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The Care of Children:

A Cross-National Comparison of Parents' Expectations and Experiences

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ABSTRACT

As a point of departure, this thesis is motivated by the big changes which have taken place in most Western European countries since the 1970s, with an increase in female labour market participation and, to some extent, men's increased share of the domestic work. There is also a debate as to whether France, having a fairly extensive family support, should be categorised as closer to the Scandinavian countries or together with countries with more restrictive family policy such as Italy and Germany, and thus belonging to the conservative regime cluster as defined by Gösta Esping-Andersen.

The major topic of this thesis concerns what expectations parents have on childcare and how they experience the combination of care of children and participation in paid work. Two studies, based on quantitative macro-data, analyse and compare differences in primarily women's employment in relation to family policy measures. The studies concern in addition to France and Sweden, also Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom. The results indicate that the extensive family support system brings France closer to the Scandinavian countries.

However, results based on 80 interviews made with 40 French and 40 Swedish families in the three following studies indicate that this may not be the case concerning factors like attitudes and values about the care of children and the reconciliation of work and family. Results indicate that values expressed in the French families point to a strong connection with values significant for countries in the conservative regime cluster. Major findings are that in the reconciliation of work and family, Swedes experience role stress more than French people, and in particular Swedish fathers. In France, on the other hand, mothers strongly express a feeling of dissatisfaction with their partner's lack of participation in the household work. Regarding the attitudes to the paid parental leave (*allocation parentale d'éducation-APE)*, French families' arguments reflect that the policy does not promote fathers' use of paid parental leave, and French mothers more than Swedish mothers refer to the weaker labour market situation as a reason for their use of the leave. Concerning expectations on childcare, French families more than Swedish families stress the importance of 'upbringing,' 'learning' and 'socialisation,' whereas Swedish families emphasise 'pedagogy' and that the staff recognises the individual child.

Key words: Childcare, Cross-national comparison, Family, Family policy, France, Gender, Parental leave, Qualitative studies, Role expansion theory, Role stress theory, Sweden

Preface

Thinking back on the years as a PhD-student it has been a privilege to having had the opportunity to write my thesis within a comparative project, covering several European countries. It has been a trip with many meetings. Some of the most precious memories are from the encounters with all the families, without whom this thesis would not have been written. They shared their good times and bad times in the Mondays to Fridays. Very, very generous of you! No sails for this journey would have been set without funding. The research has received financial support from the Swedish Council for Work Life (RALF) now Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS) and the Danish National Social Science Council.

Some journeys need guides and this was definitely one that needed supervisors. Thomas P. Boje gave me a sea chart, taught me how to navigate and has been there all along. Rune Åberg has given valuable instructions and support during the voyage. Mikael Nordenmark's skilfulness made it possible to find the calm waters, set foot on beautiful islands and reach the goal of this journey.

The French families would still be unspoken to, hadn't it been for the project's excellent French host in Nantes, Denis Bouget, at the *Maison des sciences de l'Homme Ange Guépin*. You made it possible to pass through Scylla and Charybdis, and to enter the world of French family policy. Thanks also for lending me your 'Twingo', so I could see the castles and rough shores of Brittany and Normandy.

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But you can't travel on and on. Sometimes you need to stop and take a break. Lena Karlsson has been a highly treasured company during many lunches and discussions on ups and downs, movies and theatres. With

Ingrid Schild, fine days have been spent on sunny, snowy mountains. You have also lifted my articles to higher altitudes with your proficiency in the Anglo-Saxon language, for which I am very grateful. Dietmar Rauch has made the trip much more fun both scientifically and with more easy-going pleasures. All the Saturday evenings, ending with burgers at Max, put an institutionalist perspective on that one if you can!

Pick-nicks at nice spots along the way have been enjoyed in the company of Anna Olofsson, from the Mid Sweden University, with whom I have discussed the latitudes and longitudes of the PhD-trip. I follow the tradition of mentioning 'Rött', a local pub and relaxing harbour for 'After Work' on Fridays, where Geographers also have been anchoring.

I am grateful to others in Academia as well. Christina Axelsson, Karin Ericsson, Katarina Nylund and Gun Sonlin have encouraged and contributed with good advice for the onward journey when the log has been failing. More friends have been indirectly invaluable for this work. A large thanks to Camilla Björkman, Cecilia Ericson, Jenny Eriksson and Anna-Lena Lindskog for all the laughs, cultural happenings, and days and nights discussing life.

Anna-Lisa and Börje Almqvist have supported with encouragement, fuel and provisions during this endeavour. Mats, my love, you have been patient with someone often more busy with 80 other families than her own. Thank you!

Let's set sails again!

Umeå in February 2005

Anna-Lena Almqvist

Contents

Introduction 1

Theoretical perspectives 3
- Sociological institutionalism 4
- Symbolic interactionism 6

Data and method 8
- Trustworthiness 9

Empirical findings 11
- Results from articles 1-2 11
- Results from articles 3-5 14

Concluding discussion 20

References 23

Appendixes

The Attached Articles:

Article I – Almqvist, A.-L. & Boje, Th. P. (1999). Who cares, who pays and how is care for children provided? Comparing family life and work in different European welfare systems (DK, D, F, S and UK). In *Comparing social welfare systems in Nordic Europe and France* (pp. 265-292). Paris/Nantes: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité, DREES/ MSH.

Article II – Boje, Th. P. & Almqvist, A.-L. (2000). Citizenship, family policy and women's patterns of employment. In Th. P. Boje & A. Leira (Eds.), *Gender, Welfare State and the Market. Towards a new division of labour* (pp. 41-70). London: Routledge.

Article III – Almqvist, A.-L. Experiences of the Reconciliation of Work and Family Life among French and Swedish Families. Submitted.

Article IV – Almqvist, A.-L. To Care or not to Care? Arguments about the Use of Paid Parental Leave in French and Swedish Families. Submitted.

Article V – Almqvist, A.-L. Expectations Relating to Childcare among French and Swedish Families. Re-submitted to *Community, Work & Family*.

Introduction

The ideas about how to care for a child, based on dreams, traditions and ideals are conflicting with job situations, money, leave regulations and access to care. In this 'eye of the storm,' parents have to make decisions. How do they reach these decisions? What expectations do they have? How do they experience the reconciliation of work and family life? What does the policy context influence look like? These are the issues this thesis is mainly about.

The past decades since the 1970s have seen a big change in family and labour market structure in the European countries. Although the gendered division of labour is still significant in all European countries, both at work and at home, the division is more equal now than it was a few decades ago (United Nations, 2000). Women have substantially entered the labour market and in some countries, like Sweden, the public sector has expanded extensively. Men have during these decades increased their time for household work to some extent, although this does not compensate for women's reduction of their time (Nermo & Evertsson, 2004; Nordenmark, 2004; Roman, 2004). As a consequence, more than before, the spheres of work and family life often overlap and contradict each other. The way in which family policy is arranged may highly influence how the combination of care and work is experienced.

Since the 1990s, there has been an extensive increase in studies of the relationship between the state, family policy and family life within the field of comparative welfare state research (see, for example, Daly & Rake, 2003; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Gallie & Paugam, 2000; Hantrais 2004; Hantrais & Letablier, 1996; Leira, 2002; Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury, 1996). The studies illustrate that countries have chosen different ways of attending to the complex relationship between state and family, and that these different approaches to some extent can explain possible national differences between people's behaviour. Most of these comparative studies discuss social policy on a macro-level, using aggregate data. This type of data is highly useful when describing and analysing how people act on a national and cross-national level. However, when trying to understand and explain underlying factors behind individual expectations

and experiences, studies based on qualitative interviews are more revealing.

The main purpose with this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of how families in France and Sweden reason, argue and justify their choices concerning the care for their children, as well as how they experience the combination of work and family life. A further purpose is to link this understanding to a national context. This is done by using both quantitative macro-data and qualitative interviews on a micro-level. There are two articles analysing care arrangements on a national level in five countries, and these articles form the foundation for increasing the understanding of the results from the interviews. The question of how parents experience their choices and actions concerning work and care of children in relation to structural factors on the macro-level, such as economy, work, governmental policies, norms, and value systems is overarching in the articles based on micro-data. In order to facilitate for policy makers to enhance the possibilities for parents to reconcile work and family life, this type of knowledge is vital.

The thesis is one part of the research project "Welfare and Solidarity in Post-industrial Europe – new models for the provision of social welfare and social citizenship in Europe" (Abrahamson, Boje, & Greve, in press). The project comprises 200 interviews in five countries, namely Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The countries are primarily chosen to represent three types of welfare-state regimes. The United Kingdom represents the liberal regime type, Denmark and Sweden represent the social democratic regime type and Germany represents the conservative regime type (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

France is, in the categorisation by Esping-Andersen, also placed in the conservative regime cluster. However, taking departure in the family policy contexts, France shows certain similarities with the social democratic regime cluster. Since France employs a family policy, compared to most other European countries except the Scandinavian ones, which is more supportive towards families and larger families in particular, some scholars argue that France, due to the comprehensive support system, should not be positioned in the conservative cluster (Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996; Randall, 1994). However, others find France still belonging to the conservative cluster (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1999, 2002; Korpi, 2000).

Taken the above discussion into consideration it is of special interest to investigate how the families in France experience care of children and the reconciliation of work and family life.

The first two articles are based on quantitative macro-data related primarily to two aspects of the five countries, namely female labour market participation and family policy measures. The next three articles are based on qualitative micro-data concerning parental experiences and expectations related to care of children and the reconciliation of work and family. The countries included in the qualitative study are France and Sweden. There are several reasons for why they are chosen for a comparative study based on interviews. One reason is the circumstance regarding the family policy in France discussed in the previous paragraph. Another is the fact that both these countries had fairly high female labour force participation rates compared with the EU-average, when the interview series started in 1999 (OECD, 2003). Although there are several similarities between France and Sweden, there are differences as well. For instance, norms and values related to families vary, where a more family oriented view is common in France (Inglehart, 1997).

The following section presents two theories relevant for the interpretation of the empirical results. Subsequently, the choice of data and method is described, and the empirical results are presented and analysed. A concluding discussion sums up the cover story.

Theoretical perspectives

Institutions, like policies, form part of the structural system. In a long term perspective, individuals with their experiences and practices affect institutions with individual interests mediated through, for example, voting and organisational participation. Individuals' impact on structures is a process which is difficult to study during a limited time. In a short term perspective, institutions influence individuals both in terms of their values as well as their behaviour. This thesis mainly focuses on the question of how social structures influence individuals' expectations and experiences. In the articles, more specific theories concerning for example the welfare state and roles have been used. The main purpose with this part of the thesis is to analyse the results within the framework

of more general sociological theories. The theories chosen are sociological institutionalism and symbolic interactionism, and they have been selected because they give a more thorough understanding of the processes which take place when policies and norms are transferred between the macro-level and micro-level.

Sociological institutionalism is one part of the broader concept new institutionalisms. A main reason for why this theory is chosen as an analytical tool is that it aims at bringing together institutions and norms. Sociological institutionalism has its focus on the macro-level, but it also relates and takes the micro-level into consideration. One assumption made in this thesis is that a country's family policy influences parental opinion of childcare. A further assumption is that it is of importance if the policy emphasises the family or the individual as being the main target. From this perspective, sociological institutionalism works as a theoretical tool, since it aims at linking institutional and normative explanatory factors.

The second theoretical perspective is symbolic interactionism, which contributes with an understanding of the how social life is mediated between institutions and the individual by focusing on human interaction. The perspective is primarily used on a micro-level, but takes into consideration the effects of macro phenomena. Symbolic interactionism is a useful means to understand the transfer of norms between the different levels, and how individuals affect each other. More specifically related to this thesis, symbolic interactionism concerns how norms and values are transferred between employers, childcare staff, family, friends, and parents.

Sociological institutionalism

The articles in this thesis concern the relationship between structural conditions and individual agency. Institutionalism is one perspective used for studying this relationship in terms of social, economic, and political phenomena. 'Institutionalists' vary in how much emphasis they relatively place on macro and micro features and how they weigh cognitive and normative aspects of institutions. New institutionalism has developed from, and can trace its roots back to, 'old institutionalism' (see for in-

stance, Selznick, 1949). Institutions are widely defined as social practices that are regularly and continuously repeated. They are sanctioned and maintained by social norms and they have a major significance in the social structure. The term refers to established patterns of behaviour, such as roles, but an institution is regarded as a higher order, a more general unit which incorporates a plurality of roles. Examples of institutions relevant in this case are the jurisdictions regarding the labour market and the family. The government, the Church and the educational system are other examples (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1994).

One of the schools in the new institutionalism; sociological institutionalism, will be used as an analytical tool to study the link between macro and micro societal conditions. This theory is chosen because sociological institutionalists emphasize the way in which institutions influence behaviour not only by providing formal rules or by affecting the strategic calculations of individuals, but institutions influence the most fundamental preferences, as well (Hall & Taylor, 1996).

There are in particular three features which distinguish sociological institutionalism from other new institutionalisms. Firstly, a broader definition of institutions is used. It does not only entail formal rules, procedures or norms, but also symbol systems and moral templates. By this definition, it challenges the division between 'institutional explanations' which are based on organisational structures and 'cultural explanations' which are based on an understanding of cultures as shared attitudes or values. Secondly, sociological institutionalists have a distinctive understanding of the relationship between institutions and individual action. Sociological institutionalists stress how institutions influence behaviour by providing cognitive scripts, categories, and models necessary for action. Without these, the behaviour of others is almost impossible to foresee and interpret. Lastly, sociological institutionalists take a particular approach to the problem of explaining how institutional practices emerge and change. They argue that organisations adopt a new institutional practice, not because it necessarily advances the means-end's efficiency of the organisation but because it enhances the social legitimacy of the organisation and/or its participants. Thus, organisations embrace specific institutional practices because they may be highly valued in a broader cultural environment (Hall & Taylor, 1996).

In sociological institutionalism, the self-images and identities of individuals are socially constituted from the institutional forms, images and signs that exist in social life (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Sociological institutionalists question whether the preferences and choices of individuals can be correctly understood outside the cultural framework in which they are embedded (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). As Meyer, Boli and Thomas (1994) argue, both actors and the patterns of action they are involved in are institutionally anchored. In this sense social reality – both social units and socially patterned action – is 'socially constructed' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). That reality is 'socially constructed' constitutes an important assumption in the second theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism

Theories concerned with the macro-level, which explore institutional effects on the micro-level, often tend to neglect the interaction between individuals. Norms as well as institutional regulations are transferred to single individuals through an intermediate level, consisting of various sorts of organisations as well as family, friends, colleagues, etc. This transfer works both ways, individuals are acting agents who create and reproduce patterns and norms as well as institutions influence individuals' actions.

A perspective which to a large extent has influenced theorists and the discussion about the relationship between micro and macro in general is the symbolic interactionism. Many sociologists, such as Erving Goffman (1959) and the major spokesman of this view, George Herbert Mead (Morris, 1962; Strauss, 1969), have developed this approach. Berger and Luckmann (1966) have in their work also linked the societal levels. (See, for example, Dahlgren and Starrin (2004) for a discussion on Goffman's work). Symbolic interactionism emphasises the construction of the social world and meaning through humans using symbols in communication, where language is the most important part (Burr, 2003). Several aspects can be mentioned as significant for symbolic interactionism, and two of them will be mentioned here. Firstly, social life is merely regarded as a process and not a structure or a system. Secondly, and most importantly, there is a concern with how social meanings are constructed and trans-

mitted in and through individual and group interaction (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1992).

It can be assumed that the way in which people experience different parts of their life, such as work and family, may be linked to the meaning they assign to them. Herbert Blumer (1969), who also coined the expression 'symbolic interactionism,' has described how meaning is related to. It is neither perceived as something intrinsic in a particular thing, which could be conditions on the structural level, nor as a psychological element in the person for whom the particular thing has a meaning. Symbolic interactionists describe meaning as something which arises in the process between people, and meaning is shaped by how people act towards a person with regard to this particular thing. Boglind, Lundén and Näsman (1972) argue that symbolic interactionism recognises meaning as a social construction that is formed by and through the activities of people when they are interacting. What is further significant for this perspective is that the use of meaning is not an application but the use of meaning in a person's actions involves an interpretative process.

In their epistemology, Berger and Luckmann (1966: 79) stipulate three central characteristics of the social world. First, society is a human product. This implies that society and the way we look at it, is a social construction, a product of a dialectic process of interaction between structure and agency, as well as between production and reproduction. Second, society is an objective reality. An individual is born into a society; society was there before and will be there also after the individual is gone. Third, the human being is a social product. This could be exemplified with the notion of gender. The human being is not merely a biological sex, but to a great extent shaped by what others expect her or him to be. Thus the social environment is shaping us. Berger and Luckmann assume that society is a reciprocal system, but no assumptions are made of which factors are dependent and which factors are independent. Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann highlight the importance of the fact that the social world is transmitted to a new generation through socialisation and internalisation. It is in these processes that the social dialectic can be fully visible.

In order to analyse how norms are transferred from the macro-level to the micro-level, or, in other words, how the individual actor incorporates the

norms and rules which are valid in her or his group, and the process when a child's personality is formed, a number of notions have been developed. For this thesis, the notions of 'significant others' and 'the generalised other' created by George Herbert Mead, are particularly relevant. Looking at these concepts closer, as a subject I can view myself as an object, by taking the other's view on myself. There are the significant others who mediate this process. These others are in the beginning the child's closest surrounding, usually her or his parents. At a later stage in life, they are extended to include friends, colleagues, employers, etc. With the notion of the generalised other, Mead refers to anonymous people, 'society', the institutional frames within which all people live their lives. Examples here are education, religion, and economical and political institutions. According to Mead, the development of the identity demands a close interaction with the generalised other. The society and human action are dialectically associated as preconditions for each other (Berg, 1995). Media represent a phenomenon that transfers norms to individuals and I have chosen to define media as a generalised other.

The interactionist perspective does not consider structures as preceding and determining the actions of individuals. There is constantly a co-operation between the individual and society in a process of production and reproduction. On the individual level this can be described as a joint venture between the "I-part" of the self and the "me-part." The "I" stands for the spontaneous action of the individual; while the "me" reflects the feed back received from preferably significant others. The individual tries to evaluate what took place. This means that human beings try to interpret their own action and construct its meaning, most often in interplay with people in their surroundings.

Data and method

The purpose of this section is to present and discuss the trustworthiness of the data. Articles 1-2, where quantitative data have been used, are based on secondary macro-data on an aggregate level. Articles 3-5, where qualitative primary data have been used, are based on micro-data on an individual level. There are different motives for using qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data focuses on the depth, like variation in parental expectations. The quantitative data focuses on the represent-

ative and the typical. For instance, as to whether the findings can be applicable to the entire nation and what is typical in the outcome of family policy measures. Families with preschool children were interviewed in two towns, Umeå in the north of Sweden, and Nantes in the northwest of France. In each town, 40 interviews with 40 families with preschool children in one low-income and one middle-income neighbourhood were made. The interviews took place in 1998 and 1999. For selection criteria of areas and selection criteria and gathering of respondents, see articles 3-5. Furthermore, Appendixes A and B show background information about the respondents. The interviews were semi-structured, and the major themes were: work and education; household economy; childcare; the reconciliation of work and family; and national family policy.

The empirical categorisations, like 'norms' and 'labour market participation' have been grounded in theoretical pre-understanding as well as emerging patterns during the analysis. For method of analysis, see articles 3-5. Although the empirical material is based on quite a small number of interviews it has been possible to reveal patterns. The material is comparatively rich since it contains several themes and aspects of daily life with work and children. Since the material consists of single parents, couples, individuals with different educational levels, professions, labour market positions, as well as individuals living in low- and middle-income neighbourhoods, the material gives a wide perspective. The fact that the interviews are from two countries makes an international comparison possible.

Trustworthiness

In order to judge if findings are believable, several criteria have been developed (see, for instance, Dahlgren, Emmelin, & Winkvist, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the following section, the discussion concerns the qualitative data since they are primary data. Three common qualitative criteria will be discussed. They are credibility, transferability and dependability.

The first criterion, *credibility,* refers to the issue of truth value. More specifically, it relates to the issue of what the research really aims to

study. Quantitative studies use the term internal validity or lack of bias. How well has the subjective reality of the respondents been understood and reconstructed? Several measures have been used to answer this question. One is 'prolonged engagement', which refers to spending a longer period of time in the field. The author lived in Umeå as well as spent several months during the interview period in Nantes and returned at a later stage during the process of analysis to revitalise the memory of the town and the two neighbourhoods. Furthermore, so called 'member checks' have been used, thus contacts were made with the respondents also after the interview period was terminated. In Umeå, summaries of the transcripts were sent to the respondents so they had the possibility to react on them. In Nantes, when the interview period was terminated, a meeting in the respective neighbourhood was arranged. The respondents were presented some preliminary results and we discussed the project and the interview topics in general and the respondents posed questions which had been raised after the interview session.

The second criterion, *transferability,* relates to the issue of applicability. In quantitative studies, it may be referred to as external validity or generalisation. A question often posed in qualitative studies is if it is possible to make generalisations of the results. The material comprises 80 interviews, which is too small to make statistical generalisations, (see, for example, Kvale, 1997). However, to make statistical generalisations have never been a purpose, but rather to find patterns in the way the respondents describe their life situations. With a limited number of interviews, it is possible to make an analytical generalisation (Kvale). This means that a conclusion could be drawn as to whether the results from one situational investigation can give guidance for what will happen in another situation. The conclusion builds on an analysis of similarities and differences of and between the two situations.

The third criterion, *dependability*, which relates to the issue of consistency of the interviews, was checked at several stages and the term reliability may be used here as well. To what extent is the respondent affected by a particular interviewer? At the start of the different national interview periods, the interview-guide was discussed with involved researchers and assistants in each country. In both Nantes and Umeå, test interviews were conducted by both the author and assistants. They were made jointly, as well as separately. The test interviews were discussed

afterwards and the interview-guide was revised. The author conducted and transcribed 30 of the Swedish interviews and 10 were conducted and transcribed by a Masters student in sociology. Parts of the interviews and the transcripts were discussed. There was no difference in the interviews that could be related to respective interviewer. The French interviews were conducted by a French doctoral student in sociology with the author present at 10 occasions. The author made all transcriptions of the French interviews. Concerning ethical aspects, respondents' names have been changed and professions are presented in a general way in the articles.

Empirical findings

This section concludes the most important findings in the articles as well as analyses, and discusses them in the light of macro and micro link theories like sociological institutionalism and symbolic interactionism. Below, the results in articles 1 and 2 will be presented, which form a foundation for the results in articles 3 to 5. The articles are linked together: the first two articles discuss female labour market participation and how care is provided and organised. Consequently, they contribute with background knowledge as well as provide a comparative framework for the articles focusing on French and Swedish families. The third article aims at analysing how families experience the reconciliation of work and family. After this more general theme, the fourth article focuses on the arguments behind parental care of the very young children. The fifth article continues with analysing expectations relating to non-parental care of older preschool children. The purpose with the last two articles is two-fold. The first aim is to cover the benefit as well as the service aspect of family policy. The second aim is to analyse parental as well as non-parental childcare.

Results from articles 1-2

The results referred to in articles 1 and 2 are based on figures and regulations valid in the mid and latter part of the 1990s (for example, Bradshaw *et al*., 1996; Ditch *et al*., 1994; ECNC, 1996; European Commission, 1999; Eurostat, 1998; Gornick, Meyers, & Ross, 1997; OECD, 1995). When comparing the five countries, there seems to be a

clear connection between high female labour market participation and generous caring regimes. When the welfare state provides childcare, this effects women's employment in two ways. First, facilities provided by the welfare state enhance the possibility for employment of, primarily, women, and second, caring for children in institutions or as childminders provides women with work opportunities.

Among the five countries, Sweden and Denmark have the most comprehensive childcare for young children and relatively generous conditions for paid parental leave in combination with the highest rates of female employment. The findings suggest that in Denmark, paid parental leave strongly relates to previous employment experiences, while it is a citizenship right in Sweden, although with a low replacement rate. In addition, an explicit aim of Swedish family policy is to make it easier for women to combine care giving and continuous employment. Part of this programme is income-related parental leave with high replacement rates, a non-transferable so called 'daddy-month' is included and the right to choose part-time work for parents with children below the age of 8 years. In Denmark, the paid parental leave conditions are more linked to previous employment than in Sweden, with a low replacement rate after maternity leave and 10 weeks of paid parental leave. As a consequence, most mothers have to start working full-time and use non-parental childcare after this period.

France comes next, with a comprehensive coverage of childcare, at least for children above the age of three. The paid parental leave period is fairly long but is restricted to families with two or more children (*allocation parentale d'éducation-APE*). This leads to a diversification between mothers. Those having one child are not entitled to paid parental leave after maternity leave, but they have access to non-parental childcare, whereas mothers with two or more children can choose between continuous labour market participation or using the paid parental leave. In Germany, women are eligible to a fairly long period of paid parental leave, but the replacement rate is relatively low. The childcare coverage is sparse and costly; there is a tax-relief for dependent children and a tax-system which is household-based. In combination, these factors discourage women from returning to the labour market after childbirth and encourage them to full-time care giving. The United Kingdom is found at the bottom of the list, having a restrictive family policy which is char-

acterised by nearly no provision of public child care, a very limited period for care giving with maternity leave but no paid parental leave, in combination with precarious employment conditions. This leads to women having to choose between full-time care and an early return to employment.

The findings suggest that the relationship between paid work, unpaid work and welfare provision have different consequences for men and women. First, they enter the labour market on different terms. Women work part-time, take parental leave and interrupt the labour market career more frequently than men. Second, the unequal gender positions in the labour market overlap the private life, reinforcing men's role as bread-winners and women's role as caregivers. Third, since there is a strong link between social citizenship rights and labour market status, employment becomes a key to economic and social independence which is engendered in men's favour.

In all five countries, there are family policy regulations which more or less directly affect the level of female labour market participation. However, between the countries, there are fairly large differences. Using a sociological institutionalist perspective, the Swedish paid parental leave could exemplify an embedded aim for gender equality. Although women still use an absolute majority of leave days, the regulation is made in a way to decrease the effects of the unequal gender structure by having an income-related benefit with a fairly high replacement rate. The 'daddy-month' is another measure with the same purpose. A societal norm of women's continuous employment, as well as a societal norm of men participating in the care of the very young children by taking time off from work, is embedded in these regulations. On the other side of the scale, Germany could exemplify a societal culture of women being the primary caregiver, the legislation giving tax subsidies for children and pursuing joint taxation. Regulations like these, with strong familialistic tendencies may be obstacles to women choosing a high labour market involvement. It must be noticed that this does not imply a deterministic reasoning. Although there are certain regulations, individuals may not necessarily behave nor have wishes in line with the norms that are embedded in these regulations.

Results from articles 3-5

In the following section, the most important findings from articles 3 to 5 will be discussed. The results are presented thematically, starting with the reconciliation of work and family, continuing to the care of children. The results relate in particular to perceived role conflicts, arguments behind the use of paid parental leave, and parental expectations on non-parental childcare. Sociological institutionalism and symbolic interactionism are used as tools in the analyses. To make the presentation of the results more vivid, focused, and closer to a real interview situation, a new interview-setting is created with constructed families. The results are voiced through one French and one Swedish fictive couple who represent the general findings in respective country.

'I (the author) had this discussion on a Friday evening with the French couple Louise and Claude Philbert and the Swedish couple Margot and Sven Persson. Louise works the equivalent of a four day week and Claude works full-time. They have two daughters, Mélanie who is 1 ½ years, taken care of by a childminder and Amélie 3 ½ years, who goes to preschool. Margot works full-time and so does Sven. They have two children as well, one son, Jan, 4 years old and one daughter, Lisa, 2 years old, who both go to the daycare centre (now called preschool). The topics for discussion were how they experienced the reconciliation of work and family life, arguments behind the paid parental leave and expectations on the non-parental childcare.'

Role conflicts and childcare preferences

(primarily based on article 3)

'To achieve a general picture of how the two families perceived their everyday life, we started to talk about their thoughts regarding the reconciliation of work and family. In both couples, there were wishes for reduced working hours. Notably, Sven much more than Claude gave voice to role stress and difficulties in combining work and family life. Sven referred to a constant planning and discussion with his wife about meals, about what the children should do next day, etc. Louise pronounced a different angle; she felt a sense of dissatisfaction with Claude helping out too little or hardly at all. She thought that they to some extent were lead-

ing separate lives. We also spoke about how the two couples perceived leisure time. Both couples expressed that it was difficult to find time for the relationship. However, only Margot and Sven underlined that it was a problem finding time for themselves and their individual activities. When talking about solutions regarding the care of their children, Louise and Claude mentioned that they could consider having a nanny to take care of little Mélanie when they were working. Louise also expressed a preference for a daycare centre where she worked. Then she could go and see her daughter at lunch time and she could more easily bring her in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon. No such wishes were expressed by Margot and Sven.'

French family policy regulations encourage using individual childcare, by different subsidies. From a sociological institutionalist perspective, the preference for having a nanny could partly be explained by the fact that in the regulation an orientation towards traditional family values is embedded in terms of individual care. In addition, French families are encouraged by economic incentives to choose this care solution. By using the same perspective, the reverse could be exemplified by the Swedish childcare policy. The employment of public, collective care is encouraged, and there has been a reduction in the number of childminders. Embedded in this policy is an idea about the state being the chief provider of care for preschool children after the parental leave period. The strong governmental emphasis on public care may as well be an explanation for why no Swedish parents expressed a preference for childcare at their work place. However, note that the childcare use is far from deterministic since several of the Swedish respondents expressed preference for, and high satisfaction with, having a childminder.

Continuing to the reconciliation of work and family, Swedish parents expressed more role conflicts than French parents, particularly fathers. Part of the explanation is, in sociological institutionalist terms, that there is an agenda for gender equality which can be noted in the Swedish labour market policy as well as family policy. The intentions in the so called 'work line' imply that work is considered as the primary aim to decrease uneven relationships between different groups in society, including men and women (Grape, 2001). This reflects a norm that men and women should be equally involved in the labour market, although it may be more accepted that women work part-time to a greater extent than men. The

norms about gender equality are also embedded in family policy through various measures like extensive childcare to facilitate mothers' labour market participation and the 'daddy-month' to increase fathers' participation in the care of young children. From an interactionist perspective, these norms may have been transferred to the individuals by various types of daily interaction at work and in other social spheres by significant others like family, friends and colleagues. The French fathers not experiencing role conflicts may relate to the fact that neither labour market policy and family policy nor societal norms imply a gender-equal participation in work and family life.

Although the Swedish efforts to increase the equality between the genders may lead to role conflicts, the results do not suggest that the French value system is preferable. A more equal division of labour may more easily result in role conflicts, but this negative consequence is probably outweighed by a higher sense of satisfaction with the division of household work among women and a more equal division of power between the sexes in general. A negative side of a traditional division of labour is exemplified by French women who expressed feelings of dissatisfaction with their partner's lack of participation in the unpaid house work. From a sociological institutionalist perspective, this finding could exemplify a discrepancy between the policy on a macro-level reflecting a fairly traditional gender ideology and division of labour and women's attitudes on an individual level, expressing lack of satisfaction with this situation.

As discussed above, Swedish parents, more than French parents, gave voice to role stress in relation to multiple roles. Having multiple roles can be more time and power consuming than having mainly one role as an employed or a household worker. This may be one explanation for why Swedish parents also expressed difficulties in finding time for their individual interests. In Swedish policy, according to a sociological institutionalist perspective, we find an aim embedded towards individual independence from the market as well as the family. This may have influenced parents to express lack of own time. From an interactionist perspective, the wish for having individual free time may have been transferred to individuals through generalised others like policy and media.

Arguments concerning the use of paid parental leave
(primarily based on article 4)

'We went on with discussing how the couples discussed the paid parental leave (*allocation parentale d'éducation-APE* and *föräldrapenning*). For both, the argumentation was strongly influenced by parental leave regulations, societal norms and the couples' labour market participation. Both couples mentioned the household economy as an important reason for why Margot has used most of the leave and Louise all parental leave days. Sven has used a few more months than the statutory 'daddy-month.' The fact that Claude has not used any paid parental leave days has not been an issue of discussion between him and Louise. It has merely been taken for granted that Louise would be the one to use the paid parental leave. Louise referred to having a temporary employment at the time for the paid parental leave. We continued talking about employers' perceptions of fathers taking leave for care of children. With reference to normative aspects, both Sven and Claude expressed negative reactions from their employers in relation to fathers taking leave for care of children.'

This last finding points to a similarity in experiences between French and Swedish fathers in terms of a discrepancy between the statutory regulations of fathers' right to use the paid parental leave which are implemented in both countries, and what is in practice possible due to normative limitations at the work place. Relating to an interactionist perspective, this could exemplify an interaction between employer and employee, where the employee tries to exercise his rights available to him through the family policy. However, a combination of economic interests and traditional gender role values that still are a part of the employer's perceptions prevents or makes the exercising of rights more difficult for the employees. In this asymmetric power relationship, fathers describe situations where they fall short. The employer could be viewed upon as a significant other, whose opinion is difficult to set aside since the employee is dependent on the way the employer regards him. Judging from how the fathers reason, it seems as if this is more emphasised in the private sector compared to the public sector. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that institutions, in terms of legal regulations, might work more strongly in public companies since they have a more direct connection with the state than have private companies.

Using the sociological institutionalist perspective, it could be argued that traditional family values are embedded in the construction of the French paid parental leave. Although it is officially gender-neutral, it is paid at a relatively low flat rate, thus not encouraging the one who in most cases has the highest salary to use it, the man. This indicates that the issue of fathers using the paid parental leave is not really on the French political agenda. Concerning the Swedish paid parental leave, it could be argued that although it is still mostly women who use the paid parental leave days, there is an aim towards gender equality in the actual construction. This could be exemplified by the 'daddy-month' and the income-related benefit, thus making it more attractive for men, who in most cases earn more than women, to use the leave.

French parents who have one child, thus not entitled to the paid parental leave and also those Swedish parents, who do not have a sufficient working period and are thus only entitled to the low flat-rate benefit, expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of recognition in the policy system. Using a sociological institutionalist view, the French regulations reflect a pro-natalist norm, encouraging families to have many children, not taking into account parents with one child. In the Swedish case, the regulations are influenced by a strong societal norm of working, with the 'work line' as an important incentive to participate in the labour market.

Expectations on non-parental childcare

(primarily based on article 5)

'After a short coffee-break we continued to discuss the non-parental childcare. What expectations did our couples have on the non-parental childcare? Both Louise and Claude stressed the importance of 'up-bringing' as part of the care of their youngest, Mélanie. Regarding care of the older daughter Amélie, they stressed the importance of 'learning,' taking place at the preschool, as is the case for almost all other children above the age of three in France. When elaborating further on the subject it became obvious that the French couple also underlined 'socialisation,' for older children in particular, as a more important aspect of childcare than did the Swedish couple. Primarily two factors were highlighted by Sven and Margot when they expressed what they found important about

the care of older children, namely 'pedagogy' and that the preschool staff recognises the individual child.'

In a symbolic interactionist discourse it may be assumed that the importance of upbringing and learning could have been transferred to parents, when they were brought up themselves, and strengthened by the daily interaction with the childcare staff, since these values are emphasised when the staff is educated. Thus, significant others like the grandparents and childcare staff have been a source of influence as well as a generalised other in terms of educational policy. Furthermore, the stress on socialisation indicates that French parents may have a more traditional view on children than Swedish parents and be influenced by norms linked to an historical emphasis on educational provision as a means of fostering a shared national identity. The pedagogic goal is emphasised in the Swedish childcare agenda, thus the fact that Swedish parents stress pedagogy may be connected to values transferred from staff to parents. In addition, the development towards an increased privatisation of Swedish childcare has led to a diversification and parents now have more pedagogical options than before.

Swedish parents calling attention to the importance of the staff recognising the individual child may from a sociological institutionalist perspective be a phenomenon which is influenced by a social policy where individualism and independence are vital parts. Swedish family policy has strongly focused on collective care, whilst parental expectations focus on the individual child. Within the idea of childcare there seems to still be an emphasis on the individual child, which reflects the ideal of that, albeit in a collective environment, the child can still develop her or his individuality. In other words, collective and public care is not necessarily linked to expectations like adaptation and obedience, often associated with these care forms. The results of this study suggest that Swedish childcare has to a certain extent managed to combine collective care with a focus on individual autonomy and independence.

Concluding discussion

After this discussion of the results in a theoretical framework I will summarise the main results and discuss policy implications. The over-arching question for the articles based on micro-data was: How do parents experience their choices and actions concerning work and care of children in relation to structural factors on the macro-level, such as economy, work, governmental policies, norms and value systems? The findings indicate that these structural factors strongly influence expectations, thoughts, and experiences on the micro-level. Major findings are that in the reconciliation of work and family, Swedes experience role stress more than French people, and in particular Swedish fathers. In France, on the other hand, mothers strongly express dissatisfaction with their partner's lack of participation in the unpaid work. Regarding the attitudes to the paid parental leave, French families' arguments reflect that the policy does not promote fathers' use of paid parental leave, and French mothers more than Swedish mothers refer to their weaker labour market situation as a reason for their use of the leave. Concerning expectations on childcare, French families more than Swedish families stress the importance of 'upbringing,' 'learning' and 'socialisation,' whereas Swedish families emphasise 'pedagogy' and that the staff recognise the individual child.

In what way, then, does this thesis contribute to the discussion about whether or not France is positioned in the conservative regime cluster as far as family policy is concerned? According to the results in the articles 1 and 2, it could be expected that the extensive family support system brings France closer to the Scandinavian countries. This is maybe the case when, for example, looking at the figures concerning female labour market participation and to some extent, childcare figures. However, results in articles 3 to 5 indicate that this might not be the case regarding subjective factors like attitudes and values concerning care of children and the reconciliation of work and family. Values expressed in the French families indicate a strong connection with values significant for countries in the conservative regime cluster. In article 3, French fathers less than Swedish fathers express role conflicts in combining work and family. This indicates a more traditional division of labour, characteristic for the conservative regime cluster. When it comes to paid parental leave, both

behaviour and the line of argumentation indicate more family oriented values among French than among Swedish families, referring to article 4. Findings presented in article 5 support this argument, since the French families also express relatively traditional values about non-parental childcare, which could be found in the conservative regime cluster.

The findings indicate that measures need to be taken in both countries, to improve the situation for individuals to reconcile care of children and employment. However, there might be a different focus, since they represent different welfare systems and they therefore generate different problems for parents in their daily life. In France, the more traditional view on gender roles minimises the risk of role conflicts, but on the other hand it generates a high level of dissatisfaction concerning the household division of labour among women. Another negative aspect is that this system generates an asymmetric economic power relationship between women and men. In the case of France, the findings indicate that if the state wants to pursue the general aim of the European Union to increase the gender equality, more forceful measures working against the current structure of unequal gender order are necessary. French women's positions in the labour market need to be strengthened, with an increase in permanent employment positions. Moreover, an implementation of income related paid parental leave, to encourage and facilitate for men to participate in the reconciliation of work and family is one suggestion for working towards an equal gender order. It should be available from the first child to reduce inequalities between children. Measures like these could accelerate a change in societal norms and attitudes about how family and work should be organised.

In Sweden, on the other hand, the family policy regulations work in the direction of gender equality. As the analyses indicate, norms among the Swedish parents are strongly oriented in this direction too. However, a difficulty seems to be that a more equal division of labour tends to result in more role conflicts and time strain. The results concerning Sweden indicate that the current social policy measures might not be sufficient in helping parents to balance family and working demands. The respondents' wishes for decreased working hours indicate that a general reduction of working hours for parents with young children can be one solution to their problems. Although it is a statutory right today, it might

be financially difficult for parents to use it, if they are not compensated economically.

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APPENDIX A. FAMILIES IN INTERVIEWS MADE IN FRANCE, 1999

No	Form of childcare[1]	Age of children[2]	Civil status	Mother's occupation and extent	Father's occupation and extent
1	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Weekly foster care/preschool	2 6	Single mother	Home with children, 100%	-
2	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Special school/ preschool	2 5	Married	Paid parental leave, 100%, (Waitress)[3]	Worker in the construction business, 100%
3	Parental care Preschool	9 months 3, (7)	Married	Paid parental leave, 100%, (Childcare assistant)	School caretaker, 100%
4	Parental care Preschool	2 6	Single mother	Home with children, 100% (In catering)	-
5	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Preschool	2 4	Single mother	Unemployed, training to become medical secretary	-
6	Preschool	2 ½	Single mother	Unemployed	-
7	Preschool	2	Single mother	Unemployed, (Domestic help)	-
8	Preschool	4, (14,17)	Cohabiting	Cleaner, 100 %	In security, 100%
9	Preschool	3, (16)	Single mother	Cleaner, 15%, preparing for studies	-
10	Preschool	4	Single mother	Unemployed, (Waitress)	-
11	Preschool	2 ½, 4, 6	Married	Housewife, 100%	Industrial worker, 100%
12	Childminder	2	Cohabiting	Home help, 66%	Ambulance driver, 100%
13	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Preschool	5 months 3 ½	Married	Housewife, 100%	Bricklayer, 100%
14	Preschool	5, (8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18)	Married	Housewife, 100%	Retired, (Teacher)
15	Preschool	5, 6, (16, 19)	Single mother	Legal secretary, 100%	-
16	Preschool/ grandmother	3 ½	Cohabiting	Domestic service, 50%	Industrial worker, 100%
17	Childminder	2 ½, (7 ½)	Married	In pen manufacturing, 100%	In sales, 100%
18	Preschool/ childminder	2, (6)	Married	Secretary in business school, 80%	Painter/decorator, 100%
19	Preschool	4	Married	In sales, 100%	Unemployed
20	Preschool/ grandmother	3, (8)	Married	Cashier, 50%	In computing, 100%

[1] For a description of childcare forms, see article 5.
[2] Years, if not otherwise stated.
[3] If not currently in paid work, profession in brackets.

21	Preschool	5, (8, 10, 12)	Married	Housewife, (X-ray technician)	Teacher, 100%
22	Parental care Preschool	9 months 4 ½	Married	Paid parental leave, 100%, (Clerk)	Painter, 100%
23	Preschool	4 ½, (6, 16, 21)	Married	Housewife, 100%, (Childcare assistant)	In computing, 100%
24	Preschool/ nanny	4, (8)	Married	Flight attendant, 66%	In sales, 100%
25	Parental care Private daycare centre/ parental care Preschool	4 months 2 3 1/2	Married	Maternity leave, (Psychologist)	Lawyer, 100%
26	Childminder Preschool and childminder	1 4 ½	Married	Paid parental leave, 100%, and studies (Teacher)	In the army, 100%
27	Public daycare centre	18 months	Married	Student in teaching, 100%	Student in law, 100%
28	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Preschool	18 months 4	Married	Paid parental leave, 100% (Photo assistant)	Shipping employee, 100%
29	Preschool	5	Cohabiting	Unemployed, preparing for studies	Industrial worker, 100%
30	Preschool	5	Married	Teacher, 100%	In computing, 80%
31	Private daycare centre	2 ½	Single mother	Painter, 100%	-
32	Public daycare centre	17 months	Cohabiting	Nurse, 100%	In advertising business, 100%
33	Private daycare centre Preschool	8 months 4	Married	Teacher, 33%, and studies	Research director, 100%
34	Public daycare centre Preschool	2 ½ 4 ½	Married	Teacher, 66%	Teacher, 100%
35	Parental care/ *halte garderie*	18 months	Married	Housewife, 100%	Municipality administrator, 100%
36	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Preschool	2 5, (8)	Married	Paid parental leave, 100% (Biologist)	Unemployed
37	Childminder Preschool	2 6	Married	In computing, 80%	Banker, 100%
38	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Preschool	2 ½ 6	Cohabiting	Paid parental leave, 100% (Temporary employment)	Sales manager, 100%
39	Childminder	2	Married	Teacher, 75%	Head of preschool, 100%
40	Parental care/ *halte garderie* Preschool	11 months 4 ½	Married	Paid parental leave, 100% (Computing teacher)	Ergonomist, 100%

APPENDIX B. FAMILIES IN INTERVIEWS MADE IN SWEDEN, 1998/1999

No	Form of child care[4]	Age of children[5]	Civil status	Mother´s occupation and extent	Father´s occupation and extent
1	Preschool	4, (10)	Married	Restaurant manager, 100%	In the army, 100%
2	Preschool Preschool class	4 6	Married	Laboratory assistant, 100%	Technician, 100%
3	Preschool	5, (8, 10)	Cohabiting	District nurse student, 100%, (Nurse)[6]	IT-consultant, 100%
4	Childminder	2, 4	Married	Sick-leave, 100%, (In restaurant service)	Manager, 100%
5	Preschool	5, (7, 8)	Cohabiting	Sick-leave, 100%, (Shop assistant)	In pest control, 100%
6	Preschool	3 ½	Single father	-	Truck driver, 100%
7	Preschool	3, 5, (7)	Married	Temporary project employment, 100%	Sick-leave, 100%, (Industrial worker)
8	Preschool	2	Cohabiting	Environmental protection studies, 100%	Technician, 100%
9	Preschool	2	Married	Unemployed, language studies	Self-employed in food business, 100%
10	School	8, 8, 10[7]	Single mother	Restaurant manager, 100%	-
11	Preschool	5, (7)	Married	Nurse, 75%	In computing, 100%
12	Childminder	3, (7)	Married	Assistant teacher, 75 %	Office clerk,100 %
13	Parental care Preschool class	1, 3 6	Cohabiting	Paid parental leave, 100%, (Teacher)	Teacher, 100%
14	Preschool	5, (7)	Married	Social secretary, 90%	Environmental inspector, 100%
15	School	7, 9, 10, 12, 13	Married	Church activities for children, 50-75%	Personal assistant, 100%
16	Childminder Preschool class	3 6	Married	Shop assistant, 75%	In sales, 100%
17	Preschool	1	Married	Work in manufacturing company, 75%	Self-employed in clothing, 100%
18	Preschool	1, 5	Married	Lawyer, 100%	Teacher, 100%
19	Preschool	2, 5	Married	Administrative assistant, 80%	Sales manager, 100%
20	Childminder Preschool class, Childminder	3 6	Cohabiting	Nurse, 75 %	In machine-renting, 100%

[4] For a description of childcare forms, see article 5.
[5] Years if not otherwise stated.
[6] If not currently in paid work, profession in brackets.
[7] Interviews 10, 15, 37 and 40 include children over the age of six, due to a wish to include children having single parents and children having been cared for at home, after the period of paid parental leave.

21	Parental care	2, 4	Married	Nurse, 75 %	Fireman, 100%
22	Childminder	1, 4	Married	Traffic assistant, 100 %	Production technician, 100%
23	Parental care	1	Cohabiting	Home service assistant, 50%-100%	Engineering student, 100%
24	Parental care Parental care (usually preschool)	2 months 4	Cohabiting	Paid parental leave, 100% (Occupational therapist)	Industrial worker, 100%
25	Childminder	2	Cohabiting	Sick-leave due to pregnancy, 100% (Preschool teacher)	Policeman, 100%
26	Preschool	5	Single mother	Cleaner, 100%	-
27	Preschool	3, (7)	Married	Nurse student, 100%	Teacher, 100%
28	Preschool	5, (10, 12)	Married	Sick-leave, 100%, (Nurse assistant)	Baggage handler in the transport industry, 100%
29	Parental care Childminder	1 week 2	Married	Paid parental leave, 100%, (Nurse)	Mechanical worker, 100%
30	Preschool	2, 5	Married	Preschool teacher, 100%	Self-employed in advertising, 100%
31	Preschool	5, (7)	Married	Preschool teacher, 70%	Manager in food industry, 100%
32	Childminder	3, (9)	Married	Nurse, 77%	Plater, 100%
33	Preschool	2, 5	Married	Nurse student, 100%, (Staff nurse)	Nurse, 86%
34	Parental care	2, 2, (7, 9, 11, 13)	Married	Housewife, 100%	Researcher, 100%
35	Parental care Preschool	1 3	Married	Physician, 100 %	Paid parental leave, 100%, (Physician 100%)
36	Preschool	5, (8, 12, 14)	Cohabiting	Teacher, 100%	Project with young people, 50-75%
37	School	7, 7	Single mother	In public relations, 100%	-
38	Preschool	4, (25)	Single mother	Childcare assistant, 100%	-
39	Preschool	1	Cohabiting	Nurse assistant, 100%	Social care student, 100%
40	School	8, 10, 12	Married	Home service assistant, 100%	Taxi driver, 100%