

Gender Regimes, Family Policies and  
Attitudes to Female Employment:  
A Comparison of Germany, Italy and Sweden

Eva Sundström

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### ***Abstract***

In this study, attitudes towards female employment and the division of labour between men and women in Germany, Italy and Sweden are explored. Using a quantitative approach, the first objective is to examine how political ideologies and welfare political models are reflected in or accompany attitudes towards female labour market participation among different groups in the three welfare states. Welfare policies significantly influence women's choices to enter and remain in employment and to achieve individual social rights. Based on a more qualitative approach, the second aim is to study policy dynamics in relation to changing value orientations, and to track the emergence of alternative policies and their intended target groups. For this purpose local political implementers in each country were interviewed.

The overall conclusion is that the ways in which certain patterns of gender relations occur are closely related to the designs of national welfare policies. Still, within the groups of women and men factors such as age, educational attainment levels and family status are important or even decisive for attitudes towards female labour market participation. In addition, the extent to which attitudes correspond to actual female labour market behaviour seems largely to be a matter of public policy. While all three studies point at important national differences in welfare policies at the same time as patterns of value orientations converge, especially among women, the comparison of local policy levels reveals important within-country variations. These variations concern the quantity as well as the quality of policy measures, that is, the political implications for gender on socio-economic situation, alternative political majority and historical and cultural heritage. Variations in local policy formulations are large in Italy and less pronounced in Germany and Sweden, and they illustrate the different political emphasis placed on the preservation, modification or transformation of what is defined as gender equality and as local or national cultural traditions. Local social and labour market policies depict quite different approaches. The degree of state control versus local autonomy is relevant for the outcome of local social policies on gender and both national and local policy formulations are important in determining whether the

normative emphasis should be placed on the maintenance, reinforcement or alteration of gender relations. While such choices and decisions also include the acceptance or rejection of national, and even local differences in definitions of citizenship rights, they point at the inherent relativity of the concept and as a result, its gendering effects on social, economic and political equality.

**Key words:** gender regimes, welfare state, employment, care, citizenship, local policies

## *Preface*

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The Attached Articles:

*Article 1* – Sundström, E. (1999) “Should mothers work? Age and attitudes in Germany, Italy and Sweden”. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 8, 193-205.

*Article 2* – Sundström, E. (2000) “Gender and attitudes towards female employment in Germany, Italy and Sweden”. In: Pfenning, A. and Bahle, T., *Families and Family Policies in Europe. Comparative Perspectives*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften.

*Article 3* – Sundström, E. (2002) *National policies, local policies and women's right to work*. Research report No 118. Umeå: Umeå Studies in Sociology.

## ***Introduction***

Since the 1960s women's labour force participation rates have risen in all Western European countries and will most likely continue to do so over the coming years. Furthermore, the relative importance of dual earner families has grown, as indicated by the increasing number of married women and mothers in employment (Eurostat 2002). Over the last thirty years processes of individualisation and changes in gender relations, such as the slowly moving dissolutions of gender specific spheres, have challenged both the formally established political guidelines set up to protect specific forms of families as well as their normative and theoretical foundations.

One of the main purposes of welfare policies is to manage social risks by reducing the effects of market forces on individuals through the redistribution of societal resources. All welfare states position themselves in relation to the political location of caring, how it should be performed and supported. The interaction between the state, the market and the family has taken varying forms in different societies with different historical and social contexts. In some, care work is first and foremost located within the family. Other solutions are to rely on the market to supply care services, or to subsidise care via a semi-market or the public sphere. In the majority of cases it is women who perform the lion's share of both paid and unpaid care-work. Which position welfare states adopt has far-reaching effects on the social and economic relations between men and women as it affects their position in the family, the labour market and their relation to the welfare state. The foundation of post-war welfare states is based on assumptions about labour market behaviour and family structures that today are largely invalid (Esping-Andersen 2000). Labour markets have changed in several aspects, one of which is the attraction of large numbers of women. Family formations have transformed into partly new patterns of social life and interdependencies. The changes have evoked discussions about the stratifying effects of welfare states and citizenship rights along gender lines. Above all, the handling of social rights and care issues in welfare policies has been proven to influence women's possibilities to choose between family obligations and paid work in ways that differ from men's rights, choices and obligations.

Today, more women regard having a job and an individual income as an essential component in their lives. Still, there are large national variations in value orientations regarding whether mothers of younger children in particular should work, which is the focus of this work. There are also substantial differences in actual female labour market participation and in overall national and local welfare policies and their accompanying institutional structures that enable or impede women's entrance in the labour market or their choice to be a homemaker.

For several reasons, women's access to employment, whether regarded as a response to changed female behaviour due to economic constraints, altered value orientations, or as a way to achieve greater gender equality, is a controversial policy area in most Western European countries. Neither within nor between countries is there any obvious political agreement concerning the definition and import of gender equality, the range for public responsibility to support female employment or alternative policies that aim to increase women's economic self-sufficiency. While women's access to paid work determines their possibilities to earn a direct income of their own, it also provides them with rights to individual social citizenship as opposed to having it derived from motherhood or marriage. For one, an individual income increases negotiation power within the family and, in the long run, allows for greater opportunities for economic independence (Lewis 1992, Orloff 1993, Fraser 1994, Lister 1997). Second, social rights achieved from labour market participation tend to be more generous than those based on marriage or motherhood; the latter often means a greater risk of creating long-term dependence on a husband or the state (Hobson 1990). Third, female employment is believed to influence the division of household labour by encouraging cohabiting men to engage more in household tasks. Finally, it has been argued that increased female employment may support an alteration of women's position in society, given that women win sufficient political leverage to influence the conditions for their labour market participation and to control their ensuing income (Fraser 1994, Phillips 1997, Walby 2000). The aim of this work is twofold. The first is to point out how political ideologies and welfare political models are reflected in or accompany men's and women's attitudes towards female labour market participation in Germany, Italy and Sweden. The second aim is to investigate how national and local social policies respond to changes in value orientation, family formation and female behaviour from the aspect of

improved gender equality by ways of reforming or restructuring women's access to individual social rights.

The three countries Italy, Germany and Sweden were selected because they represent important differences in welfare policy and in institutional settings that largely influence women's possibilities to enter or remain in employment or in other ways gain access to full citizenship rights. They also represent three specific national and cultural contexts in which the relationship between gender and social citizenship produces divergent dynamics for value orientation, individual choices, political agency and policy change. As such, Germany, Italy and Sweden are used to illustrate processes of changing attitudes in relation to including and excluding effects of social citizenship and gender. In order to detect similarities and differences in patterns of value orientation towards female employment, the ISSP (*International Social Survey Programme*) module on 'Family and Gender Roles' from 1994 has been used. The basic assumption guiding the analyses is that the ways in which gender relations are articulated within the family as well as in the labour market largely depend on the conditions provided by welfare policies. As such, these may support or constrain men and women in different social positions to combine housework, care responsibilities and paid labour. The first objective has been to explore the hypothesis that attitudes to gender relations to a certain degree conform to national policies, but that individual qualities such as gender, age and educational attainment level intersect and reduce or strengthen international variations.

The relationship between attitudes and welfare policies is a complex one. The extent to which attitudes influence policies or vice versa cannot be pinned to one-way relationships in which popular value orientations influence policy making, or the other way around, that policies influence peoples value orientations. The recent and extensive alterations in value orientations, family formation and female labour market behaviour in several countries exemplify this. As such, changes in attitudes and conduct cannot be straightforwardly explained by changes in national welfare policies. Since these have changed only marginally work opportunities for women have been created by structural changes in the labour market, especially in the service sector. Growing numbers of women in higher education may also be viewed in relation to labour market demands. Modified or altered family patterns may be the result of a more complex interrelation between changes in female attitudes and behaviour, the situation in the labour markets and

family policies. The preservation of national welfare state designs have led to demands from social actors for the renewal or modification of policies and institutional settings that are seen as counter-productive to family formation, labour supply and democracy.

Since the mid-1990s gender inequalities in welfare policy outcomes have been brewing as one of the major themes in the European Union and in national policy discussions. The international dimension of the debate helped to focus public attention of women's issues and brought about a growing insight among states as well as employers that the present omission of women from the labour market is bad for both government and economy. Furthermore, European welfare states have been forced to face and discuss new solutions to battle the rapidly increasing costs for economic undertakings mediated by welfare policies. These concern the ageing of populations, putting pressure on both pension systems and the supply and selection of care services, rising unemployment figures, growing costs for public health care and for social assistance to economically constrained individuals and families.

National strategies, or the absence thereof, aimed at maintaining or abolishing obstacles for individuals to combine work and family life, matter for individuals and families in their decisions about how to organise their everyday care work and household tasks. In addition, national policy strategies are influenced by the extent to which national welfare policies are directed towards and implemented on regional or local levels. The possible range for within-country variations is largely determined by the freedom of action for local policy making in the three countries and by the sometimes quite tangible local political, social, and economical realities. For the individual, variations may imply that costs and supply of services as well as access rules to social rights differ depending on official residence and on the terms and conditions under which claims can be made on public resources. In spite of the fact that the "price" for being in employment (in terms of individual expenses connected to employability and restrictions of working hours) may vary largely within countries, and thus also the potential for individuals to alternate between paid work and care responsibilities, effects of local variations in existing social policies and social policy goals in relation to gender are still largely unexplored. The second objective of this work is therefore to illustrate important implications of within-country variations in relation to gender. The focus is set on existing and suggested local social policy goals that directly or indirectly address gender relations.

In order to detect the impact of national social policies on local levels and to identify the emergence of alternative policies and their intended target groups, political implementers in different geographical locations in Germany, Italy and Sweden were interviewed. The interviews were conducted by the author herself and carried out in the respective native languages of the interviewees.

The potential emergence of suggested new or modified national or local policies might reduce or strengthen the within-country variations. The possibility of within-country variations in access to social services and social rights emphasises the importance of studying divergences in social citizenship rights not only in an international perspective, but also from a local comparative stance in order to identify differences in gender ideologies and their practical consequences for individuals.

### *Historical Retrospect*

While facing similar problems, the three countries included here set out from very different points of departure and are equipped with quite different political and administrative tools as well as with varying levels of coherence in political support for alterations and/or modifications of welfare policies.

The state as protector and administrator of individual social rights and life chances evolved in the first half of the twentieth century and grew comprehensive after the Second World War, following the democratisation of the majority of countries in the western world. Institutional characteristics, power relations between various social groups and the impact of different social movements formed welfare states into quite disparate models for social protection and reduction of social inequalities. As German, Italian and Swedish welfare policies developed, they gave way to country-specific attributes that influence married women's social choices in different ways. A brief introduction to the development of the three welfare states may illustrate this.

### **1930-1945**

Parts of the modern welfare policies have their roots in the interwar period and as a response to sinking birthrates and high unemployment rates. Issues of reproduction, previously regarded as determined by "nature" and largely beyond the influence of society, was modified and brought into the developing sphere of social sciences. As shown by Horn (1994) nationalistic

political currents at this time were effectively combined with efforts from the social sciences to gain a status similar to that of natural sciences, producing policies to control the bodies of men and women. The family became the obvious site for social technologies of reproduction aiming to fulfil demographic policies on the one hand, and to counter the effects of industrialisation with high unemployment rates, changed family formations and increasing poverty on the other.

During the nazi and fascist dictatorships in Germany and Italy unemployment among large groups of men, demography and eugenics were to be controlled through the abolition of women from large parts of the labour market, reproduction policies and laws that included both forced breeding and sterilisation of women in particular. Through the construction of norms and motherhood myths that replaced nature, the borders between the public and the private was abolished; maternity and motherhood were transformed from the domain of privacy into an object of social management and control (Horn 1994). The spectacular and devastating results from the combination of totalitarianism, eugenics and social engineering are notorious.

Also in Sweden national policies to confront sinking birth rates and stimulate reproduction through social engineering gained a foothold in the 1930s. The absence of totalitarianism and dictatorship spared the largest part of the population from direct political and physical control over individuals' bodies and reproduction, although elements of social and mental eugenics were present.<sup>1</sup> As the Great Depression hit Sweden voices were raised that demanded married women to leave their jobs in order to make room for male breadwinners. However, strong feminist groups, with Alva Myrdal as the most prominent advocator, succeeded in turning the question of women's right to work into a question of working women's right to have a family (Gustafsson, 1994). According to Gustafsson, in the interwar period Sweden had the worlds' lowest nativity figures and the framing of pronatalist policies as social welfare policies gained broad political support. A population increase was to be managed through ameliorated physical and material well-being of individuals, and especially of children, through improved

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1930s birth control to avoid undesired pregnancies was accepted through the use of contraceptives. A large number of forced sterilisations were performed on particular groups of women who, for social, psychological or physical reasons, were regarded as unsuitable or unfit for parenthood. The possibility for authorities to prescribe or carry out forced sterilisation was abolished in the mid 1970s.

healthcare, quality housing and childcare while female labour market activity was supported. It was argued that women would otherwise opt out of childbearing and marriage. Women gained their first rights to equal treatment with men in the labour market and simultaneously obtained gender specific legal rights aiming to enable the combination of motherhood and employment as well as marriage and employment. In 1935 equal basic pensions for both men and women were introduced. Formulated as a universal right, all individuals received basic pensions at a certain age regardless of labour market performance.

### **1945-1980**

After long periods of social and economic crises, totalitarianism and warfare the advocacy of a family model consisting of a male breadwinners with a homemaking wife was regarded as a guarantee for normality, social stability and protection of individual rights in all three countries. Politically, differences in men's and women's societal positions were established in laws regulating individual bodily rights<sup>2</sup> and in social policies regulating, among other things, marriage and care duties as well as taxation policies and policies guiding areas of the labour market. Of course the ways in which such 'contracts' were instituted varied between countries but in general, they had important aspects of gender inequalities and discrimination in common. Depending on political majorities and the awareness and experiences of preceding national legislation to control male and female bodies, the construction of the family as a bearer of moral values and social duties relied on country-specific attitudes towards government involvement by way of family policies (Kulawik 1991, Kaplan 1992, Horn, 1994, Ostner 1994, Saraceno 1994, Wennemo 1994).

In the formulations of the German Basic Law and the Italian Constitution equality between men and women and rights to individual autonomy were declared. However, the Civil Codes of both countries were based on assumptions of social and biological gender differences. Men's and women's labour were declared to be of different qualities and to constitute different spheres. Thereby, women's social choices were legally conditioned in relation to marriage and their prime responsibility as caretakers (Kolinsky

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of such legislation are the presence or absence of the recognition of freedom from sexual abuse and violence within marriage, legalisation of contraceptives and abortion rights as well as the acknowledgement of alternative family formations other than heterosexual marriages.

1993, Bimbi 1993). Social and family policies were revised to protect individuals and families from public interventions. Despite far-reaching adjustments of existing laws to new democratic ambitions, male superiority within the household was upheld through restrictions of women's rights and obligations. In immediate post-war welfare policies, revised versions of motherhood myths<sup>3</sup> were introduced and the home was re-confirmed as the natural place for women and for a sheltered privacy. Accordingly, in both Germany and Italy women were assigned the task of full-time care work while labour market policies were adjusted to suit male breadwinners, who also became the base for social protection of family members. Strong corporatist traits of status divisions continued to guide the social security systems and the family was ascribed the ultimate responsibility for its member's welfare, so called familialism, to absorb the individual's exposure to social and economic risks. Social citizenship rights such as sickness benefits, unemployment insurance and pensions related to previous employment status and work incomes were secured for extended groups of workers, producing not only social stratification by employment status but also important gender differences in access to economic resources and citizenship rights. Social assistance was to be distributed according to family failure rather than market failure (Saraceno 1998), resulting in poor protection to young adults, single parents and elderly, who were primarily dependent on resources available in the extended family.

Even though both German and Italian feminist groups opposed the strong emphasis placed on the family and the subordination of women within the family and in society, they were overrun by political parties and the Catholic Church. Like the Church, political parties feared that changes in family structures might turn the family into a Trojan Horse that would encourage undesired interference from the state, nourish communism or threaten the value basis of the Catholic Church (Kolinsky 1993, Saraceno 1998). Whereas both Italian and German legislation sought to protect the (traditional) family and support family self-sufficiency through normative and legal expectations of family solidarity, the political strategy in Italy was to act rather passively and evasively towards family policies. Over time, this strategy has resulted in inadequate and inconsistent social policies. The

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<sup>3</sup> Female bodily constructions and expressions were defused, as was the honouring of fertility and large families. Instead the new family ideal leaned towards functionalism in which socialisation and the upbringing of good members of society emphasised caring by an at-home mother.

passive approach was a result of political conflicts concerning women's social roles and the role of the family. The conflicts were partly avoided or defused, as they became integrated parts of ideological debates about definitions of traditional and "proper" moral family values. As a consequence, developments of family policies and changes in the wording of the Civil Code were blocked until the 1970s. Several attempts were made to construct fiscal systems in support of breadwinners with dependent family members. In its original version it did give some financial support to the average Italian family but today it is directed mainly to large and poor families (Saraceno 1998). Numerous variants of work related family benefits were developed and implemented according to the employer and employment status of the head of household.<sup>4</sup> They covered different spectra of dependent relatives such as adult children unable to work, wives with low or no income and dependent elderly relatives.<sup>5</sup> Today they have lost much of their import as economic succour.

While avoiding interference with the family and the private sphere the political parties and the Italian State were more supportive in policy areas where women could be regarded as workers in need of specific juridical or social protection schemes.<sup>6</sup> In 1950, working women obtained paid maternity leave and companies with more than 30 married women employed were to arrange for breastfeeding rooms at the work place and infant childcare services. A housewife pension insurance was introduced at the end of the 1950s but with very low reimbursement levels, and therefore regarded as quite insufficient and inadequate (Saraceno, 1998, 169). In the 1960s and 1970s public, or collective<sup>7</sup>, daycare was introduced as a response to increasing numbers of women in employment. In addition, abortion rights, maternity leave and flexible working hours, the right to legal divorce and

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<sup>4</sup> There are different contracts depending on employment status such as private or public clerk, employee, civil servant or worker (Saraceno 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Even today it is impossible to collect and account for figures from every single public administration on, for instance, how much they distribute to families according to their numbers or types of families (Saraceno 1998, 99).

<sup>6</sup> The supportive policies for gender equality in the labour market depart from the assumption that only women who are constrained to work outside the home enter the labour market. Because women's participation was regarded as forced upon women it was considered important to offer these women reasonably equitable conditions with men and to argue for either gender equality or, under particular circumstances, for gender difference and specific rights for women as mothers.

<sup>7</sup> The term collective is preferable to public because most care facilities in especially Germany and Italy are publicly financed and controlled but organised and performed by organisations related to various church orders and other volunteer organisations.

individual income taxation were implemented. Since the end of the war the improvement of women's rights was achieved through a combination of scattered, but in specific issues, forceful feminist efforts in collaboration with labour unions and political parties (Kaplan 1992, Chamberlayne 1993, Bimbi 1993, Saraceno 1996 and 1998). Demands for the recognition of both gender equality and gender differences were sometimes in line with, and sometimes conflicting with attempts from other political representatives to protect the moral values of the family. Paradoxically, the achieved rights for women to participate in the labour market proved to work against their original intentions and with unintended side effects.<sup>8</sup>

Faced with ideological conflicts similar to those in Italy immediately after the end of the war, German protection of the family, marriage and motherhood was accorded a much higher and more formal priority than in Italy. Policies were actively aimed to shield women and the nuclear family from the state and market forces (Daly 2000b). Instead of extending married women's rights to include labour market participation and bodily autonomy, women's rights were instead reduced to expectations of appropriate moral behaviour and the fulfilment of marital values (Kaplan 1992). The clearer stance taken on the family in proactive German family policies constituted a more distinct position towards the range of economic resources that realises family self-sufficiency without inviting women into the labour market. For instance, male breadwinner salaries and income taxation were tied to men's marital status and the number of dependent family members to support. It also reflected institutionalised gender relations, in which a married man, until 1977, could prevent his wife from taking up employment or force her to work if he determined her income necessary for the family. Considering the stronger financial support of the nuclear family in the politically and economically stronger German State the number of women in employment did not accelerate until the late 1970s. Demands from women's groups and from the European Commission on increased gender equality in the labour market resulted in ambiguous and inconsistent national policies regarding female employment. As an effect women's choices were restricted to

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<sup>8</sup> Chamberlayne (1993, 176-177) describes how the equalisation of rights for part-time workers with low wage differentials priced out flexible working hours as compared to full-time employment. Maternity leave at a substitution level of 80 % became a further disincentive for formal employment of women. To counter forceful demands from labour unions Italian enterprises moved into the underground economy, using subcontracting, cottage industry and small plants and so escaped protective labour legislation. By the late 1970s women comprised more than half of all workers in underground manufacturing.

predominantly short term and part-time employment. Due to the economic recession in the 1970s, public incentives for women to re-enter employment after periods of homemaking and child-rearing were conditioned with reference to the employment status of their husbands and in relation to their domestic duties (Kolinsky 1993, 56 ff.).

In Sweden, the political measures taken to support female employment during the 1930s did not protect Swedish women from gender discrimination, or insulate policies from functionalistic influences with their inherent normative messages concerning family values and the 'proper' divisions of gender roles and tasks. The 1950s in Sweden was the decade of the housewife. Like in Germany and Italy, joint taxation, and the absence of parental leave and care services made employment both difficult and relatively unprofitable. But contrary to the other two countries, Sweden was not devastated by war and its inhabitants were not as impoverished. The infrastructure was intact and the economy expanded fast. Employers cooperated with labour unions to attract large numbers of women into the export industry. Despite the power of the prevailing housewife ideology the number of married women in employment grew rapidly (Hirdman 2001, 157). In 1955 three months paid maternity leave was given to working women on the birth of a child. In 1960 an agreement was reached between employers and unions to abolish separate wage rates for women. The growing body of working women inspired and pushed forward the equality debate, including frequently recurrent demands for equal pay for men and women with similar work tasks. These were accompanied by other integrative and universalistic demands and countered by arguments in support of gender differences and segregation.

The difference between Sweden and the other two countries was reinforced when large numbers of Swedish women entered the labour market in the 1960s and the development of a large public service sector initiated. The birth control pill was approved of in 1964 and ten years later abortion was legalised. In 1971 separate income tax assessment was introduced. The Swedish welfare state developed to provide a wide range of services and benefits that are commonly universalistic and perceived as individual citizenship entitlements. As the female labour market participation continued to increase in the 1970s it was accompanied by a growing public service sector, in which many women found employment, while simultaneously relieving them from care responsibilities. The change in policy direction towards gender equality in the labour market was not self-evident. It has

been argued that the relatively early politicisation of issues relevant for women contributed to a comparatively high representation of women in parliament, which in turn strengthened the legitimisation of feminist demands regarding equality issues and welfare policies (Raaum 1999). There was an ideological and discursive political dividing line between increased support to the male breadwinner model and an individual model with two wage earners. Women from different political parties strongly dominated the political debate and the political documentation of arguments that led to the introduction of public childcare. But, as shown by Bergqvist, Kuusipalo and Styrkársdóttir (1999) there was also an astounding overall political agreement on the need for public engagement in childcare. In 1973 a new pre-school reform was introduced, in which full-time centre-based care for children was guaranteed to all working parents. In line with the new familial ideology of equal parenting and shared roles maternity insurance was transformed into parental insurance in 1974. The educational system was reformed to promote equal opportunities. Full-employment policies through active labour market measures were directed to also attract women, a turn away from prior policies that mainly encouraged and recruited men (Sainsbury 1999).

In all three countries, among the most prominent changes that has destabilised the positioning of men and women in relation to national welfare policies and labour markets from the 1970s and onwards is the increase in the number of women in the labour force. The reasons for the growth are manifold. The number of well-trained women has risen, economic and technical developments have altered employment structures towards a growth in service jobs that has attracted a female workforce. Alterations of employment structures and household composition have led to reduced household purchasing power. In addition to this development changes in value orientation, particularly among younger women have also taken place. The patriarchal protection of women within marriage and its exclusionary effects in the labour market has loosened up as women have entered employment on a wider front. To varying extent and depending on national contexts, laws regulating marriage and the place of men, women and their families in transfer and tax provision policies and in social and labour market policies have been modified to allow for increased individual rights and larger economic independence for women.

## **1980-2000**

In the mid 1980s political parties in Italy began to conceptualise the family as an issue relevant for social policies but it took another ten years, until the electoral campaign of 1994, for family policies to become a national political topic. Saraceno (1998, 180-181) identifies the main policy areas that were developed by different political parties and coalitions. The centre-left demanded increased gender equality and improved opportunities to reconcile work and family through increased support to families by way of social services. The Christian Democrats claimed economic support to motherhood and housewives and tax relief for families. In the mid 1990s, for the first time, a ministry for social and family affairs was introduced. To date, no concrete or radical changes serving to increase the economic support to families with children have been realised. The central role of the family is continuously reinforced by adjusted but maintained legal obligations for relatives to provide care and economic maintenance for its members. On local levels, efforts to reorganise opening hours for various public services constitute incremental and half-hearted efforts to facilitate everyday lives for working women. New or revised policies in effect reinforce the male breadwinner family. As shown by Saraceno (2000), means testing to determine eligibility for economic subsidies and services on the basis of household income discourage low-trained women and young adults to participate in the formal labour market. Instead, these groups resort to informal work opportunities, thereby evading paying the social contribution which is meant to cover individual social risks such as unemployment compensation, old age pensions and taxes. There are immense regional variations in local labour markets and local policies and resources vary in important aspects. Most social services are publicly funded but performed by non-statutory organisations. The supply of services therefore depends on the relation between local policies and local organisations and on the traditional aims and specialisation of these groups. Independent of largely unchanged welfare policies and rigid full-time work contracts, the number of two-earner couples with children grew during the 1990s and is now equal to the number of two-earner couples without children (Eurostat 2002). In addition, the number of inactive and unemployed women who wish to work is among the highest in Europe (Rubery et al 2001, 17). There are large differences in female labour market participation according to educational background, and the educational attainment level of women crowds out the effects of children (Eurostat 2002). The political responses to growing female labour market

participation in Italy continue on the road of ambiguity. Today, intra-generational kin networks fill the gaps of the Italian welfare system as the most important and reliable source for economic as well as other types of support. Because familialism has resulted in a failure to support new family forms, not only various groups of women, but also young adults and elderly persons are referred to the social and economic aid of close relatives. The increase in female employment has reopened deep political conflicts as it challenges the most fostered family paradigm of family self-sufficiency and subsidiarity. The definition of what constitutes a family or a household is at stake, although the subject is not central in the public political debate, and the political connection between service needs and working hours is weakly articulated. Instead, and as a response to the increasing number of divorces, new laws and services are under construction to strengthen the rights and obligations of both parents in the event of dependent children. Future outcomes depend on how political actors decide to interpret causes of and solutions to the problems of economic state deficits, extreme low birth rates and the actual existence of new types of families.

In Germany, changes in political majorities show how women's issues have been emphasised over the last thirty years. The left-centre governments of the 1970s supported gender equality in the labour market while the centre-right orientation of the 1980s favoured the idea of women as occupying a special place in society. The reunification of Germany demanded compromises in certain policy areas. For instance, the extended supply of care services was a response to rising female employment rates and demands for free abortions, and allowed a rejection of the latter. Attempts to modernise the notion of women's specific pursuits were made through a combination of increased flexibility in the labour market and the recognition of service needs for employed women. The introduction of a 'baby year' in 1986, based on employment but at a relatively low substitution level, together with pension points to reward caring years at home, mirror not only ideological conflicts between political parties. It also reflects the ambivalence among German feminists' conflicting goals of individual independence through employment and the upgrading of domestic activities. Making domestic work economically visible through housewife salaries and economic substitutions for care of close relatives could raise the status of family work without involving women in employment. The political emphasis on family solidarity was further reduced with the introduction of a care-insurance fund for elderly in 1995. In 1996 in Germany universal

childcare on a part-time basis for children in the age group 3 to 6 years was introduced and taxation for short part-time work was adjusted to ameliorate components of social security. Like in Italy, social services in general are publicly funded but performed by local branches of non-statutory organisations. Between the years 1996 and 2000 the German employment rate grew faster for women than for men (Rubery et al, 2001) and the growth of the number of two-earner families with children is especially striking (Eurostat 2002). Educational level has a strong impact on female employment in Germany and the main reason for the increase in female employment is the growing number of highly skilled young women who enter the labour market. The introduction of universal childcare may have strengthened the effect. As such, access to childcare may have inspired a move away from a full-time breadwinner/full-time carer family model towards a full-time breadwinner/part-time work and part-time carer model. Still, the number of cohabiting working mothers is below that of cohabiting working women without children. The male breadwinner household is continuously strongly supported in financial terms by the German institutional system and, as stated by Daly (2000b, 82), the German state has manifested a clear position: care for family members is principally a private matter. Rather than supporting the idea of gender equality in the labour market through the expansion of social services, flexible female employment fits well with employers' preferences for job-sharing and non-permanent patterns of employment to match trade conditions.

According to Ostner (2001), changing marriage and family behaviour in Germany has not caused moral panic among Germans but is perceived as indicators of an ongoing cultural modernisation. An increasing plurality of living arrangements put further pressure on privileges attached to marriage and families. Similar to Italy, it remains to be seen how German politics choose to respond to continuing large income inequalities between men and women and to changing behaviour in family formation. In a situation where growing numbers of women wish to remain in the labour market, marriage and birth rates will sink, or remain low, as long as family status and the maintenance of traditional gender roles are given greater political and legal importance than women's relationship to the labour market.

The increase in female employment in Sweden in the 1970s manifested a strong division of labour by gender, in which the majority of women were concentrated to the public and the private service sphere of the labour market. The right to reduce working hours for parents of small children was

introduced in 1979. Over the years, suggested and realised proceedings in labour market and social policies have been continuously contested and debated in all spheres of the Swedish society. Despite the new family ideology that prescribed shared parenting in dual income families, on a more subtle normative level, women were continuously expected to take the main responsibility for care and household tasks and combine it with long part-time employment. Policies established to secure the replacement of income from formal employment are more prominent than policies to secure care services to dependent people. Because women continue to perform a considerable share of unpaid care work at the expense of paid work gender gaps arise in income distribution and is accumulated in pensions, unemployment and sickness benefits.

By the end of the 1990s gender employment and unemployment gaps in Sweden had almost closed and the female share of unemployed and inactive desiring employment was among the lowest in the EU (Rubery et al 2001). Likewise, the difference in employment rates between mothers and non-mothers, and high and low educated women was very small and childbearing was evenly distributed among women with different educational levels and rates of employment. The number and age of children influence women's employment rates and working hours but few leave the labour force because of motherhood. Parental leave has been modulated and prolonged several times to encourage men to make use of their rights to combine work with leave to care for their own children and so reduce the negative effects of children on women's work careers. The introduction of a maximum fee for collective childcare in the late 1990s awoke the slumbering ideological conflicts over family policy anew.

The Swedish situation at the turn of the century is both similar and different from that of Italy and Germany. Today there is a strong political emphasis on gender equality and a widespread moral acceptance for working mothers. Reality of family life has undergone important changes. Even if women still perform the major part of care and household chores, they do so less than previously and men have increased their proportional efforts in both areas. Prolonged education and demands for increased flexibility in the labour market are expected to cause decreasing birth rates as people postpone the arrival of the first child in wait for more secure and advantageous employment positions. As a consequence of the most recent recession the supply and distribution of public services in Sweden were downsized or transformed into semi-private organisational structures.

Efficiency programs to enhance performance in public services influence women's work in several aspects and the gendered effects of welfare policies at large and social policies in particular have anew brought social and gender inequalities to the fore. The concentration of women in public employment is regarded as either a position of relative strength, given the state support for female employment, or as an impasse because they would have greater possibilities for wage negotiations and professional advancement in the private labour market. At the heart of the matter lie the costs for care, how care is performed and by whom. Nonetheless, gender inequalities persist and controversies continue to concern different aspects of gender segregation and discrimination in the labour market.<sup>9</sup>

### *Prospects for the future*

The international dimension of debates concerned with gender equality that emerged in the 1990s helped to focus public attention on welfare issues in Germany, Italy and Sweden. Discussions on women's political empowerment and the economic gender gap were echoed through the media thanks to the Cairo and Beijing Conferences, but also as an effect of European integration. In the national academic and political discourses attention has steered towards the unequal distribution and effects of gender discrimination regarding social and political citizenship rights. The challenges of today are related to changing behaviour among younger women and to demands for increased economic autonomy and political influence for women. The growing tension between women's rising employment rates and increasing insufficiency and inadequacy in matters connected to the supply and organisation of care services has rendered both women's labour market participation and their traditional family role problematic. Recent demographic changes reflect sinking birth rates and a growing proportion of elderly, youth unemployment, new types of family formations such as lone parenthood, married couples without children and

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<sup>9</sup> The most prominent are the relation between income structures and gender pay gaps, the gender segregated labour market, women's working hours and working conditions, individual costs for care services, care obligations and the division of labour within households. Growing numbers of women reporting sick is taken as an indication of increased workloads due to organisational cutbacks with increasing workloads for employees. Austerity policies make employment and family obligations incompatible for both women and men. From opposite political positions voices are raised in support of the individual's right to choose more freely between employment and care, some of which hold that gender differences are oppressed.

single elderly, all of which have spurred political discussions about systems of social protection and conditions for female employment.

Whereas birth rates previously have been positively related to women's possibilities to stay out of the labour market, a reversed relationship is true for today's Western welfare societies. With few exceptions, countries with the highest female employment rates today also have the highest birth rates. Regardless of whether political goals and policies support a line of gender differences or of equality between men and women, issues of obligations and rights to care (or be taken care of) for children and elderly are central. If women are to engage in the labour market, who will care for children and elderly? If women are to perform family care, how should they be compensated? How are individual autonomy and care needs among elderly best met, by referring them to the resources of close relatives or to collective care services? What are men's rights and responsibilities in care issues? Other central themes are the preconditions for young adults to enter the labour market and establish their own households and how social and geographical inequalities should be handled politically and administratively.

Today, the differences between the three countries lie in the strength of the relationship between the state, the market and the family as well as in the ways policy making has responded to organised feminist demands and to changing value orientation and behaviour, in particular among women. To be sure, to allow for legal and normative shifts to occur, collective actions and considerable efforts from women's groups have been indispensable. Male dominated national parliaments, labour unions, employer's organisations and other organised interest groups are to be convinced of the democratic and economic benefits to be gained by increasing women's individual rights and evening out gender inequalities. The speed and direction of policy changes with impact on gender relations vary largely between the three countries. Across the national political spectra, increased female employment rates are interpreted as signs of increased gender equality, alternatively as an effect of a growing female individualism or as reduced purchasing power in the former male breadwinner family. New "family friendly policies" are suggested in order to resolve the tension between employment and caring. As the definitions of the causes of the socio-economic "crisis" vary with national contexts, institutional settings, and power relations, so do the proposed solutions. The rise in female employment is seen by some as a result of economic stress in families with children; tax reductions, family benefits or care vouchers are from

conservative political views regarded as more appropriate policy measures to alleviate economic stress and to encourage women to choose family work ahead of wage work. From leftwing and liberal political quarters, gender neutral possibilities to engage in care responsibilities without losing employment or being compensated at low replacement levels are desired.

### ***Gender Dimensions of Welfare States***

Within mainstream welfare state research patterns of successful social, political and economic strategies of welfare policy tools have been detected and analysed, as have policy measures that have failed or produced unintended consequences. In general, welfare studies have not discussed possible gender effects of policies and mainstream theorising has mostly ignored feminist writings on the topic. More recent studies provide support for the conclusion that, despite more or less prominent variations in welfare state designs, economic and social aspects of gender hierarchies and inequalities exhibit similar patterns across country-specific settings. Albeit the similarity of cross-national patterns, it is suggested here that they occur in different national cultural, political and juridical contexts and display important variations in size and import for women as individual citizens and political actors. Variations in behaviour and value orientation between men and women, between different groups of women and between individuals and institutional structures also indicate varying types of conflicts at different societal levels.

Social and economic ideas and theories that rested on functionalist notions about role differentiation and the family dominated the post-war period. Through the lens of academic functionalist theories male and female roles in society came to be interpreted as complementary, 'different but equal'. The function and survival of the family and of society at large was theoretically defined as relying on a necessary interdependence among its members, which contributed to family stability, and to the social preservation of shared norms and values (Parsons 1942, see also Marshall 1994). These and similar conclusions struck a note with the dominating groups within both conservative and socialist parties. But, as argued by Marshall (1994, 41), separating women from economic processes, which was inherent to functionalist theory, not only underestimated or even ignored, the economic import of women's wage labour. It also neglected the political and economic implications of domestic labour and hence, women's role in the family

became one of mainly cultural or normative import. To hold that women fulfil a necessary and complementary role in a complex, structurally differentiated cultural system facilitated the theoretical and political renunciation of women as a subordinated group, for which other theoretical and political rules than those associated with men were appropriate and applicable. Alternative micro-economic interpretations of women's economic position in relation to men were delivered by human capital theory, in which men's and women's preferences were explained as guided by free and rational choices that would achieve the largest individual economic gains and that would best promote the needs of all family members. The growth in female labour force participation rates from the 1960s and onwards led mainstream sociologists to focus on the presumed strains married women experienced when combining wage labour with their roles as wives and mothers, ideologically constructing working mothers as a social problem. Both economic and social theories and normative political expectations on families, and particularly on women, identified women's difficulties to combine work and care responsibilities as individual role conflicts. However, little or no account was taken of the impact of conditions for women's employment.

Central to the majority of feminist theories in the 1970s and 1980s were discussions about the relationships between public and private spheres, production and reproduction, and the possible routes to individual autonomy freed from dependence on male protection. The presumed impact of welfare policies on women diverged markedly, from interpretations of policies working as vehicles for male exploitation of women to the identification of the state as exercising liberating functions in freeing women from dependence on male incomes (Daly 2000b, 2-3). According to Hirschmann and Liebert (2001, 6) one reason that feminist theories were marginalised is that arguments and conclusions drawn were seen as normative and too universal or categorical in their claims and therefore not practical or useful. Another important explanation is that the majority of gender studies were conducted within single national contexts and therefore limited in their theoretical and empirical conclusions. A less glamorous but nevertheless vivid hypothesis is that feminist scholarship and their representatives ran into suspicion and disapproval because of existing normative implications, or even misogynous, that were built-in into dominating social, political and economic theories and into social relations within the academy and politics.

With reference to the post-war course of events in Germany, Italy and Sweden, the points of departure for feminist theories and political claims differed not only in historical experiences but also in the understanding of what makes a welfare state "women-friendly" (Hernes 1987). The limits for public intervention through social and labour market policies and the question of whether the state should protect mothers from the labour market or support their entrance into paid work became national topics for feminist scholarship in these and other countries. Gender and citizenship were increasingly connected to the links between women's exclusion from active democratic citizenship and their inclusion as mothers, and frameworks for gender equality with competing visions were developed (Pateman 1989, Skocpol 1995, Phillips 1991, Lister 1997). On a political level the identification and recognition of gender differences created links to inequalities but as discussed above, the national political agendas consisted of very different power relations and of qualitatively different understandings of the area of welfare policy intervention with reference to women. The implemented changes in social policies reflect both power relations within each country and the normative understanding of what constitutes gender inequalities or specific female needs.

#### *Welfare regimes and gender regimes*

From a gender perspective and related to efforts to connect feminist theories to mainstream spheres of theoretical and empirical research, Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) has been very influential. In analysing how social citizenship as individual rights to economic welfare and security have been defended historically, and their likely development within different welfare states, Esping-Andersen traces the interaction between political institutions and class relations in national policy strategies for decommodification in a large number of democratic, Western capitalist countries. The concept of decommodification is tied to the political power inherent in political and social citizenship and defines the extent to which states liberate individuals from the operation of market forces by means of for instance pension systems, sickness insurance or unemployment benefits and strengthen their leverage in the market. In short, Esping-Andersen compares state – market relations in a large number of democratic, industrialised countries, taking into account eligibility rules and substitution levels of a number of social policies and their effects on social

stratification. He shows that welfare policies and social policies exhibit important national differences but that groups of countries share certain components which render them qualitatively similar in their social policies and in the socially stratifying outcomes. The resulting three types of welfare state regimes are first, the conservative welfare regime type (exemplified by among others Germany and Italy) is characterised by its close link between performance and status segmentation, with social rights delivered through strong occupationally segregated and corporatist traits in the social security systems. The second regime type consists of social democratic welfare regimes (predominantly the Scandinavian nations). In these countries there is an emphasis on the primacy of full employment, universalism in social policies with high levels of benefit equality. The state plays a strong role in the integration of social and economic policy. The third type is the liberal welfare states (Anglo-Saxon countries). These regimes are work-oriented and residual with a minimised and highly selective state. While means-tested benefits compensate for failures in the labour market for the poor, a privatised and market based social insurance system is available for the working middle-class. Because this text concentrates on Germany, Italy and Sweden the liberal regime type is left aside in the analyses.

While Sweden fits into the social democratic regime type as identified by Esping-Andersen quite easily, the clustering of Germany and Italy into the same typology has provoked objections. It has been argued that there are such qualitative political and institutional differences between Germany and Southern Europe, particularly when it comes to political culture and welfare policies and their institutions, that they call for a fourth, Mediterranean, model (Leibfried 1992, Ferrera 1996, Rhodes 1997, Trifiletti 1999). In his most recent book Esping-Andersen (2000, 90, 93-94) contends that the similarities are imposing. Country variations within each typology are a matter of degree of political power, national economy and generosity in benefit levels, and therefore differences are quantitative rather than qualitative. In this work it is held that there are indeed important differences between Germany, Italy and Sweden that largely influence women's possibilities to achieve individual autonomy but does not set as its prime goal to confirm or falsify Esping-Andersen's typology. Instead the focus has been set on the hypothesis that attitudes to gender relations to a certain degree conform to national policies. Changes in value orientation, in particular among women, provoke political responses that make not only

national differences in institutional structures visible but also illustrate divergent notions of the conditions for women's citizenship rights.

A combination of the advantages and the critique of the implications of Esping-Andersen's initial approach and conceptual tools used to study gender made it possible for feminist scholars to break into and take part in a larger debate about the purposes and the gendered effects of policies operating in different welfare states. Among the advantages are the comparative ambition, the focus on citizenship rights as mediated through decommodifying social rights, the emphasis on stratifying effects of social policies and their historical roots in power relations between different groups as expressed in political influence on welfare policies. The critique has concerned the gender blindness in the analysis of decommodification through the neglect of the normative bias in welfare policies that produce differences in men's and women's access to social rights. As noted by Lewis in her critique of Esping-Andersen's conceptual tools: "women disappear from the analysis when they disappear from labour markets. Yet consideration of the private/domestic is crucial to any understanding of women's position because historically women have gained welfare entitlements by virtue of their dependent status within the family as wives, the justification being a division of labour perceived to follow 'naturally' on their capacity for motherhood." (1992, 161). Several studies show that gender relations cut across the three systems of welfare capitalism because the state-family nexus is different from the links between the state and the market (Hobson 1990, Lewis 1993, 1997b, Sainsbury 1994, Duncan and Edwards 1997). Other studies have discussed how welfare regimes affect different groups of women (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999). Jane Lewis examines the categorisation of welfare regimes from the perspective of the gendered division of work and argues that the idea of the male breadwinner family model cuts across established types of welfare regimes. Over time the model has been modified in different ways and to different degrees in particular countries (1992). The breadwinner model is appreciated because it underlines the gendered consequences of the public/private divide. The drawback is that it tends to reduce the development of social policies and gendered socio-economic inequalities to the male breadwinner norm as the single decisive factor for women's subordination. However the links between various types of gender gaps, welfare policies and individual rights call for more thorough analyses (see Sainsbury 1999, see also Lewis 1997a, Sassoon 1997, Jenson 1997, Orloff 1997, Michel 1997). Considering the

gendered social and economic inequalities created by specific welfare regimes in which women are "pre-commodified" as dependent family members, the capacity for individuals to form and maintain autonomous households has been suggested as an alternative tool in the analysis of gender inequalities (Orloff 1993, Mahon 2001).

By virtue of the by now extensive empirical body of evidence, showing a shift towards a feminisation of poverty<sup>10</sup> while a growing numbers of women enter the labour force, the gender segregating factors in political spheres and in the shaping of labour market and social and family policies are at the centre for feminist theorists. Because the most rewarding social rights are achieved through full-time and long-term employment the problem with the concept of decommodification is the difficulties women encounter when trying to find and keep good enough jobs. The conditions for women's wage work converge where the treatment of care in welfare policies intersects with demand factors in the labour market. As shown by Daly (2000a) in a cross national comparison of relationships between welfare policies and female employment, national variations in women's labour market participation profiles seem to depend on the demand and supply of the labour force coupled with welfare policies' tendency to favour or impede female employment. In countries where demand factors are strong women participate and show continuance in their participation pattern (e.g. Canada and the USA). When coupled with policies that facilitate female labour market involvement (e.g. Scandinavian countries, Finland, France), a similar pattern emerges. But when policies are inconsistent, as in Germany, or render female employment difficult, as is the case in Italy, female employment figures are low with a strong pattern of interruption in employment histories. Attention has been called to the influence of the institutionalised role of the family in national family policies and the stratifying and segregating effects of social and labour market policies on gender-related arrangements. In particular the interdependence between wage work and caring work has been emphasised. Both are relevant to the social rights of employed women as well as to those women who perform unpaid care and household work.

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<sup>10</sup> A major qualitative shift in poverty has drawn attention to mature welfare states. The feminisation of poverty, predominantly among elderly women due to the cumulative impact of low incomes, shorter work lives and longer life spans, and the "infantilization" (child-poverty) (Mushaben 2001, 198) of poverty due to working-poor families or lone motherhood has drawn attention to family policy, previously overlooked or receiving only scant attention.

Gendering aspects of decommodification are not only related to wage work but also to family policies and expectations on women to perform unpaid care. An additional dimension in welfare policies that has been suggested is the potential of full economic recognition to in-family care. As such, this type of labour would not be directly related to work performance in the labour market and serve to liberate women from dependency on male breadwinners or public subsidies due to lone motherhood (Knjin 1994). In the public political discourse in Germany, Italy and Sweden, organised groups have recurrently recommended the introduction of care or housewife wages as an alternative way to restructure the social division of labour. The purpose has been to redress the imbalance between paid and unpaid work and so decrease women's dependence on incomes from husbands, relatives or social allowances. These organised demands have been more forceful in Germany and somewhat weaker represented in Italy and Sweden. As it appears to be an impasse politically and because the purpose of most feminists is to disentangle women from the almost symbiotic connection between womanhood and care in welfare policies, today the proposal has few advocators in the feminist academic field. Currently the main questions are who should be entitled to care wages, at what substitution level and what should the duration period be? Women's disadvantaged economic situation is predominantly regarded as derived from their subordinated position in the labour market. As stated by Fraser (1994) a care wage would accommodate gender differences as long as no pressure is put on men to change their behaviour and do primary care work. Care wages would improve women's economic situation only marginally, as it seems difficult to argue for a substitution level much higher than levels for minimum income. In line with the ideological rhetoric around family values and female virtues, there are few political objectives to support female economic independence through a benefit that has little or no connection to labour market performances. Furthermore, care wages risk producing ambiguous policies for women who wish to combine family and wage work. Individuals who would opt for a care wage would most likely loose labour market attachment for a longer period of time and encounter structural difficulties to re-enter. As women are the most likely receivers it would augment the risk for discrimination and further gender segregation in the labour market and in the public political sphere.

Several writers have suggested a theoretical transformation of care responsibilities into a public policy issue as an alternative way to accentuate

women's legally enlisted dependence on husbands or families and to create a caregiver-parity model (Fraser 1994, 1997, see also Hirschmann and Liebert 2001). Another way to go is to incorporate the concept of defamilialisation to complement the concept of decommodification. Defamilialisation, parallel to the concept of individual autonomy, has been suggested to theoretically encircle and politically claim a clarification of public versus private responsibility in connection to the relationship between the individual and the social policies of different welfare states (Lister 1995 and 1997, Lewis 1997a, Tronto 2001). This approach has also received some support among mainstream welfare state scholars (Rhodes 1997, Boje and Leira 2000, Esping-Andersen 2000, Korpi 2000). The purport of defamilialisation relates to familialism and the institutionalised role of the family in welfare regimes. Familialism describes women's pre-commodified status within the internal interdependence among family members (Esping-Andersen 2000, 45). In their welfare policies Germany, Italy and Sweden support different family forms and the political institutionalisation of concepts such as "motherhood", "fatherhood" and "childhood" vary accordingly. So do interpretations of the meaning and content of independence and dependency.

The concept of individual autonomy originates from a liberal tradition in which the individual is ascribed the right to determine his or her own life. Hence, independence and influence is core and one of the main problems is how to overcome structural power differences between men and women. This view permeates large parts of the Swedish universalistic welfare policy. The Swedish welfare state includes women in the labour market and in politics. To alleviate the care burdens of families care is largely inserted into public policy and has achieved the status of an individual right. The supply of childcare services is guided by the combined need among dual-earning couples and by the objective to universalise children's right to care and education. By tying care needs to social rights, the provision of old age services are ruled by the ambition to reduce dependency on relatives or social assistance. This involves both increased public spending as well as a displacement of the frontier that divides the public from the private sphere. Arguments have been developed around cost efficiency to demonstrate that new types of expenditures result in a more efficient, sustainable and equitable welfare state. Although public care institutions are politically contested in Sweden, the public economic responsibility for a high provision of care is not.

The German and Italian welfare regimes are familialistic, that is, in line with the principle of subsidiarity; most welfare and care issues are referred to the family with residual social assistance delivered on grounds of family failure rather than on market failure (Saraceno 1998). The family is ascribed the legal and moral responsibility to secure the economic wellbeing of its members, including adult children and elderly. Social assistance, for example, will not be granted to adult children or elderly parents if other family members can support them. From the legal obligations for family provided care follows a systematic discouragement of public provision of care services and assumed family wages makes family transfers redundant. It is in this sense, among others, that Esping-Andersen rejects the notion of Italy as belonging to a fourth qualitatively different regime type. In Germany familialism is proactively supported through family wages and transfers. In Italy, passive and underdeveloped family policies strengthen the familialistic features. Because women's welfare derives from family dependency, and family responsibilities restrict their ability to gain full economic independence via work, female independence necessitates defamilialisation of welfare obligations. Suggested reforms, for instance tax reductions, family benefits or care vouchers, may hence support a policy line of "re-familialisation" rather than facilitate female autonomy through employment and a transformation of care into issues of public responsibility.

#### **Values, attitudes and politics**

Values and behaviours among individuals or groups in different welfare states are not only guided by restrictions in national welfare policies, distinctive characters of heterogeneity and cultural expressions must also be taken into account. This implies that nation-specific cultural patterns anticipate and co-vary with the design of welfare policies, creating a far-reaching normative acceptance of prescribed gender roles. In an attempt to explain different patterns of gender relations and division of labour Pfau-Effinger has developed the concepts of gender culture, gender order and gender arrangement (Pfau-Effinger 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b, 2000). Whereas gender culture captures assumptions about what is considered to be normal or desired divisions of labour between men and women, gender order defines the institutionalised norms within formal organisations. Gender arrangements encircle gender relations within e.g. families or workplaces on an aggregated level as social practices and social action, structured within specific gender cultures and gender orders. The notion of culture could be

taken to suggest that some kind of free market of cultural expression exist, from which men and women can freely choose their identities and occupations. However, Pfau-Effinger argues that particular cultural models usually dominate over other, alternative models, and that specific cultural models are absorbed and woven into institutions as formalised proposals of expected behaviour. This means that many women in Germany and Italy agree to choose family work over waged labour and that the majority of Swedish mothers combine motherhood with long part-time employment because of a similar normative conformity. At the same time the connection between political power relations and welfare policy design imply a fixation of chosen values and norms into more permanent institutional structures, which limit peoples' ability to chose, thereby convincing them to act accordingly.

Pfau-Effinger's concepts of gender culture, gender order and gender arrangements encompass three dimensions of gender relations: culture, institutional structures and social actors but the notion of factors that produce social change remains underdeveloped. Cultural aspects of nationality can certainly not be ignored. Nevertheless, and as argued by Maynard (1995, 275), men and women are clearly subjects of traditions, norms and ideologies that differ between countries and over time, but the ways in which material processes influence the cultural practices available to individuals are of even greater importance. There is widespread evidence that growing numbers of women do not favour a pre-commodified status within the family and the welfare state, however it is also clear that not all women take up a male pattern of labour market participation. Rising female participation rates notwithstanding, the patterns of female employment between and within groups of countries remain stable (Daly 2000a). Age, educational level and home district influence women's labour market participation more than the presence of children (Rubery et al 2001). Cultural expressions of family values, "care cults" and "true man- and womanhood", are braided into welfare policies, material structures, knowledge and relationships. As such they may put different types of restrictions on the choices open to men and women with different social backgrounds and the integration of women into the labour market includes aspects of maintenance and reinforcement of differences between men and women but also of convergence and equality. Cultural practices, changing technologies, societal power relations and social and economic institutions influence each other and the power of each individual factor can only be analysed within a specific context.

In Sweden the perception of gender relations has been altered and today women constitute a strong force in the political sphere and in the labour market. Gender equality has been a conscious political project over the last thirty years but it has not taken place without conflicts. In short, the Swedish feminist movement has succeeded in drawing attention to specific policy issues with gendered implications via a tactic of "strategic essentialism" (Maynard 1995, 275), whereby organised groups of women have drawn attention to bonds of common experiences in order to mobilise their constituency politically.<sup>11</sup> While value orientations and behaviour, especially among women, have shifted towards a two-earner family model, welfare politics in Germany and Italy have undergone very little change. Still, the harsh economic realities of the 1990s and empirical evidence that present gendered social and economic inequalities and their accompanying public costs of both countries have worked as "social learning" (Pierson 2001, 453). As such an increased political and economic focus on the national economic costs for gendered socio-economic inequalities have provoked a certain discomfort and forced political actors to concede the results of earlier policies. The majority of mature welfare states and employers face similar problems, and imparity in gender relations is part of both the explanation to the crisis of the welfare state and of the solution. In this sense, demands on women's right to work have in part become acknowledged as an economic potential. Perhaps Rianne Mahon is right when she suggests that "...it is the consequences associated with the decline of the male breadwinner family that has forced mainstream theorists to begin to listen" (2001, 25) rather than a newfound appreciation of feminist claims. By detecting methods to reduce or abolish gender and class disparities regarding access to social rights parts of the welfare crisis may be lessened or solved. Thus, it seems that it is not only, or not primarily, feminist demands but rather needs for welfare state reforms that have influenced alternative political motives for revised or changed policies.

Gender inequalities are by no means uncontroversial issues on political agendas, however their aftergrowth has spurred mainstream theorists to start taking gender, political and social rights and family policies into account.

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<sup>11</sup> By using the concept of 'woman' (or worker or Afro-American etc.) as a unifying term rather than a unified one, various (e.g. feminist) groups may draw attention to socially constructed properties, qualities and attributes to which women (or other subordinated groups) have been historically bound. The object is to gather common experiences and to distillate the lowest least common denominator in order to politically collaborate and mobilise (Maynard 1995).

Ongoing negotiations about the content of social and labour market policies illustrate large variations in approaches to policy changes and are connected to re-definitions of what a family "is" and what the rights and duties of families and individuals are, or should be. They also mirror country-specific situations in which political representatives, employers, labour unions and academics are more or less involved in definitions of family values and morals and in discussion about what to expect from the family of the future.

The crucial issue is how particular national settings facilitate the emergence of reform efforts and on what terms. Demands on increased social spending and encouragement of female employment is supported by different groups and for particular reasons that often do not focus primarily on improved gender equality, but rather on possible ways to increase production and tax revenues and reduce social security costs for people on the verge of poverty. The most common strategy has been a strengthening of work incentives. When not combined with labour market policies that admit flexible working hours or set minimum wages, as in Italy, or with childcare facilities that are compatible with longer working hours, as in Germany, women will continuously find it difficult to combine family and wage work. One of the largest socio-political challenges, especially for the conservative regimes, is the raised demand for social provision to elderly and children. In this area, traditional dividing lines between public and private responsibilities clash with the call for the strengthening of citizenship rights and for public solutions to make the combination of work and family a feasible option. The distinct characteristics of the countries included in this study open up for nation specific discussions and strategies to meet challenges, such as growing demands for well-trained manpower, increasing female labour market participation and changes in age structures within the populations. In addition, issues of quite different features such as socio-economic effects from country-specific institutional structures, and political cultures have been raised.

Previous patterns of policy development inarguably have massive implications on the range of reforms possible in particular political settings (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2000, Pierson 2001). While national historical, cultural and normative traits are crucial in shaping social and economic policies, path-dependencies in the ways policies and their core institutional features are shaped leave them relatively unyielding to structural change. The term path-dependence refers to the way existing and more or less formalised, institutions and beneficiaries/voters adapt to previous

arrangements and make courses of political action hard to reverse or redesign and restructure. As argued by Pierson, processes of path-dependence have historical and cultural origins and constrain the range of reform initiatives that are politically plausible in a particular setting (2001). On a national level, the economic and political urgency to take closer looks at individual welfare as well as women's overall economic situations and employment conditions are influenced by international and national policies, the dynamics of economic and political power relations, already existing key programmatic arrangements and their institutional designs. Therefore introductions, changes, or modifications, of welfare policies have taken different routes in different countries.

The literature on welfare states tends to focus on national characteristics and international influences but pay no or little attention to variations within countries. The implementation of welfare policies is commonly the task of local authorities and it is reasonable to assume that emerging social needs are first identified on local political levels and reforms are often motivated by experiences and demands 'from below'. As shown in a number of studies, the process of policy-making is likely to vary not only between countries depending on socio-economic circumstances and historical experiences, political traditions and the configurations of economic and social agencies but also, for the same reasons, between regional and local levels (Hellman 1987, Duncan and Edwards 1997, Duncan 1998, Bergqvist et al 1999). In order to understand crucial aspects of social policy making in the restructuring processes of welfare policies in Germany, Italy and Sweden local dimensions in the contemporary period were investigated by interviewing local politicians in the period between 1999 and 2000 and by studying available local reports, statistics and policy programmes. The potential of local variations is closely related to the influence and dynamics of central politics. Also in this respect there are important differences between the three countries.

The polity structure, that is the form of government of a state or organisation, encourages different degrees of local reform initiatives. The degree of dispersion of political authority between national, regional and local levels affects the emergence of specific policy solutions that are adapted to local needs, local political majorities and public demands. As such, these may cherish and support specific features of culturally conditioned "desirable" forms of gender relations that motivate the persistence of status quo or policy changes. Whereas all three countries are

guided by a principle of local political autonomy Swedish egalitarian and universalistic welfare policies are largely centralised and force obligations upon municipalities from which they cannot withdraw. It is upheld with a relatively high geographical redistribution of economic resources. The within country variations are therefore comparatively small. The political reluctance or hesitation to support social services and the dispersed authority created by German federalism and Italian regionalism results in lower levels of economic redistribution, exhibit larger socio-economic variations and a higher recognition of social and cultural diversities and local practices. The tribute paid to social specificity supports the development of regional particularity and local diversity that opens up for the creation of local solutions to specific political issues.

The ISSP data show no or little geographical variance in attitude patterns within Germany, Italy or Sweden but, as stated previously, female employment patterns vary over regions especially in Italy. This is no doubt largely related to the local labour markets and to influences from local cultures and traditions that intermingle with political initiatives opposing or supporting certain behaviours. Welfare policies and institutional settings largely decide the freedom of action for women who want to engage in wage work. The legal, economic and political power relations between local and national political authorities may support or impede political innovations to adapt to new public demands. In addition, the occurrence of more or less well-established collaborations between local political representatives and representatives in the labour market or non-statutory organisations influence the preferences among local political agencies' and their room to manoeuvre. To break free from path-dependence requires group action that involves a high level of agreement, commitment and energy. Fragmented and diversified institutional settings may increase the possibilities for local political solutions to specific policy needs. But the encouragement of local cultural heterogeneity points towards difficulties to gather support for centralised reforms. In a centralised welfare system, like the Swedish one, local political majorities are more restrained in their reform ambitions, which forces them to co-operate in order to carry through political issues on a national level. In Germany and Italy the principle of subsidiarity allows for more freedom to recognise local practices but constrains local authorities to redesign social policies towards more generous models. The emergence of new or modified local and national policies will show if and on what terms

women's labour market participation is requested and if and how political institutions treat the forthcoming issue of care.

In the included texts of this thesis value orientations towards female employment are investigated. Rising female employment, its causes and preconditions, are contested political issues and attitude patterns among different social groupings suggest alternative policy solutions. As such they may be absorbed and modified by political parties of varying ideological affiliations. The first article investigates the relationship between age and attitudes towards female labour force participation. The second study compares attitudes between social groups and the effects of gender, educational background, the presence of children and individual labour market status on these. The third study depicts local political suggestions and the implied assumptions about gender roles and gender hierarchies in areas concerning women's access to the labour market and the liberation of families from care responsibilities.

### ***Summary of results***

#### *Article 1: Should mothers work? Age and attitudes in Germany, Italy and Sweden*

Departing from the assumption that welfare regimes exhibit nationally institutionalised normative understandings of preferred gender relations, people's attitudes to women's paid work are expected to mirror their national contexts. During the last thirty years welfare states have been exposed to new challenges in terms of changes in socioeconomic structures, increased educational levels, feminist movements and growing numbers of women in employment. As large numbers of young women successfully have entered, and more recently have come to remain in the labour market even after having children, variations in value orientations were expected to occur according to age and gender in each country. One question posed was how such changes in value orientations are matched by overall policy structures.

In order to detect changes in attitudes towards women's labour market participation questions about conditions for women's wage work and traditional gender divisions of labour were analysed. The results show a three-fold pattern that supports the thesis of welfare regimes as producing gendering relations and that the relations created inherit potential conflicts.

First, the large variations in value orientations between the countries correspond quite well to the gender regime of each welfare state. Whereas Germans, and to a lesser extent Italians, approve of a male breadwinner family, especially if it includes children, Swedes express a positive view towards dual-earner couples. Second, there are marked gender differences in attitudes. Overall, women are more in favour of female employment than men are. This is especially striking in the German case. Together these findings support the thesis that each welfare regime creates both specific patterns of gender relations, but also conflicts between men and women about the gendered division of labour within families. Third, younger citizens are more in favour of female labour market participation than are older persons. The friction between changing attitudes and the structures of political incentives is most obvious in Germany. In Italy the political definition of gender relations is less explicit but shows large gender inequalities in policy outcome. Young Italian women's attitudes differ from the attitudes of other age groups and to those of men the same age, indicating criticism of the gendered division of labour within the family as well as of the consequences of the loss of adequate national family and social policy. The Swedish example stands out as the most positive to female labour market participation among both men and women in all age groups but also presents the largest gender gap in attitudes towards women's paid work. The Swedish case indicates gender conflicts in which men withdraw from childcare and household responsibilities, something that women compensate through part-time work. It is concluded that the comparatively high gender equality in the Swedish labour market has not yet been transferred into the family and further, that the younger generations in the three countries are dependent on the bringing about of political and social changes that support increased gender equality in the family as well as in the labour market.

*Article 2: Gender and attitudes towards female employment in Germany, Italy and Sweden*

In the second article the dependent variable was changed to include questions about whether married women should work full-time, part-time or not at all before and after having children. The answers were analysed according to their distribution along the lines of gender, educational background, labour market status and the presence of children. The general picture of strong support for female employment in Sweden, and weaker and

more ambivalent attitudes in Germany and Italy changes when these groups of citizens are compared. The largest variations were found between the different categories of women. Labour market status and educational background seem to be among the most important influencing factors in Germany and Italy whereas again, only minor disparities were found between groups of Swedish women. Italian women, and in particular mothers, report the most negative attitudes towards female employment. While educational background strongly influences Italian women's attitudes positively, labour market status has only a weak effect. For German women however, both employment and educational background are strongly associated with their attitudes. Among the different groups of men, there are practically no variations in Sweden and Germany. In Italy, educational level, and in particular a university degree has the most forceful positive impact on both men's and women's attitudes towards women's labour market participation.

Despite large variations, there is a cross-national resemblance in valuation patterns. Because the three countries show substantial differences in welfare policies, composition of labour markets and in organisational and institutional arrangements, men and women are left with very different living conditions and possible life choices. The obvious effects of national welfare and labour market policies on women's employment rates discriminate not only between men and women but also between women from different social groups, which contributes to social and economic inequality among women. The mismatch between the structure of welfare policies promoting certain levels of female labour market participation on the one hand, and women's attitudes and access to paid work on the other, makes apparent the need for a political translation of public opinions into public policies. It also shows where conceivable conflicts may occur between men and women with family responsibilities.

### *Article 3: National policies, local policies and women's right to work*

Drawing on the historical developments of the three welfare states and on the results from the two previous studies the third study focuses on the emergence of new local policies that aim to support female employment or otherwise strengthen women's right to control their own lives.

The development of welfare policies is not only influenced by national and international interpretations of social and economic courses of events but

also by demands from ‘below’. The text emanates from the assumption that women’s opportunities to choose between family work and employment is not only restricted by national policies, attitudes and value traditions but also by cultures and value orientations that guide policies on the local level. Hence, the study is principally situated on a local level with references to a broader framing of national welfare policies. Germany, Italy and Sweden grant far-reaching regional and local sovereignty in decision making concerning social infrastructure. Because there are large differences in the degree of state guidance and control there are also important variations in the degree of local autonomy. For instance, the supply and content of compulsory schools are nationally regulated, however authority and responsibility may be either national, as in Italy, a federal matter as in Germany, or local as in Sweden. Apart from the obligation to organise a certain minimum supply of childcare services, decisions about what other social services that are to be offered are usually left to the local authorities. In order to capture signs of change or resistance in the local political comprehension of increasing work orientation among women in combination with the prospective of retained or changing national policy directives the following main questions are raised. How do local politicians in Germany, Italy and Sweden define local and national policy needs that support gender equality in terms of improvements that further female economic autonomy? What kind of assumptions about gender roles and care responsibilities are inherent in existing and suggested policies and what kind of assumptions about women’s right to full paid labour are implied?

The study makes use of Pfau-Effinger’s concepts of gender culture, gender order and gender arrangements and attempts to add a dimension of change. The latter is empirically investigated through the respondents’ opinions and interpretations of particular local circumstances and descriptions and interpretations of policy needs. In each country local politicians responsible for social provision in their municipalities were interviewed and responses analysed and compared. In addition to the differences between the countries in the construction of welfare policies there are obvious variations in local policy design and practical achievements within each country. For the local authorities the situation of public finances, local labour markets, peripheral policies and habitual patterns of institutional behaviour, e.g. ways of thinking about citizenship, gender relations, care responsibilities and employment play important roles in how social and family policies are adapted to actual social circumstances and events.

In spite of huge variations among the three countries, two factors emerge as common. First, political affiliation has a strong impact on how existing local social policies are executed and on potential suggestions for re-definitions of, and proposed changes in, national policy directions. Municipalities influenced or dominated by left-wing parties were more in favour of women's right to employment and more likely to regard care as a public and not a private responsibility. Municipalities influenced or dominated by right-wing parties emphasised the differences between gender roles and saw care as primarily a private responsibility, and hence as a female task. Regarding their view on the need for care institutions, they opted for market oriented solutions and opposed state-controlled public services. Second, the gender of the person in charge influenced the political favouring of measures addressing families (argued mainly by men) versus measures directed towards the securing of women's independence from husbands and state subsidies through paid labour (argued mainly by women). The relations between gender culture, gender order, and gender arrangements are hence not straightforward but interrelated in a complex pattern of power structures and social relations such as those between men and women, political parties, public and semi-public institutions, and the parts in the labour market. The usefulness of the concepts of gender culture, gender order and gender arrangement is limited when the conditions for transforming gender culture into new gender orders are not given and when they vary according to local preconditions. The findings reveal not only important variations in what is regarded as proper gender arrangements, gender (in)equality, public responsibilities and a just supply of social services that relieve the pressure on women with care responsibilities, or reduce dependence on family members. They also point at the significance of the governing effect of national policies on the local political liberty of action. In a period of renegotiations, restructuration and changes of welfare policies as was the case at the time of the interviews, clearly different approaches were suggested by local politicians to modify social policies in order to facilitate an adaptation to new circumstances and new public demands. In relation to the degree to which social actors are tied to, or more autonomous from, national policies they face different possibilities to alter or reinforce existing gender orders.

In Germany most respondents referred to changes in female behaviour and agreed that the best way for women to reduce their dependence within marriage is through employment rather than through benefits derived

through marriage or motherhood. To justify the low economic priority given to the further expansion of childcare services the importance of motherhood was emphasised, reducing female employment to a necessary evil for women with no other economic alternative. Women 'working of their own will' were referred to private solutions for their care requirements. Actors with demands for a more open-minded approach to the relationship between female employment and family responsibilities were described as running into extensive obstacles while making their way into decision making arenas, political institutions and their administrations as well as labour unions and employers. The variations in these difficulties seem to be crucial for understanding how care facilities were organised and distributed. There are signs that indicate that geographical areas with a rapidly growing service sector and few but declining heavy industries will be forerunners in combining female employment with more extensive social care services.

Italy exhibits the lowest homogeneity in the pattern of female employment. It is also the country with the largest geographic and socio-economic differences, producing a weak and fragmented span of social policies and political ambitions regarding gendered patterns of social inequalities. The negative demographic trend has caused an alarming situation concerning the rapidly increasing proportion of elderly. The political reactions on both national and local levels exhibit both economic preoccupations and strong ethical concerns. Voices raised in support of gender equality and female employment find themselves in the crossfire between defenders of traditional family values and actors that do not directly resist female labour market participation per se, but see no possibility to increase public expenditure for child and elderly care. The solution chosen by most local authorities is to select specific groups such as poor families, physically disabled children or demented elderly, and work out specific local policy programmes in support of these particular groups. In this sense, individual social rights have become more extensive and to some degree reduced the familialistic aspect in social policies. The most striking difference between the towns included was whether the political emphasis for public support was put on groups at risk for social exclusion or on middle-class groups that over the last ten years have experienced a decrease in economic purchasing power.

The Swedish case differs in many respects from the German and the Italian cases. With welfare policies directed towards full employment for both men and women, and local politicians overwhelmingly in agreement that women's employment reduces gender inequalities, the main issues discussed

in the article were how to reduce gender inequalities in the labour market and in households. With regard to social policies variations were somewhat subordinated to political affiliation though geographical situation did play a certain role. Two main paths towards increased gender equality in the labour market crystallised but the span of alternative policies or target groups was not nearly as wide as in the other two countries. The leftwing argument was to regard public employment as less threatening to already attained victories, and as a better platform for collective claims than would be possible within the private sector. In addition, a general reduction of working hours and stronger "push - pull factors" to convince men to take a larger part in care and household work were suggested. The rightwing proposal suggested compensation for care to be independent of labour market participation, which would justify a direct financial redistribution to families with small children. In addition the privatisation of care services in order to increase women's influences in the labour market was advocated.

### ***Conclusion***

Beyond doubt, welfare policies play an important, even decisive role in women's and men's opportunity structures and life chances throughout their lives. Changes in value patterns and attitudes towards female employment, the de facto increasing numbers of women in the labour force and changes in household structures, have attracted much attention since both attitudes and behaviour may collide with institutionalised presumptions about gender roles. Hopefully the results of the twofold purpose that has guided these studies contribute to a growing insight into some of the institutional mechanisms that propel and guide the shaping and design of gender relations in different welfare states. Whereas the first objective, to examine how the effects of political ideologies and welfare political models are reflected in attitudes towards women's paid work among different groups, was constructed according to a quantitative approach, the second objective was based on a more qualitative approach. With the aim to study policy dynamics in relation to changing value orientations, and to track the emergence of alternative policies and their intended target groups, local political implementers in each country were interviewed.

The overall conclusion from all three studies is that the ways in which certain patterns of gender relations occur are closely related to the designs of national welfare policies. Still, within the groups of women and men factors

such as age, educational attainment levels and family status are important or even decisive for attitudes towards female labour market participation. The extent to which attitudes correspond to actual behaviour seems, again, largely to be a matter of public policy, an assumption that brings us to the results of the third of the included studies. The importance of national policies for the scope given to men and women in relation to family obligations and paid work notwithstanding, very little attention has been granted the impact of design and implementation of social policies on local levels. While all three studies point at large national differences in welfare policies and at converging patterns of value orientations, especially among women, the comparison of local policy levels reveals important variations within each country. These variations concern the quantity of policy measures as well as the quality, that is the political implications for gender, of socio-economic situation, alternative political majority and historical and cultural heritage.

Obviously, value orientations do not entirely correspond to directions of national policies, nor do national policies automatically accompany changes in value orientations. The combined results of the included studies point at gender conflicts on individual as well as on local and national levels. While the majority of German and Italian men defend the male breadwinner family model, women increasingly question it. Sweden presents a reverse pattern with men as the strongest advocates of the dual breadwinner family, largely supporting women's full-time labour market participation. Swedish women on the other hand, seek a combination of wage work and family responsibilities through reduced working hours. The patterns of gender arrangements conflict to some extent with the value patterns in each country. The presence of homemaker mothers in Germany and Italy has its advocates, especially among men, while women are more positive to combining work with having children. Although the explanations for this are many, cultural components, the male dominated German and Italian labour markets, the subsidiarity principle and its familialistic policies carry great weight and can be seen as the most central. The positions of German and Italian policies, that female employment is regarded as a private rather than a public matter, create very different conditions for women depending on their care responsibilities, job opportunities and individual qualifications. For women in low-wage occupations, the costs for care services and time juggling may exceed the direct gains from being in employment. Still, the value orientations among unqualified women outside the labour market

indicate that many would prefer to combine at least part-time work with having children. This is particularly true for Italian and less so for German women. Social class is not unimportant in relation to value patterns. Whereas attitudes among German men do not vary with educational background, the value patterns among both German women and Italian men and women do.

The Swedish situation contrasts with the German and Italian. In Sweden, the work-line in combination with encompassing social services and a strong normative and legal defence of gender equality conceal patterns of inequalities that tend to occur in the labour market as well as within families with care responsibilities. Women's response to labour market demands and family obligations is to argue for reduced number of hours in wage work in order to make employment compatible with having children. Despite the egalitarian outlook, housework and childcare have largely remained 'women's work' and still shape women's conditions for participation in the labour market. Policy interventions aimed at preventing social and gender inequalities, such as the substantial economic redistribution to individuals, and care services, are increasingly accompanied not only by the normative expectations on women to work but also on men to take up care responsibilities. As such they clearly reduce class differences in women's job opportunities and hopefully will contribute to more positive attitudes towards men's family work.

Local variations in policy formulations, large in Italy and less pronounced in Germany and Sweden, illustrate the different political emphasises placed on the maintenance or reinforcement of what is defined as local or national cultural traditions. As such, the within-country variation indicates not only that the degree of state control versus local autonomy is relevant for the outcome of local social policies. It also shows that both national and local policy formulations are important in deciding whether policies should emphasise the maintenance or alteration of gender relations. While such choices and decisions also include the acceptance or rejection of national, and even local, differences in definitions of citizenship rights, they point at the inherent relativity of the concept. This is true both in terms of influences in processes of policymaking and in preconditions and access to work and social rights as well as to services and their costs within each country. While local political self-determination is combined with centralised policies in all three countries, local policy planning and initiatives may be used to discuss the possible future of welfare policies at large and social policies in particular for Germany, Italy and Sweden. Specific local labour market

structures, policy traditions and the aims of national and local social and labour market policies strongly influence the possibilities open to inhabitants in the area. The availability of and access to vocational training programmes, higher education and jobs, the opening hours of certain administrative offices and access to and costs for social services all act to influence how women's employment can be combined with other responsibilities.

As argued by Ferrera (1998, 94), in under-institutionalised Italy strong social and economic groups make use of the rhetoric of subsidiarity by defending regional political, administrative and cultural variations in order to preserve social diversity. The lack of state institutions that protect social rights has led to the development of a particularism that allows for large variations in citizenship rights between social groups and regions. The strong emphasis on family responsibilities and subsidiarity is embraced and criticised at the same time. At the heart of the matter lies the issue of whether and how the welfare state should support employment or protect traditional family structures and values. Powerful local and national pressure groups, mainly on the political right, demand political measures to make access to social rights and services, and social assistance to the very poor contingent on employment. At the same time these groups argue for increased economic support to family breadwinners in order to maintain a familistic social policy. The consequences of such policies may further increase the differences in opportunity structures for women. Single mothers, immigrants and single Italians will find it more difficult to make ends meet as they find themselves in a Catch 22 situation, in which the informal labour market offers the only economic solution. Married women, living with husbands with average incomes run the risk of seeing their possibilities to enter the labour market further reduced. Due to the general cultural adherence to the principle of subsidiarity and familialistic values, the demands of feminist groups' and political parties for a larger degree of universalism in social policies have not been very successful in inserting their claims into public debates or political parties' agendas.

Though a similar line of policies operates in Germany, a conditional reduction of gender inequalities has taken place through the introduction of part-time childcare services and a larger selection of part-time jobs. Still, care remains largely a private issue and female employment a private choice with better labour market opportunities more available in some regions than in others. Some aspects of women's interests have become institutionalised in local gender equality offices. Among the advantages with this type of

offices are the official acknowledgement and the distribution of public economic resources to issues connected to gender inequalities. These offices are manned by civil servants and their possibility to communicate specific social needs as specific risk groups or exert political pressure on the local political level is largely dependent on the willingness among established political majorities, employers and unions to initiate and cultivate a continuing dialogue. The depoliticization of women's demands through the introduction of gender equality offices is thus one of the disadvantages associated with their existence. While constituting a resource for many women in need of advice and assistance with issues ranging from legal help, protection from violence and more practical assistance in their every day lives, the offices are constrained in their abilities to channel these needs and demands and influence politically.

In Sweden, female employment is already high and decommodification from the labour market is connected to care responsibilities at comparatively high replacement rates for both men and women. Public support for women's labour market participation is strong, as is the perception that female employment is conditioned by the existence of good quality and publicly subsidised social services. The disparities between female and male incomes per capita are smaller than in most countries and women have a comparatively high parliamentary representation. As observed by Pierson (2001) the policy adjustments and economic curtailment following the financial crisis in the 1990s in Sweden did not include reductions in costs for wages or social services as their main goal. Rather, the furtherance of full employment was underlined, as was the effort to make public institutions and services more cost-efficient. There was hence very little possibility to question women's right to work or individual rights to social services. Instead the major debate revolved round service quality, individual freedom of choice and the advantages and disadvantages associated with publicly versus privately organised services. Issues of segregation along gender and class lines developed as a result of the demands based on diversity in the supply of social services. The connection between subsidised childcare services and labour market participation has anew been called into question. Predominantly rightwing arguments in defence of traditional family values have called attention to the absence of economic support to families with small children, which are unrelated to labour market performance.

National cultural values and traditions, such as the ones discussed here, are used as arguments in policy-making that aims to protect national, or even

local, integrity and to call attention to, or reject demands for reform policies that would include new groups of citizens. The analyses included here have illustrated the political dilemma inherent in the "culturalisation" of gender or other social relations. While cultural values and practices are constitutive of gender, material processes influence the cultural practices that are available to individuals. Cultural values may be incorporated into legal and formal institutional structures that either encourage or restrain certain behaviours and actions without regard to existing inequalities or individual rights. The politicization of culture as values that "exist" as natural elements within a nation state or social grouping runs the risk of demanding recognition by relativising or neglecting injustices that emanate from oppressive structures that are built into concepts of specific cultural expressions. As such, cultural politics may become detached from social politics and provide a basis for the creation and development of political, social and economic inequalities.

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