Ellingsæter/Leira, *Parenthood*, see note 2, 101–120; Johanna Lammi-Taskula, *Nordic Men on Parental Leave: Can the Welfare State Change Gender Relations?*, in: *ibid.*, 79–99; Anne-Karine Sørskår, *Fra mors plikt til fars rettighet [From Mothers’ Obligations to Fathers’ Rights]*, in: Stein Kuhnle and Per Selle eds., *Frivillig organisert velferd [Third Sector Welfare Provision]*, Bergen 1990, 186–212.

25 For example in Sweden parental leave replaced the former maternity leave in 1974 and ‘daddy days’ were introduced in 1980. Finland introduced paternity leave in 1978 and parental leave in 1980.

26 OECD, *Long-term Leave for Parents in OECD Countries*, chapter 5, in: *Employment Outlook*, Paris 1995.

3.4 Summarising: 1970s a watershed in welfare state-family arrangements

Welfare state childcare policy reforms of the 1970s marked a watershed in work/family/childcare policies in Scandinavia with the introduction of a more active commitment of the state to involvement in the early childhood years. The aims of childcare policies were redefined; public policy responsibility for and regulation of the early childhood years increased. At the same time, emphasis was put on the childcare-related rights of parents and children.²⁷ The social rights aspects were most clearly formulated in parental leave legislation in which caring rights were democratized: working fathers, as well as working mothers, were legally entitled to paid leave of absence to care for their infant child. State-sponsoring of fathercare was a Scandinavian innovation. As for childcare services, new in the 1970s was the universalistic approach to provision of services replacing the formerly selective orientation. Aiming for universal provision, the welfare states signalled willingness to meet the demands of both new family forms and of national economies that needed mothers' labour. In the day-care legislation of the 1970s, access to state-sponsored childcare services had not yet been formulated as an individual, substantial right for parents and/or children. In principle, and in the longer term, universal access was the aim, in the sense that high-quality, publicly funded services were to be made available to all parents who wanted it. However, in the short run, local authorities – charged with responsibility for provision – were under no formal obligation to make supply meet demand. In fact, access was a rationed 'public good' not an entitlement to be claimed there and then. For years to come, publicly funded childcare services remained supply-conditioned, not meeting demand, and certainly incomplete as a social right (Table 2).²⁸

The increasing involvement of the welfare state in the family's private arrangements of childcare – especially state support of childcare services – had a mixed response. In Norway and Finland, in particular, support for mothercare in the early childhood years was still strong in parts of the population. However, from the 1970s onwards, among parents, welfare state regulation of the early childhood years came to be widely accepted in Scandinavia, indeed expected, and arguably more so than in countries of a more liberal or conservative disposition. During the 1980s, family change continued. In addition to the rise in mothers' employment, a growing popularity of cohabitation without marriage, extra-nuptial births, and an increase in parental split-ups and divorce added to new family forms. Family norms, values and practices repeatedly came up for political debate.

27 In no way underestimating the importance of care-related rights for children, this presentation deals with the establishing of care-related social rights of mothers and fathers.

28 For more details cf. Leira, *Welfare States*, see note 2; Bergqvist/Nyberg, *Welfare*, see note 14; Borchorst, *Child Care*, see note 14.

4. The 1990s: a new wave of work/family/childcare policy reforms

Family policy discourse of the 1990s was set in the context of economic recession, and rising unemployment, when the Scandinavian welfare states experienced serious economic problems – their decline and fall were forecast.²⁹ Sweden and especially Finland were hardest hit, with unemployment rates rising to levels unprecedented in the post world war II period, reaching 17 per cent in Finland in 1994 and in Sweden close to ten per cent in 1996. In Denmark and Norway problems were less dramatic, but in all the countries, the necessity of welfare state restructuring was strongly argued. The revival of neo-liberal ideology added to calls for downscaling of the welfare state and deregulation of labour markets. By the end of the decade, Sweden had largely recovered, while unemployment remained high in Finland. During the economic crisis, however, still there was political support for women's employment, for the state contributing to childcare, and for gender equality.

In the mid-1990s, the Nordic Council of Ministers stated that gender equality was a central element of the Nordic welfare state model and “integral to Scandinavian citizenship”. Indeed, the Council further argued that new approaches were needed: If gender equality was to be realised, “the distribution of the workload between women and men in the family and in society must be changed”.³⁰ Labour market participation rates of mothers of pre-schoolers remained high, in 2000 ranging from 59 per cent in Finland to 78 per cent in Sweden.³¹ Fertility rates were relatively high in European comparison. State support for childcare was not all rolled back. Some benefits were downscaled, some policies re-designed. At the same time, reforms were introduced, such as the daddy quota and cash grants for childcare. However, after a short period, Sweden abolished the cash grant and Denmark the quota, to be discussed further below. Doing away with these benefits, arguably, was not a response to economic hardship, but rather the outcome of political shifts, with a new government putting forward new policies. By the early 2000s, in all the countries, the politicising of childcare had been taken further with the public expense for childcare expanded, as was the volume of childcare-related rights, regulations and provisions (Tables 1 and 2). Childcare policy reform was not stopped, but did remain controversial.

4.1 Childcare policies of the 1990s

During the 1990s, state support for the dual-earner/dual-carer family model was further developed: paid parental leave was prolonged to about one year, and publicly spon-

29 Cf. e. g. Mikko Kautto et al., *Nordic Social Policy, Changing Welfare States*, London 1999; Kangas/Palme, *Coming*, see note 10, 17–55.

30 Nordic Council of Ministers, *Gender Equality – the Nordic Model*, Copenhagen 1995, 6, 10.

31 OECD, *Employment Outlook*, Paris 2001.

sored childcare services were nearing the aim of becoming universally available. Individual rights of fathers were extended with the introduction of a new measure, the 'daddy quota', which meant part of the leave being reserved for fathers. Public funding of childcare services was kept up and increased. The 1990s also saw government change and shifts in policy orientation towards arrangements for childcare. Political support for the traditional gender-differentiated nuclear family model was strengthened in Finland, Norway and Sweden via the legislation of cash grants for parental childcare as an alternative to the use of state-sponsored childcare services. Traditionally, social democracy and parties to the left have supported the dual-earners/dual-carers, while support for the male breadwinner/female carer family has been advocated by parties to the centre/right.

Two policy discourses attracted increasing attention; one focused on the gender equality deficit in unpaid care and domestic work, the other advocated more parental choice with respect to forms of childcare. Influenced by concern about persisting gender inequalities, the former discourse was also informed by a rising public and political interest in men, maleness, masculinities and fathers. Research literature as well as everyday experience provided evidence of change in fatherhood practices, social norms and values.³² In Sweden and Norway, government-appointed committees examined the situation of the male in society and – in tune with new images of fatherhood – made proposals for assisting caring fatherhood. For example, the Norwegian committee suggested a three-month leave period earmarked for the father.

Politicising of parenthood also took a different track: In Finland, in particular, but also in Norway and Sweden, political parties to the centre and right had long voiced the need for traditional family forms to be assisted. With neo-liberal ideologies gaining ground, the rhetoric changed, and 'parental choice' was hailed as the new mantra of work/family/childcare policy discourse. The institution of cash grants was increasingly advocated as a means by which to give parents more choice with respect to childcare arrangements.

In the following, I discuss the 'daddy quotas' and cash benefits for childcare, two reforms that highlight central ideological conflicts over work/family policies in the 1990s. The former illustrates the drive for gender equality in childcare via a strengthening of fathers' right to care, the latter the drive for parental choice with respect to form of care, including support for domesticated mothercare. I briefly outline the policy reforms and examine in some detail the reception among parents.

32 Cf. Barbara Hobson ed., *Making Men into Fathers*. Cambridge 2002; Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996; Scott Coltrane, *Family Man – Fatherhood, Housework and Gender Equality*, New York/Oxford 1996; EC Childcare Network, *Men as Carers*, Brussels 1994.

4.2 Parental choice versus individual entitlements: The daddy quota

Policies supporting the gender-differentiated nuclear family are not new, while in the 1970s, institution of the rights of fathers to care certainly was. As mentioned previously, the 'daddy days' – individual rights for fathers to a short period of leave at the time of confinement – rapidly gained popularity. The opportunity for more equal sharing by making a greater part of the leave period the subject of 'parental choice' was largely ignored. In the 1980s and 1990s, in Norway and Sweden, earmarking was thus introduced as an alternative in order to advance the rights of fathers to care.

The proposal for a daddy quota was first aired in Sweden in the 1970s, when social democratic women members of parliament argued for inclusion of a period reserved for fathers. However, they did not succeed in gaining the approval of the party leadership, and the proposal was shelved.³³ Later, in the 1980s, suggestions for strengthening the individual caring rights of fathers were again entered on the political agenda. It was increasingly acknowledged that the effect of gender equality policies in the labour market, and in society at large, might be undermined if equality policies stopped at the family front door. Hence, the gender division of childcare was framed as a gender equality issue. There was also the greater concern with family values and family dissolution, and how to assist the father-child relationship with rising divorce and split-up rates among parents. Furthermore, as mentioned above, a change in the social and cultural norms constituting 'good fatherhood' and masculinity was underway.³⁴

In an orientation to parliament, the Norwegian government argued that protecting mothers as employees was obviously important, but so also was securing the rights and responsibilities of fathers.³⁵ A win-win perspective on fathers' caring emerged from this and other policy documents: Promoting fathercare appeared to be in the best interests all. The daddy quota provided opportunities for early bonding between father and child, which was important; it might also facilitate the greater sharing of domestic duties, important as a means towards reducing gender inequality at home. When the Norwegian parliamentarians discussed the proposal for a daddy quota, the *Conservative Party* opposed because it believed that parents should be free to decide for themselves how to make arrangements for leave of absence.³⁶ The debate did not show changing fatherhood as a really hot political issue. Perhaps the fathers' quota did not really inter-

33 Gunnel Karlsson, *Från broderskap till systemskap: det socialdemokratiska kvinnoförbundets kamp för inflytande och makt i SAP* [From Brotherhood to Sisterhood: The Social Democratic Women's Association's Fight for Influence and Power in Sweden's Labour Party], Lund 1996, chapter 7.

34 Cf. Leira, *Childcare*, note 2.

35 *Likestillingspolitikk for 1990-åra* [The Ministry's Report to Parliament: Gender Equality Policy for the 1990s], ,Stortingsmelding, 70 (1991/92), 5.

36 *Innstilling frå forbrukar – og administrasjonskomiteen om likestillingspolitikk for 1990-åra* [Report from the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality for the 1990s], 148 (1992/93).

fere too much with norms concerning masculinity, neither in the family setting nor in the field of employment. Obviously, the legislation stating a father's right to earmarked leave that is not easily transferred to the mother might improve the father's position when negotiating with reluctant employers. It might also assist fathers in discussions on the home front. Symbolically, too, it was important, depicting as it did the male parent as a capable carer of children. Objections to the earmarking of a father's leave, more pronounced in the neighbouring countries, especially in Finland and Denmark, came from political parties, employers and parents who did not want state interference with parental choice.

In the early 1990s Norway and Sweden decided to go for a new deal, a 'no choice-reform', that is the daddy quota. By reserving a period of leave for fathers on a use-or-lose basis, caring entitlements of fathers were strengthened. In 2002, Sweden extended the quota to two months; in 2006, Norway offered six weeks. Finland has set special conditions for fathers' entitlement to a two-week quota. Denmark has taken a different path: A fathers' quota of two weeks legislated in 1997 was abolished in 2002 by a centre-right government.³⁷

Parental leave, and especially earmarking of leave rights for fathers, provides an interesting illustration of political concern with 'gender equality' being made relevant for domestic arrangements. Including fathers among those formally entitled to give priority to childcare over the demands of the job implied an effort to change the parental division of labour in both breadwinning and caring. In this case, legislation was policy-induced; it was not a response to any large-scale change or demand reported among fathers, but rather a follow-up of the political commitments to gender equality. Policy reform preceded family change.

4.3 Parental choice: Cash grants or childcare services

Finland was the first of the Scandinavian countries to institute an individual entitlement of young children to receive some form of state-sponsored childcare, with 'parental choice' as a central element. Demand for childcare was to be met by parents being given a choice between access to state-sponsored services and a cash grant (home care allowance). Legislation of the cash grant scheme formed part of a grand political compromise between the social democrats and the agrarian Centre party. By 1990, the scheme applied nationwide for children aged less than three, and was later expanded to include cash grants for extra-parental care for all pre-schoolers.³⁸

37 Cf. Lammi-Taskula, Men, see note 24; Borchorst, Split, see note 24.

38 For the political discourse in Finland up to 1990 cf. Mikkola, Choice, see note 23; for the later years cf. Minna Salmi, Parental Choice and the Passion for Equality in Finland, in: Ellingsæter/Leira, Parenthood, see note 2, 145–168; Haataja/Nyberg, Paths, see note 20.

In 1994 in Sweden and in Norway in 1998 governments of the centre-right instituted cash grants for childcare schemes as an alternative to accommodation of children in state-sponsored childcare services.³⁹ Cash grants were advocated as assisting parental choice and as valorising formerly unpaid work by offering 'caring wages'. However, in both countries, political discourse was heated, since introduction of the schemes was regarded as a threat to the public funding of childcare services, to mothers' employment and gender equality. In Sweden, the scheme was abolished after a short run when the social democrats returned to power. The fate of Norway's scheme is up for revision following Parliamentary elections in 2009.

Publicly funded childcare services have been much in demand in the Nordic countries, and widely accepted as advantageous for young children. For several decades, provision had proceeded at different speeds, with Denmark among the premier league states in accommodating the under-threes, not just in Scandinavia but among European Union states. In Denmark, Sweden and Norway demand remained high in the 1980s and into the 1990s, and supply increased. Denmark and Sweden established a childcare guarantee that access to publicly funded childcare could be claimed as an entitlement.⁴⁰ Local authorities were obliged to meet demand with the minimum of delay. In 2007 the Norwegian government minister in charge of early childhood education and care proposed changing the legislation to the effect that, by 2010, access to state-sponsored childcare services was to be made an entitlement of children under school age.⁴¹

4.4 Work/family/childcare policies and gender equality

Several scholars have analysed the various approaches to gender equality in European work/family/childcare policies. For example, G. Bruning and Janneke Plantenga in 1999 concluded that work/family policies of Denmark, Finland and Sweden presented three different gender equality models. However, Rianne Mahon (2002) has argued that the childcare policies of Sweden and Denmark are similar in pursuing a gender equality track, while Finland has taken up a neofamilialist turn. Karin Wall agrees that the parental leaves schemes of Denmark and Sweden are examples of a 'gender-equality' orientated model, while Finland and Norway illustrate a 'parental choice' model.⁴²

39 Leira, Childcare, see note 2; Haataja/Nyberg, Paths, see note 20.

40 Cf. Borchorst, Split, see note 24; Haataja/Nyberg, Paths, see note 20.

41 Kunnskapsdepartementet, Høring om endringer i barnehageloven [Ministry of Knowledge, Proposals for Change in the Day Care for Children Act], Oslo, October 31, 2007.

42 Cf. G. Bruning and Janneke Plantenga, Parental Leave and Equal Opportunities: Experiences in Eight European Countries, in: *Journal of European Social Policy*, 9, 3 (1999), 195–209; Rianne Mahon, Childcare. Toward What Kind of "Social Europe"?, in: *Social Politics*, 9, 3 (2002), 343–379; Karin Wall, Leave Policy Models and the Articulation of Work and Family in Europe: A Comparative Perspective. Paper presented at the 8th ESA Conference, Glasgow, Sept. 3–6, 2007.

However, if we consider policy support for both working motherhood and caring fatherhood, and examine the various national childcare policy packages (parental leave, state support for childcare services and the institution of cash grants for childcare) the picture is more complex. In short, throughout the period considered, *Denmark's* policies demonstrate strong support of working motherhood, first of all in the provision of publicly funded childcare services for pre-schoolers, the under 3s included. However, in the Nordic region, Danish policy support for caring fatherhood is the weakest. More than the Nordic neighbours *Finland* has aimed for a dual track in childcare policies, with prolonged family care for the younger children (via parental leave and cash grants for parental childcare) developed as an alternative to the use of state-funded childcare services. Hence, the policy package makes assistance for domesticated or working motherhood the subject of parental choice. Policy support for fathercare is stronger than the Danish, but weaker than the policies of Norway and Sweden. *Norway* also takes a dual approach to childcare and motherhood, with policies assisting working or caring motherhood. Support of caring motherhood comes second only to that of Finland. However support for caring fatherhood is stronger than that of Denmark and Finland, coming second only to that of Sweden. Sweden's policies are of special interest, as they combine furthering of working motherhood and the strengthening of caring fatherhood. In Nordic comparison, Sweden's policies come closest to facilitating the dual-earner, dual-carer family.⁴³

5. Parenthood practices: parental choice versus gender equality

5.1 Earmarking versus parental choice

Entitlements to paid parental leave are generally taken up by fathers as well as by mothers. One striking result of the legislation – especially the ‘no-choice reforms’ establishing of individual rights of fathers to care – is that the majority of eligible fathers in Norway and Sweden make use of some leave days. Large numbers of fathers taking some leave does not, however, indicate that fathers generally take very long leave, although some increase is noted over time, especially in Sweden (Table 1). In 2004, Swedish fathers made use of about 20 per cent of the leave days available and Norwegian fathers 10 per cent. Danish and Finnish fathers took up five to six per cent.⁴⁴ Another striking result concerns the use of the period set aside for parental choice: gender-

43 Cf. for details Leira, Parenthood, see note 2, 44.

44 In Iceland, one of the latecomers in instituting daddy quotas, fathers take almost 30 % of the days available. In Iceland, of the parental leave period of nine months, one three-month period is reserved for each of the parents, while the remaining three-month period is taken at the discretion of the parents.

neutral leave has gendered consequences. Parental choice with respect to parental leave has resulted in prolonged job breaks of mothers and the familising of maternal care for very young children. In Finland and Norway, this effect is further enhanced by mothers being the main recipients of cash grants for childcare.⁴⁵

5.2 Choice of childcare services or cash for care

By 2004, in Sweden and Denmark, 95 per cent of the older pre-schoolers attended publicly funded day care services, along with more than 80 per cent of the one and two year old Danish children and 66 per cent of the Swedish. Denmark and Sweden were close to meeting demand, thus reaching the principle aim of universal provision. Norway provided for 87 and Finland for 68 per cent of the older children, with close to 50 per cent of the Norwegian pre-schoolers and 40 per cent of the Finnish being accommodated in public childcare services. Prolonging paid parental leave to about one year has reduced demand for the youngest children. Provision for the under 3s has been increasing in all four countries, but with a dip in Finland during the 1990s (Table 2).

Following the institution of the cash grant scheme in Finland and in Norway, the benefit has been widely used, and in both countries, taken up mainly by mothers. In Finland, high take-up rates have been attributed to a revival of maternalism and yearning for the traditional family.⁴⁶ However, whether the use of cash grants is through necessity or choice is hard to say. The reform was introduced at a time of grave economic problems, with unemployment soaring, and high take-up rates could be seen as a mix of preference for mother care and lack of jobs. In Norway, in the late 1990s, the institution of cash grants for childcare for children aged 12 to 36 months took place in a very different setting, with the economy well recovered and unemployment negligible; lack of jobs does not explain the reception of the reform. The Norwegian cash grant scheme, unlike that in Finland, offered no real choice for all parents. Parents who preferred public childcare services were not entitled to make a claim for it on local authorities. When the cash grant was legislated, planned local increase of services was postponed, due to the uncertainty about parental reception of the reform. As demand remained high, provision was resumed and expanded. Lowering of parental fees made publicly funded childcare services attractive for more parents, and served to keep up demand. In Norway, high take-up rates in the post-reform years were not just about preference for mothercare but also about the lack of opportunity for choice of high-

⁴⁵ Cf. contributions in Ellingsæter/Leira, *Parenthood*, see note 2.

⁴⁶ Cf. Anneli Anttonen, *The Female Working Citizen*, in: *Kvinder, køn og forskning [Women, Gender and Research]*, 10, 2 (2001), 33–44; Jorma Sipilä, *The Right to Choose: Day Care for Children or Money for Parents*, in: *Social Policy Review*, 7 (1995), 151–169.

quality state-sponsored childcare services. – Demand for cash grants has been declining in a period of services expansion.⁴⁷

5.3 Parental choice – who cares?

How the reception of gender-neutral ‘parental choice’ reforms (parental leave and cash grants for childcare) should be interpreted has been the subject of much debate. It is often discussed as rational economic choice, and/or as generated in gendered cultural traditions, parental norms and values. However, the limits to choice also need consideration in a context in which the labour market is strongly segregated by sex, gendered wage inequalities persist and parental obligations have remained gendered although less markedly so compared to those of the grandparent generation. In the Nordic region, unequal sharing of breadwinning and childcare often makes economic sense, since fathers are generally in better paid jobs and the family stands to lose more if the father takes long leave with less than full wage compensation. Furthermore, the normative climate and cultural traditions surrounding the mother-child and father-child relationships are still gendered. Caring is an all-important element in social and cultural norms concerning ‘good motherhood’, but less so in the interpretation of ‘good fatherhood’. For example, for fathers, spending ten weeks on parental leave is taking very long leave; for mothers, a ten-week period of parental leave is considered very short; indeed, too short. In discussions of ‘parental choice’, more attention has to be given to the conditions under which parents make ‘choices’. Who has priority of choice in a two-person system, what is chosen first – childcare or job – and what real choices does the second chooser have? Parents’ reception of gender-neutral work/family/childcare policies may serve to reduce or reproduce gender inequalities in parenthood. In the cases discussed here, the take-up and use of parental choice in parental leave and cash grants have confirmed mothers as the primary carer parents.

6. Childcare: parental responsibilities and social rights

Increasingly since the 1970s, childcare in various forms has been interpreted as a *social right* of parents and children in Scandinavia. The care of young children has been expanded to include a platform from which parents are entitled to make claims on the welfare state. In the early 2000s, for working parents, paid parental leave is about

47 Cf. Leira, Parenthood, see note 2; cf. also Anne Lise Ellingsæter, The Norwegian childcare regime and its paradoxes, in: Ellingsæter/Leira, Politicising, see note 2, chap. 6; Anne Lise Ellingsæter and Lars Gulbrandsen, Closing the Childcare Gap: The Interaction of Childcare Provision and Mothers’ Agency in Norway, in: Journal of Social Policy, 36, 4 (2007), 649–669.

12 months, and fathers' rights to care have been substantially strengthened in Sweden, Norway and Finland. Access to state-sponsored childcare services is meeting or close to meeting demand. The childcare policy packages have changed the setting, regulation and contents of motherhood, fatherhood and the early childhood years. Legislation of individual entitlements to paid parental leave promotes an equalizing of the carer opportunities and rights of mothers and fathers; the childcare responsibility is refamilised and degendered. State-funding of childcare services has been and still is important in defamilising of childcare, equalising and degendering the economic provider opportunities of mothers and fathers. In combination the two sets of policies assist the dual-earner, care-sharing family. In Norway and Finland childcare policies also support more traditional family arrangements via legislation of cash grants for parental childcare that generally presumes a gendered division of earning and caring.

In interplay, family change and policy reform have succeeded in transcending the traditional gendered division of earning and caring – but to what extent? It should be noted, that the potential for change entailed in work/family/childcare policies is far from fully developed or utilised. Legislation allows for more opportunities for sharing of childcare than is actually used. While it may well be argued that the gender equality policy project remains unfinished, in a 30-year retrospect, the change in parental practices is rather striking. In the early 1970s the combination of employment and care of progeny was characteristically framed as a feminine dilemma, a matter for mothers, and public policy investment in childcare was modest. In 2007, welfare state involvement in facilitating childcare arrangements is well developed and fathers are much more part of the political discourse, parenthood policies and everyday childcare. The greater change is evidenced in mothers' economic activity, with labour market participation rates among the highest in Western Europe. Mothers have updated the gender contract and changed the gender balance in economic provision. Changing the gender balance in caring has been slower to take effect. Mothers are still the primary carer-parents, but the changes taking place in fathercare cannot be neglected. Parental responsibilities for children are taken up in new mixes; dual-earner, care-sharing parenthood is increasingly common. Childcare policy reforms have advanced and facilitated a model of the 'citizen parent' in which both mothers and fathers combine employment and childcare. In instituting care-related rights for parents, Scandinavian welfare state policies since the 1970s have increasingly reflected how childcare is a responsibility and an interest for mothers and fathers, and a collective interest of societies and welfare states.

Figure 1 Gender equality – legal reforms⁴⁸

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
<i>Family planning</i>				
Contraceptive pill approved	mid 1960's	1961	1967	1964
Women's right to abortion on demand	1973	*	1978	1975
<i>Parental leave</i>				
Parents granted paid parental leave after a child is born	1984	1978	1978	1974
Part of parental leave is reserved for the father	1997 (abolished 2002)	2003	1993	1994
Right to 6-hour working day for parents of small children	–	1988	–	1979
<i>Equal opportunity</i>				
Act on equal opportunities at work	1978	–	–	1980
Act on gender equality	–	1987	1979	
<i>Childcare</i>				
Cash for care benefit for children 1–2 years old not using public child care	–	1990	1998	1994 (abolished same year)
Legislation of national child care services	1964/1974	1973	1975	1975

* Abortion legislation on social and medico-social grounds 1970.

Table 1 Father's uptake of total leave days with benefit in the event of pregnancy, childbirth or adoption (in per cent)⁴⁹

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
1990	4.1	2.4	–	8.8
1995	4.4	3.6	5.8	10.3
2000	5.1	4.4	7.2	13.7
2003	5.5	5.3	8.6	18.3
2004	5.5	5.7	9.0	19.7

48 Source: Nordic Council of Ministers, *NORD*, 3 (1994), Copenhagen, 14; contributors Ellingsæter/Leira, *Parenthood*, see note 2.

49 *Nordic Statistical Yearbook, Social Security in the Nordic Countries*, 44, 1 (2006).

Table 2 Children in publicly funded childcare (per cent of all children in the age group)⁵⁰

Year	Denmark	Finland	Norway*	Sweden
Age of child				
1975				
0–2	18	4	3	13
3–6	27	9	6	19
1987				
0–2	45	22	8	31
3–6	65	52	50	79
1990				
0–2	48	31	11	29
3–6	73	58	57	64
Total 0–6	61	44	33	48
1995				
0–2	48	18	22	37
3–6	83	55	61	74
Total 0–6	68	39	44	59
2004				
Under 1	12	1	2	–
1–2	83	37	48	66
3–5	95	68	87	95

⁵⁰ For 1975, 1987, 1990, and 1995 cf. Leira, Parenthood, see note 2, 37; for 2004: Nord, see note 47. Due to changes in registration and prolongation of parental leaves, the 2004 figures for are not comparable with earlier years.

