



UNIVERSITY OF  
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HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT  
ZU BERLIN



Symposium

# **Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Family Formation Policies**

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*29 November 2019 in Berlin*

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*Summary Report*

Partners



**WZB**

Berlin Social Science Center



Berlin University  
**Alliance**

The project was funded by the Oxford/Berlin Research Partnership.

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## **Project outline**

The symposium “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Family Formation Policies”, seed-funded by the Oxford/Berlin research partnership, took place on 29 November 2019 at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

The project explores the potential challenges in linking policies oriented to the pre-parental phase of family with those oriented to the parental phase. Theories on the latter are far more developed than on the former, certainly from a social policy perspective. Moreover, the two phases of life are typically treated in isolation and by distinct research fields. Policies for the preparental phase tend to be considered from a public health perspective whereas the parental phase tends to be the province of classical family policies. Hence, little is known about similarities and differences in the logics of law and social policy shaping partnership and family formation on the one hand, and parenthood and family life on the other. This omission is highly problematic especially because it makes for a lacuna in social policy knowledge and potential contradictions between social policy, law and health policy. In sum, the project opens up the view of the life course as starting before conception and aims to contribute to elaborating an innovative perspective of social rights of children and parents across the life course.

At the project’s core is a critical and forward-looking analysis, surveying the existing relevant regulation in a range of policy fields. The first strand of the project was to develop a descriptive overview of the patterns of policies across countries; the second was to uncover the specific tensions created within particular policy packages.

The interdisciplinary symposium had the aim to bring together experts from the fields of classical family policy, social policy, public health, law, political science, demography and sociology from different countries. Thereby, the symposium explored important synergies and research needs. This report summarizes the most important insights and highlights how an agenda for a new research program on Family Formation Policies can look like.

## Overview of the Program

*Friday, November 29, 2019*

- 9:00 Welcome coffee
- 9:15 Symposium Welcome
- 9:30 Introduction
  - *Mary Daly*
  - *Hannah Zagel*
- 10:00 Panel 1 "Reproduction, fertility, childlessness"
  - *Anne-Lise Ellingsæter*
  - *Anne-Kristin Kuhnt*
- 11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:30 Panel 2 "Health, maternity, abortion"
  - *Sally Sheldon*
  - *Nadine Reibling*
- 12:30 Panel 3 "Children, Childhood"
  - *Kirsten Scheiwe*
  - *Harry Willekens*
- 13:30 Lunch Break
- 14:30 Panel 4 "Parents, parenthood, parenting"
  - *Marie Evertsson*
  - *Almut Peukert*
  - *Claude Martin*
- 16:00 Coffee Break
- 16:30 Concluding session
- 17:15 Wrap up & Farewell
- 17:30 End of event

## Introduction

The first session consisted of presentations by the principal investigators of the project and the main organizers of the symposium, Hannah Zagel and Mary Daly. They presented the project's main ideas, aims, and motivations, and introduced a theoretical conceptualization of family formation policies.

### **Presentation by Hannah Zagel (PI)**

Family formation policies can be defined as policies and laws that govern the reproduction of families by regulating whether, when and how people (can) form families. The lead question of this symposium is to understand what are the particularities of the family policy and family formation policy fields, and how do they compare with and sit beside each other?

The starting point of the OX-BER project was to focus on a blind spot in comparative family policy research which is the process of family formation. Policies and laws regulating family and policies and laws regulating the formation of family are often studied separately. By bridging this gap, a more extensive idea of state-family relationships can be established. A study of family formation policies theorizes and describes the differences in state regulation of whether, when and how families are formed. Here, it is important to also account for the diversity in family forms (e.g. outside the heterosexual partnership).

By examining the process of family formation from a policy perspective, the project contributes to the field of life course sociology by presenting a more extended description of the set of institutional opportunity structures created for individuals in addition to the widely used welfare state typologies. With regard to comparative policy research a more comprehensive analysis of relationships between state and family can be accomplished. By focusing more strongly on the preparental life stage one acknowledges that the state intervenes in this process. It is argued that family policies and family formation policies are parts of a broader patterning of state-society-economy relations. In this context, different types of regimes have to be considered, such as welfare state regimes, production and reproduction regimes. This regime perspective suggests common institutional logics across policy fields regarding, in this instance, shared family ideals as well as power relationships.

This emerging field of family formation policies will be assessed from different perspectives and topics. Four questions were to be discussed throughout the course of the symposium: At which levels do family formation policies operate? What are the roles and modalities of family formation policies? How do they address family? How do they relate to family policies?

Since the emerging field of family formation policies has implications for many different study subjects, the symposium is structured around four broader topics. The symposium is set up to enable experts from different fields of study to discuss how the 'family formation gap' (in scholarship) can be addressed and what follows from this for understanding and conceptualising family formation policies.

Firstly, in panel 1 on *reproduction, fertility, childlessness*, the discussion will focus on how family formation policies relate to the regulation of whether and when to have children. Two experts discuss the questions of who is expected and allowed to reproduce, who is given access to resources for having children, and which fertility pathways are supported by countries and for whom?

In the second panel *health, maternity, abortion*, the pre-parental phase of family is discussed. Two experts offer insights regarding the topic of rights and conditions in gestation, how pregnancy is governed, and under which circumstances and for whom abortion is permitted.

The third panel - *children, childhood* - focuses on the perspective of children. Together with two experts the panel discusses the role of children as actors and childhood as a life stage. Furthermore, the questions of children's legal status and whether or how child-centred laws/policies oppose family-centred laws/policies are addressed.

In the fourth panel on the topic of *parents, parenthood, parenting*, discussion centres on the conditions of the transition to parenthood, the definition of who is considered a legitimate parent, and parenting ideals. This panel was led by presentations from three experts.

### **Presentation by Mary Daly (PI)**

Mary Daly focused in her presentation on the conceptualisation of family policies and family formation.

Regarding the conceptualisation of family policy interesting questions can be posed. For instance, should family be understood as collective unit or more in terms of sectoral policies (e.g. age groups, elements of family life)? Should family be restricted to families with children? Mary Daly suggested a broad definition which relates polity, economy, social and cultural systems:

*Family policies are policies by which the state seeks to affect the income situation, organisational structure and role of the family regarding care and resourcing of its members (especially children) in the context of the practices, behaviours and relationships that constitute family life* (adapted from Bahle, 2008).

### **Overview: Family Policy**

<b>Modalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cash/income and services</li> <li>• Within particular administrative and legal frameworks</li> </ul>
<b>Functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-poverty</li> <li>• Fertility considerations</li> <li>• Redistribution (from childless to those with children)</li> <li>• Child welfare -&gt; child rights</li> <li>• Gender (in)equality</li> </ul>
<b>Field of family policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family policy is European in origin – dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century</li> <li>• Slow to develop and rather fitful - Gauthier (1996) spoke of five historical periods (1870-1929, 1930-44, 1945-59, 1960-74, 1975 on)</li> <li>• Different models in different parts of Europe</li> <li>• 'Flowering' in last 10-20 years               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ new domains and motivations</li> <li>○ different versions of gender equality, children's life chances/children's rights (social investment, generational equity), parenting, the reconciliation of work and family (work-life balance)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Paradigms</b>	<p><u>Older Paradigm/Functions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support families financially</li> <li>• Address family poverty</li> <li>• Support maternity</li> <li>• Support male breadwinner model</li> </ul>

### Newer Paradigm/Functions

- Combat child and family poverty
- Mobilise female labour supply and gender equality in that guise
- Promote fatherhood, parenthood
- Promote child development
- Help families reconcile work and family life, promote conditions which allow families to have the number of children they want

Family policy can be considered as a relatively small but specialised field with focus on particular areas of policy (e.g., childcare, parental leave, income supports, gender measures). It includes three types of work. Firstly, national studies focus on the aims, instruments and political ideologies of family policy (often over time). Secondly, research seeks to identify and characterise country policy packages, hallmarked by a strong empirical focus and also a classificatory aim (Gauthier, 1999; Hantrais, 2004; Leitner, 2003; Gornick et al., 1997). Thirdly, there is research searching for explanations, which tends towards historico-institutional analyses or analyses tracing intent and to a lesser extent impact over time and place (Kaufmann, 2001; Bahle, 2003; Pedersen, 1995; Saraceno, 1994).

Many insights can be gained from existing work. The motivations for family policy are interdisciplinary and include economic, institutional, demographic, socio-political (gender, generation, culture/values) interests. It is important to differ between *explicit* and *implicit* family policy. Furthermore, family policy is set in a constellation of historical relationships between the main power agents (especially state actors and churches). Change is often seen in terms of familisation/defamilisation (Leitner, 2003; Saraceno, 2016; Saraceno and Keck, 2010), although many question the framework (Lohmann and Zagel, 2016), not least that it is state centric. The field of research as a whole contains strong institutionalist orientations as well as a strong gender focus and some intergenerational approaches and considerations.

Currently, too little attention is paid to the definition of what is a family. It is problematic that family is often seen as passive. Agency associated with family (members/life) is often not considered. The 'conventional family' which is two-generational and focuses on heterosexual couples with young children is the core of most theorising. Hence, there is little theorising of family diversity as associated with family policy – are policies for the status quo or for change? Besides, family policy studies have underused a life course perspective, as most concentration has been on parenting and young childhood stages with little longer-term orientation and little or no 'pre-family' consideration as part of the span of family life. It is helpful to differentiate structure and practice, for instance through seeing family as institution and group of individuals.

From a collective level perspective, family can be summarized by the functions of consumption, production, and reproduction, but also the inculcation and transferral of norms and values. The family is also a form of social organisation associated with legal and social conventions of marriage, parenthood and childhood. When we understand family as a group or a collection of (related) individuals, relations/status among family members are studied as are the relations of members of the family to outside institutions such as the labour market, education system and so forth.

Multiple axes of state/family policy intersections exist. This includes the monitoring and policing of families and/or family members and providing resources (though services and benefits and sometimes as employer). Besides, also the state/family intersection of

legitimising (and reproducing) family as institution status and set of relationships needs to be considered. Also, internal aspects of family life are shaped and mediated.

It can be concluded that the existence and forms of family policy have to be posed as a cross-national variation, with deep national roots. Here, a multi-disciplinary perspective is needed. Family policy has to be conceived as operating at several different levels (certainly as institution and group of individuals but perhaps also even more widely). There are large gaps in our knowledge as well as weaknesses in existing perspectives.

## **Panel 1 “Assisted reproduction, fertility, childlessness”**

### **Presentation by Anne Lise Ellingsæter**

Expert Anne Lise Ellingsæter discussed the topics of family formation policies and the regulation of reproduction. Accordingly, family policy has implications for the pre-parent stage, for instance regarding the role of family policy as generating ‘opportunity structures’ for fertility behaviour. Important classification of family policies occurs regarding whether policies can be framed as *explicit* or *implicit*, and pronatalist or laissez faire.

Regarding the regulation of reproduction, family policies, including work-family policies, may aim at stimulating on the one hand the *number* of births (e.g. cash benefits, bonuses) or on the other hand the *timing* of births. For instance, the state could aim at supporting earlier births by creating incentives such as student finances or by reducing the opportunity costs for people (women) to procreate early in their life. Furthermore, reconciliation policies could be a way of ‘governing’ fertility.

With regard to understanding power and gender structures, the relationship between gender equality policy, family policy and fertility needs to be understood. The EU neoliberal vision for a productive Europe is as follows: women are expected to replace retiring male workers in the labour market and reproduce next generation of wage earners. Interventions are enacted through gender equality policies, to empower sexed subjects to self-governing reproductive choices based on cost-benefit calculations (Repo, 2016).

Furthermore, it is important to consider the interaction with class and other societal conditions and policies when discussing family formation. In Nordic countries, there is a long-term trend of increasing childlessness among low educated men with low educated women now following this trend. Whereas the number of low educated has decreased remarkably over time, these population segments face increasing social and economic disadvantages that are also reflected in their patterns of family formation.

### **Presentation by Anne-Kristin Kuhnt**

The expert Anne-Kristin Kuhnt focused on assisted reproductive technologies (ART) and its implications for family formation. ART includes techniques when egg(s) are fertilized outside of women’s bodies. In-vitro fertilization (IVF) describes the fertilization of the ovum/egg outside of the female body. Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) describes the process when a single sperm cell is injected directly into ovum/egg cell. Assisted reproductive technologies has implications for the concept and differentiation between biological and social parenthood.

The number of treatments is growing with currently 1.6 million treatment cycles per year in Germany. One out of 30 children are now born with the help of ART (Kuhnt et al., 2018). This share is even larger if the use of ART in other countries is considered (“reproductive

tourism"). The overall trend of postponement of first births to higher ages (30 years in Germany in 2018) is relevant for the discussion of ART.

Three potential ways of regulating ART can be distinguished. The first is through specific *guidelines for practitioners* which are proposed by professional organizations (e.g. gynaecology societies) and consist of sets of rules to be voluntarily followed by practitioners. A second route is *governmental legislation* which sets the rules codified by law and comes with penalties for violation. Thirdly, there is *insurance coverage* which is an indirect regulation of access to ART because the costs for ART can be high (Präg and Mills, 2017).

The insurance coverage for ART in Germany differs between private and statutory health insurances. The regulation of private health insurance is such that infertility is recognised as a disease. The reimbursement is not uniformly regulated. Statutory health insurances do not recognise infertility as a disease. The reimbursement covers 50 percent of costs for up to three treatment cycles. The patient's contribution is 50 percent. The Social Security Code (SGB V, §27a) regulates that IVF and ICSI treatments are taken over if they are medically indicated, when a reasonable chance of success exists, when a couple is married, when the couple's egg and sperm cells (homologous system) are used, when individuals do not exceed certain age limits (women at 40, men 50 at years), and when partners received advice on medical/psychosocial consequences of ART.

Dr Kuhnt also poses some concluding questions. One important question is *Who should benefit from family formation policies?* It needs to be assessed whether some groups are excluded and whether social inequalities exist regarding access to ART. Socio-demographic attributes such as age, sex, marital status, income amongst others should be considered here. Furthermore, there is the question of whether *there are alternative ways to regulate family formation apart from the state?* Finally, a crucial question is how *should ART be considered in family formation policies?* ART can enable parenthood but also an informed decision about parenthood.

## **Panel 2 "Health, maternity, abortion"**

### **Presentation by Sally Sheldon**

Sally Sheldon spoke about the regulation of abortions in Great Britain where abortion is a serious criminal offence, punishable by up to life imprisonment. According to the Abortion Act (1967), no offence occurs where it is authorised by two doctors and performed by a doctor in an approved place. The text of the 1967 Act has remained largely unchanged since 1967 but has acquired meaning through the day to day interpretation offered by doctors, facing women seeking services, evolving practices, official guidance and occasional court cases. The interpretation and application of abortion law has shifted over time, reflecting a range of factors including changing institutional contexts; declining religious norms; shifting ideas of the medical relationship; changing ideas of disability; and changing understandings of gender and family. Abortion regulation needs also to be understood in a context of broader social policy regulations, e.g. two-child benefit cap in Universal Credit (whereby parents get the child payments only for two children, regardless of whether they have more children or not).

### **Presentation by Nadine Reibling**

Next, Nadine Reibling discussed the role and implications of maternity care and maternity policies for family formation policies. Maternity care is defined as the care of women (and children) during pregnancy, birth, and for a (mostly) short period after birth as part of the healthcare system. Maternity care fulfils the functions of supporting and resourcing individuals and of regulating family-related behaviour and relationships. The idea(l) of family in maternity policies regarding social rights is understood as mother and child. Families are not at the centre as maternal and infant health are primary policy goals. Fathers and extended family have a place in maternity care processes, but this is more part of practice/values and not regulation, although there are cross-national and socio-economic variations.

Three different stages of maternity care can be identified. The first is the phase of *pregnancy/antenatal care*. This includes support and resources for mothers, e.g. prenatal classes. The organization, practice, and content of maternity care highlight gender inequalities and contribute to (re-)traditionalization of gender relations (Müller and Zillien, 2016). The second stage of maternity care is *birth*. Social rights and choice and autonomy at birth can be in conflict in this phase. Furthermore, doctors and midwives have power during the stage of birth. The choice of medical treatment tends to be restricted in the public health sector compared to private markets. Birth experiences can lead to bonding which sets the path for future family relationships. The third stage of maternity care is *postnatal care and breastfeeding*. Important topics in this phase include maternity leave and the right to breastfeed at work. This stage reveals contradictions between public health messages and work ideals/policies, for instance regarding the gendered patterns of the division of labour in the household.

Should maternity care be included in the concept of family formation policies? What speaks in favour of including maternity care is its long duration. Family life already exists during pregnancy and pregnancy/birth set the stage for later family life. Furthermore, the state plays a strong role during this stage, regarding the granting of social rights, support provision, and regulation. The phase of maternity care also creates inequalities along gender, socioeconomic and ethnic lines which need to be accounted for in the analysis of family formation policies. However, a differentiation needs to be made between the healthcare system and welfare regimes (Reibling et al., 2019). In addition, there exists a surprisingly high level of homogeneity regarding the regulation of maternity care on the macro-level but on a meso-level,, a surprisingly wide variation in maternity care practices exists (Benoit et al., 2010; Kennedy et al., 2015). Dr Reibling poses the following questions for discussion: How does the variation in family formation policy set the stage for family life? How does maternity care (re)create inequalities in family life? How are experiences in maternity care related to problems in family life?

### **Panel 3 "Children, childhood"**

#### **Presentation by Kirsten Scheiwe**

The expert Kirsten Scheiwe presented legal aspects of family formation. In the stage around birth legal rules aim to assign two legally responsible parents to a child as soon as possible. Societal interests and 'best' interests of the child play a role in an abstract way. Thereby, there is the principle of 'parents are destiny', which entails that there is no right for a child to choose or divorce parents. Regarding adoption, potential parents are checked

in the child's best interests. In this process, the child's voice will be heard. Here, questions can be posed as to why only two parents are assigned and the role gender and genetics plays.

Regarding the topic of children's rights regarding family formation, specific family law rights are granted, such as the right to contest the assignment of paternity (but not maternity) in family law proceedings. This may blow up the former legal family and the family life practiced before, if the legal assignment of paternity is withdrawn by the court, based on to the contestation of paternity by one of the parties (legal father, mother or child). But the possibility to contest paternity, based on biological/genetic facts, is limited by social facts and appropriate time limits - rules which differ considerably between countries.

When it comes to children's rights regarding later stages, children have the right to be heard or to veto decisions concerning separation and divorce in family court proceedings. However, these rights are often insufficient or are not properly implemented.

The topic of minors as parents is a complex legal issue. In some legal orders, minor persons do not enjoy full parental rights. The minor parent is allowed to care (and has to), but does not have the right to represent the child legally and to take certain legal decisions. This should change. The treatment of minor's marriages under private international law (nullity of ,child marriages') as a rule is highly problematic and might make young women/mothers particularly vulnerable.

## **Panel 4 "Parents, parenthood, parenting"**

### ***Presentation by Marie Evertsson***

The fourth panel on *parents, parenthood, parenting* consists of three expert presentations. The first presentation is by Marie Evertsson on legal rights to parenthood for same-sex couples. The term 'parentalization' is introduced which describes the *ability to become parents and be recognized as such, legally and via social policies*. It is important to investigate the extent to which individuals can: (a) transition to legally recognized parenthood and (b) make use of family policies to care for the child. Both (a) and (b) can be accessible in theory but more or less difficult to achieve in practice. There are risks associated with not being legally acknowledged as the parent. Firstly, there is the risk of losing custody of the child in case of divorce/separation or the other parent's death. Furthermore, legally unacknowledged parents are not able to pick up medicine at the pharmacy and/or to act in the child's interest/represent the child in various situations. Additionally, they are not able to pass on inheritance without a testimony and to use family leave benefits to care for the child. The following two tables visualize the legal rights of same-sex couples to register their partnership or marriage and the acknowledgement of legal parenthood across a number of countries.

Dr Evertsson concludes that family formation, marriage rights and family policies are strongly interlinked. Theories and concepts on differences in family policies are useful for understanding and analysing differences in family formation and policy use across countries. Welfare states institutionalize relationships of power and control. This influences whether, when and how people form families.

Same-sex couples' legal rights linked to registered partnership/marriage and parentalization in five countries.					
	The Netherlands	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
<b>Reg. partnership</b>	1998	1989	2002	1993	1995
<b>Marriage</b>	2001	2012	2017	2009	2009
<b>Second-parent/joint adoption</b>	2001 (joint within country); 2009 (joint international)	1999 (second parent after 2.5 years); 2009 (second parent at childbirth if non-anonymous donor at clinic used; after 2.5 years otherwise); 2010 (joint)	2009 (second parent); 2017 (joint)	2002 (second parent after 5 years if registered partners); 2006 (at birth if non-anonymous donor at clinic used); 2009 (joint)	2003 (married/registered partners); 2018 (cohabiting)
<b>Insemination/IVF for lesbian couples</b>	Never limited to different-sex couples	1992 - 1997 (all clinics); 1999 (private clinics); 2007 (all clinics)	1997 (private clinics)	2009	2005
<b>Possible for social mother to become legal parent at childbirth</b>	2002 (non-anonymous donor at clinic)	2009 (through adoption if non-anonymous donor at clinic used); 2013 (known or non-anonymous donor at clinic used)	2019 (non-anonymous donor at clinic used)	2009 (non-anonymous donor at clinic used)	2005 (non-anonymous donor at Swedish clinic used); 2019 (non-anonymous donor at certified clinic used)
<b>Wife/registered partner automatically recognized as legal parent at childbirth</b>	2014	-	-	-	-
<b>Surrogacy legally available to male couples</b>	2019 (altruistic) Illegal if commercial	Unregulated until 1997; Thereafter, unregulated (if private & altruistic) and illegal (if commercial or at national clinics)	Unregulated 1991-2006; Illegal since 2007 (if commercial or at national clinics) and unregulated (if private & altruistic)	Unregulated (if private or done abroad); Prohibited at national clinics	Unregulated (if private or done abroad); Prohibited at national clinics
<b>Possible to legally recognize more than two parents for one child</b>	No, but government proposes two legal parents and two guardians (in 2020)	-	More than two persons can be guardians (not legal parents) to a child.	-	-
<b>Both partners can use some parental leave</b>	2001	2009	2007	2007	1995

For sources, see Evertsson, Jaspers & Moberg (2021) "Parentalization of Same-Sex Couples: Family formation and leave rights in five Northern European countries", in Nieuwenhuis, R. and W. Van Lancker (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Family Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

### **Presentation by Almut Peukert**

Almut Peukert challenges the traditional concept of parenthood and its restrictions concerning diversity. When a heterosexual couple raise their 'own' children there is a concurrence of biological, genetic, legal and social 'parenthood'. What happens if we have two (or more) mothers, fathers or generally more than two parents in one family? This conception of parenthood has implications for the definition of parenthood in welfare states and the law. We need to ask which forms of parenthood exist but are not recognised by the welfare state and understand who is included and who is excluded? Which groups of individuals and families are supported and which are not supported by the welfare state? The German legal framework privileges (married) heterosexual couples. However, it is important to also grant LGBTQ families the recognition as a family through family policies, for instance regarding parental leave/allowances. These are currently granted for partnered or married lesbian or gay two-parent families, but not for families consisting of more than two parents. The question of legal parenthood is crucial since only legal parents receive support by the welfare state. Parents, who are involved in daily care work and raise the children, but who have no custody, often remain excluded from benefits

To reveal these inequalities, it is important to study diverse families. Beforehand, a careful examination of concepts and definitions on parenthood and family is mandatory. Furthermore, it is promising to compare family formation policies of countries using a social inequality perspective to understand their selective or non-selective effect on who is founding a family and who is not. In addition, a stronger differentiation within the concept of parenthood should be discussed which goes beyond the binary assumption of 'parent' or 'no parent'. This scholarship should consider the family life course perspective (including possible changing parental 'involvement').

### **Presentation by Claude Martin**

The expert Claude Martin focused in his presentation on French family policies and investments in children. He first presents the steps and main topics of reforms over time and the emergence of parentalism which is related to high fertility rates in the 1930s. In the 1945-60 period, child mortality decreased and costs of supporting children rose. In the 1970-80s, equity and social redistribution between households was important. In the 1990s, unemployment rises and there was a turn towards flexibilization of the labour market. Since 2000, the aim of improving parenting skills in the best interest of the child has received more attention. The family policy field in France is marked by a structural opposition between the Catholic Church and the *République*, with two forms of familialism which are state familialism versus church familialism (Lenoir, 2003).

### **Chronology of family policies in France since 1945**

	<b>Familialism</b>	<b>Individualism</b>	<b>Parentalism</b>
<b>Universality</b>	I: 1945 – 1965 The golden age of French family policy	II: 1965 – 1975 Recognition of women's rights	V: 1995 – 2015 Volition to universally accompany parenting practices
<b>Selectivity</b>	III: 1975 – 1985 Targeting of the most vulnerable families	IV: 1985 – 1995 Promotion of women's jobs and balancing family/work through a dual policy known as "free choice"	V: 1995 – 2015 Targeting of irresponsible parents in connection with child protection

Notes: Based on Martin (2010).

Regarding the topic of social investments in childhood, trendy concepts of the « welfare modelling business » exist which often imply a black-box open to many possible options. This approach often implies self-investment and responsabilisation and even engages in blaming the victim of inequalities. It is linked to the promotion of well-being and rising happiness. This concept reframes childhood and parenting policies in the sense of economic returns rather than social returns, obscuring normative choices. In recent years, there has been a shift from social investment to parental investment. This change is framed in the context of lower upward social mobility for the new generations. The competition among pupils in schools is high which generates a high level of anxiety. Thus, parents are more and more looking for advice to optimize the children's trajectories (a market for experts). Parental skills are no longer an issue only in disadvantaged social classes but also now in the middle class. There exists a parental double-bind between not investing enough and investing too much in your child. The concept of investing in yourself thereby follows a neoliberal rhetoric.

It is said that emphasis should be placed more strongly on early childhood investment: the earlier the better. This philosophy ordains a turn to services more than rights and

allowances and emphasizes prevention instead of curative intervention. Furthermore, evidence-based policies with evaluation as proof of efficiency are valued in this perspective.

## Outlook

Our project started from the observation that comparative family policy research does not commonly include policies regulating non-familial or pre-familial reproductive processes. This is a shortcoming in a context where fertility rates are widely discussed as a public concern, and where technological developments push governments to regulate value-laden fields such as access to assisted reproductive health services. Some observers have noted a 'demographisation' of public discourses (Schultz, 2015), but what that means in terms of policies, particularly in a comparative perspective, has yet received little attention.

Comparative family policy research provides a rich set of conceptual perspectives on the regulation of demographic processes and hence is a fruitful starting point for thinking about possible theoretical perspectives on 'family formation policies'. However, issues like assisted reproduction, abortion, and non-heterosexual family formation do not commonly feature in these approaches (but see O'Connor, 1993; O'Connor et al., 1999). In this symposium, we brought together experts who have considered such perspectives in their work to discuss common themes and possible future research questions that conjoin family policy and 'family formation policy'.

A term that perhaps best puts a bracket around the diverse topics is 'reproduction', which is a broad research field with a long tradition (Laslett and Brenner, 1989). Reproduction conveys all scenarios, the pathways leading to family life, those that lead away from it, and family life itself (Almeling, 2015). Looking forward, emerging research questions are how do policies regulating reproduction sit besides each other and form distinct patterns across countries? How do such patterns emerge and how does change occur, given the heated debates around reproduction and fertility?

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