

Care-full public policy

A comparative study of the gender equalizing potential of social policies in Sweden and the Netherlands

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Abstract

In this thesis, I compare two forms of social policy in Sweden and the Netherlands for their gender equalizing potential. These countries have both tried to achieve better gender equality using several social policy forms in different socio-economic situations resulting in two very different systems. To analyse the equalizing potential of both countries, I asked how Sweden's public policy concerning work-family balance compares to Dutch policy equivalents and how these policies affected gender equality differently in these countries.

In order to signal good and bad practises in policy implementation, I have investigated two specifically heralded policy fields: publicly funded childcare and parental leave. Concerning these policies, gender equality is understood as the extent to which both genders can achieve an equal balance between work and family responsibilities. Effectively these policies should thus increase both women's labour participation and fathers' uptake of care work.

The analyses resulted in three general conclusions. Firstly, social policy follows social movements, not the other way around. In both countries the analysed policies were formulated and implemented as a reaction to social developments. Secondly, parental leave is an ambiguous policy tool to improve both work-family balance and the gender equality situation. Overall, a gender equalising potential resides within these policies, bringing fathers to care and women to work but they can do serious harm to women's labour market position. Thirdly, government paid childcare is a complementary policy tool to achieve better gender equality. It does little for men's share in care work as part of the work-family balance but does provide mothers with means to outsource care work.

Based on the analyses and comparison of Swedish and Dutch policies, Sweden's system has improved gender equality the most. Sweden has a theoretically more solid and practically more effective parental leave scheme. However, the mentioned downsides of parental leave schemes have also actualised in Sweden. Secondly, it was revealed that there is potential within the Dutch parental leave scheme to assimilate characteristics present in the Swedish equivalent. This is supported by results of the analyses of both the Netherlands and Sweden. To improve gender equality institutionally in the Netherlands, Sweden can therefore provide helpful inspiration, and there are serious indications this implementation would be successful.

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Introduction

Public policy has an important potential to achieve social change and improve gender equality since it is a relatively controllable and identifiable means to accomplish these goals. Policies dealing with work and family matters in particular provide examples of this potential. These are frequently associated with both work-family balance and gender equality (Haas, 2003: 90; Lyness & Krompf, 2005: 34). Additionally, such social policies can be effective means to positively changing (gender) normative systems in work organisations (Haas, 2003: 91). On the other hand, public policies are often inconclusive in their outcomes and a rather blunt instrument to achieve delicate social change. This complexity shows the importance of analysing and comparing such policies and their outcomes.

Both the Netherlands and Sweden are welfare states with a high concern for gender equality that have implemented several policies to this end (Pascall & Lewis, 2004), making it interesting to see how they fare and compare at achieving such changes. Thus, unsurprisingly, the Netherlands and Sweden are frequently compared concerning their policies dealing with work and family matters (Gustafsson & Stafford, 1994; Cousins & Tang, 2004; Ray et al., 2008; Versantvoort, 2008). Despite this fact, an analytical overview of academic analyses of how their policies compare on both content and success remains incomplete.

My analysis provides an addition to the debate by looking at which policy works in which context and, more importantly how sometimes heralded policies have underexposed or unexpected downfalls. For these reasons I ask how Sweden's public policy concerning work-family balance compares to Dutch policy equivalents and how these policies affected gender equality differently in these countries. To answer this question, I will perform a comparative study based on previous academic research, intent on combining insights and possibly engendering new ones.

Background

The so-called 'Nordic countries', notably Scandinavia and Iceland, are particularly successful in implementing mentioned policies considering the balance between work and family (Ray et al. 2008: 14). Sweden is of particular interest for having the most institutionalised model of feminist influences and policies explicitly aimed at gender equality (Bergqvist, 1999). In addition, Sweden's political system has been related to

'state feminism', meaning "the integration of feminization of the political elite through the integration of women into the political parties", and has explicitly feminist political parties (Borchorst & Siim, 2008: 210-211). These qualities of Sweden's system make it an interesting subject for analysis as an example of an extensive amount of policies that arguably lead to a more gender equal work-family balance in society. Sweden is an example to show how extensive social policies that can lead to improvement but also to signal pitfalls related to such policies.

The Netherlands also has a history of both active feminist movements and (institutionalised) concern for gender equality. Gender equality is characterized as "[o]ne of the most central qualities defined as 'Dutch'" (Roggebrand & Verloo, 2007: 272). The Netherlands also has a high female participation in the workforce and actively regulates work and family matters to improve female labour participation and women's emancipation (Versantvoort, 2008). Contrary to Sweden, the Netherlands has left elements of its policy considerations to the private sector, creating a different policy system (den Dulk et al., 2003). Although both countries engage with gender equality on an institutional level, the differences between the systems allows for an interesting comparison between policies.

Concepts

Two specific core-subject areas of public policies will function as primary focus. The first being government-mandated paid parental leave policies, the second subsidized childcare policies. Both policy areas have been frequently related to more gender equal societies and identified as sources of gender equality (Haas, 2003: 90; Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 378; Lyness & Krompf, 2005; Ray et al., 2008; Borchorst & Siim, 2008). Yet, this does not mean these policies work in a vacuum; therefore, I will address other forms of policy occasionally to clarify certain contextual developments. To accommodate some of these contextual developments beforehand, a third field, working hour policies, is analysed to provide some supplementary information. Due to the size of this third policy field, I will address it only in relation to the first two policy fields.

The comparison of policies occurs across differences between culture, history, institutional structures and policies (O'Connor, 1993: 510). It is these kind of differences that pose difficulties to be considered throughout the analytical comparison and critical evaluation of administrative projects. On the other hand, when comparing policies

aimed at gender equality, exactly such differences can provide a fruitful base for a multifaceted analysis.

Gender equality

To address these possible complications the social and historical context of policies will have to be analysed along clear definitions, making it essential to specify what is understood as gender equality in relation to public policy in both this analysis and in the treated works. The term 'gender equality' is a complex and highly contested concept with different interpretations. The theorization of gender equality as a goal of policy is complicated further due to "different possible standards and goals" (Walby 2004: 4). For these reasons, some have resorted to understanding gender equality as 'empty signifier', allowing for different and fluid inscribing of meanings and different framings (Verloo, 2005a; Verloo, 2005b; Verloo, 2007). This careful approach allows and acknowledges much of the complexity within it. Yet, that same ambiguity makes it hard to work with.

The difficulties and lessons motivating this reluctance to fix gender equality in a 'fixed' meaning will have to be taken into consideration, yet it is for pragmatic reasons that a stricter definition of gender equality will be used in this analysis. It should be clear any finite definition is bound to homogenize diversity and contain some form of conscious or unconscious framing (Verloo, 2007: 22). Even so, a definition is necessary in order to research the policies of the mentioned countries.

The United Nations Development Programme uses a possibly useful definition for this analysis by defining 'national gender equality' as "the extent to which national cultures support women's development and achievements, and recognize the importance of including women in all aspects of life" (Lyness & Krompf, 2005). This notion incorporates national and cultural particularities and thus allows for comparison on these grounds. An important problem with this definition is its formulation from a male-dominant perspective. 'Integration' suggests the addition of women into a male world they were previously excluded from, but it has no clear acknowledgment of the female perspective. In terms of the policies that are to be treated, women should participate in paid work through such policies, but do men move into caring roles as well?

Walby mentions a related issue to this definition problem in a reaction to policies and guidelines developed by European Union, for its "equal treatment laws take the male pattern of life as the norm and do not tackle the deep-rooted causes of inequality"

(2004: 6). This definition also ignores any gender inequalities involving men in a disadvantaged position. As will be seen in the following analysis, family policies often target women's interests, which can lead to serious difficulties for men to engage in family matters on the same level as women.

It is important to note Lyness & Krompf use this definition in the context of addressing 'work-family balance' as an important origin of gender inequality (2005: 34). This 'work-family balance' is understood as 'the degree to which an individual is able to simultaneously balance the temporal, emotional, and behavioural demands of both paid work and family responsibilities' (Hill et al., 2001: 49). Taking an 'individual' as focal point rather than a single gender has the benefit of avoiding some of the difficulties mentioned in regard to the United Nation's definition. This allows to take into account "that policies addressing fatherhood and men's work time and caring time for their children cannot be divorced from policies aimed at mothers' reconciliation of employment with family life" (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009: 216). Additionally, a similar interest in policy effects on 'work-family balance' will be central to this research, serving as an important specification of the concerned 'aspects of life' as noted in the United Nations' definition.

To further specify the policy outcomes of interest the notion of a 'woman-friendly state' will be also be taken into account. This refers to the extent to which a state enables both women and men "to have a natural relationship to their children, their work and public life" (Hernes, 1987: 15). It is important to point out that the idea of a 'natural relationship' in this sense is problematic since it is this very relationship that is constantly negotiated. Hernes understands this as that such a state "[w]ould not force harder choices on women than on men, or permit unjust treatment on the basis of sex" (1987: 15). It is specifically the notion of 'harder choices' put on women that are of interest in this analysis. These choices, such as caring for children or working full or part-time, are taken to be more difficult for women, due to social norms for example. The policies of interest should be an alleviation of these choices and thus either implicitly or explicitly aimed at a more gender equal society.

These definitions must be brought together in order to achieve a workable definition of gender equality in order to cast judgement on the definition of gender equality negotiated by the targeted policies. The importance of inclusion and recognition of women *and* men in all aspects of life will be an important part of the definition of gender equality in this analysis. Support for development and achieving participation

are essential to achieve both this inclusion and recognition. In one of its most basic forms, equality is constituted by the ability to balance education and paid labour with the possibility to deal with family responsibilities.

To sum up, gender equality is addressed in this research as the extent to which both men and women can achieve the previously mentioned work-family balance and the extent to which both states differ on their 'woman-friendliness' as a result of policies concerned with work-family balance. Theoretically, this means that in a gender equal society, women have access to and participate in education and paid work on equal basis with men and have the possibility to continue working whilst having children. On the other hand, men should also be able to participate in family responsibilities equal to women and balance this with paid work accordingly. In practise, this means the actual social situation should closely resemble this theoretical idea. It is on these grounds that the extent to which the social policies in the Netherlands and Sweden play a part in reducing gender inequality concerning work-family balance will be analysed and compared.

Care models

Welfare state policies in gender equality research are often positioned within care and breadwinner models. These models are interesting for three reasons; to maintain continuity with other research, illustrate shifts in policy intentions and related outcomes, as well as a conceptual means to position the researched policies and their outcomes. The care model discussion mostly focuses on a situation where there are two parents involved in the care and work dynamic. Although a two parent model is no longer strictly the norm in modern day Europe it must be noted that the discussed dynamics should be applied to single-parent family situations where possible.

There are four elements of importance at the basis for a family's choice for a care model (den Dulk, et al., 2003: 70). First is human capital. When the human capital, such as education or experience, represented by a family member creates a situation in which it is too expensive for that member not to work, this plays an important part in the negotiation of work and care. A second related issue is economic necessity, when the societal situation is such that it is too expensive to maintain a family with only one income, this can motivate towards a situation wherein both parents work. Third element is the availability of (care) facilities making it possible for family members to outsource some, or nearly all, care-work thus freeing up time for paid work. The fourth element is

more abstract, but very important, and deals with social norms surrounding the different aspects of care. When it is socially considered self-evident that parents combine care work at home with paid work, or place their children in day-care for a large amount of time a day this has a great impact on the chosen model. Such a situation makes the consideration utterly different from a situation wherein there is a strong social norm stating mothers should take care of their children themselves.

The male-breadwinner or single-breadwinner model illustrates a(n) (illegitimate) baseline position to which gender equal alternatives can be posed. This model represents a normative, heterosexual ideal of a family wherein it is presumed that the man functions as 'breadwinner' and the wife takes on all (unpaid) caretaking. This is a problematic model in terms of gender equality and has been challenged in Europe by new forms of social organisation and legislation (Pascall & Lewis, 2004).

The single-breadwinner model correlates with low human capital and low educational level of the parents (den Dulk, et al., 2003: 70). This is often combined with low economic necessity for both parents to work. An example can be state provided income compensation for the parent that does not work. The availability of childcare facilities is either low or deemed unimportant due to a very strong social norm of taking care of the children. One of the many important conceptual problems with this model is the fact that "only men are visible, while women are invisible" (Haataja & Nyberg, 2006: 218). Their role within the model is neither acknowledged nor gender equal. While this model is not prevalent in Europe anymore it is still important, for it "leaves residues in most western countries of difference in working hours, part-time work, rewards from work, and the balance of work and care responsibilities" (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 385).

One alternative to the male-breadwinner model is the dual-breadwinner model. This model still presumes a two-parent family but both parents earn an income that partly provides for the family (Haataja & Nyberg, 2006: 218). There are many different ways these models can be formed. One interesting version is the 'one and a half working pattern' in which one parent works full-time and one part-time, wherein women mostly occupy the latter position (Pascall & Lewis 2004: 386). The choice for this model is often sparked by one of both family members having a significantly higher human capital and accompanied income making it cost inefficient for that person to work less (den Dulk, et al., 2003: 70). This is combined with economic necessity of two working family members but not two full incomes. Finally, it is often hard and or expensive to outsource care and most often not (fully) socially accepted (den Dulk, et al., 2003: 70). These models are

problematic because they focus on paid work only, leaving care work secondary (Haataja & Nyberg, 2006: 218). The focus on paid work excludes women that do not work entirely, and ignores the societal importance of unpaid care work. Differences in norms regarding care responsibilities and income equality make these models male centred.

The universal breadwinner model offers an alternative perspective (Fraser, 1997). This is a model conceived to “foster gender equity by promoting women’s employment; the centrepiece of this model is state provision of employment enabling services such as day care” (Fraser, 1997: 593). The model works “chiefly by supporting informal care work; the centrepiece of the model is state provision of caregiver allowances” (Fraser, 1997: 593). This is better than a one and a half earner solution, for both parties are presumed to acquire a similar level of economic autonomy within the family. One problem with this model is that the focus on employment through outsourcing care, when combined with caregiver allowances it still has little incentive for male participation in care.

In a response to the issues related to the previous models some suggested alternatives that should have greater equalizing potential. The ‘dual-earner/dual-carer’ models are an example (Haataja & Nyberg, 2006: 218). These models draw attention to the work done as carer as well as earning an income, whilst it also allows for a single parent family position. The idea behind a dual-earner/dual-carer model focuses on a “two x three-quarter earner model” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 378). This would bring men into the household and women to employment. This model must be accompanied by a strong social provision of facilities to allow both the parents to spend three-quarters of their time on paid labour. In such models in which rely on two (almost) full earners, both parents often have a high amount of human capital making it expensive for either of the partners to stay home for care work. Economic necessity can also motivate parents, when it is too expensive to support a family on less than two full incomes. The occurrence of this model therefore presumes the possibility of care outsourcing combined with a social acceptance of doing so (den Dulk, et al., 2003: 70).

This treatment of different models has shown how the parameters, human capital, economic necessity, available care facilities and social norms can have a strong impact on the occurrence of certain models. It is important to note that a care model does not simply follow certain policies and norms; it is the result of a social process and therefore unpredictable. So, although what is illustrated is by no means a direct causal

relation, there is a correlation between parental leave and childcare policies combined with, social norms and certain care models. Making these models an interesting tool analyse the Swedish and Dutch situation.

Look ahead

Now the premises and core definitions are clear, it serves to look ahead at what will be presented. The question is how Sweden's public policy concerning work-family balance compares to Dutch policy equivalents and how these have affected gender equality differently in these countries. In the next chapter, the method of analysis is treated. Additionally, the two policy forms will be described and defined.

Upon these definitions, the case of Sweden will be analyzed first, starting by looking at some historical information to illustrate and situate the emerging context of the cotemporary policies. This contextual analysis is followed by a description of the current policies in effect, accompanied by an interpretation of intended gender equality results that were aimed for in the formulation of these policies. Finally, these will be analysed along with the actual current social situation. This is done to see how the work-family balance for both men and women has developed. Then, in the following chapter the Dutch policy equivalents will subsequently be analysed along the same lines.

In the fourth chapter the comparative part of the research question is addressed. The policies in effect of both countries, and what is known of the socioeconomic situations that exist as a result, will be compared to each other. As a result of this comparison both countries' weak and strong points will be located and compared. These will subsequently be discussed and related in the final chapter where a reflection will be given on good and bad practices of both countries.

Method of analysis

Now there are some issues concerning the matter of 'effect assessment' of the policies that have to be addressed. First it is important to realise policies are never 'gender-neutral', "[a]nd because government policies are not gender-neutral, they may have unintended, unforeseen but important and mostly negative effects on the gender relations in a society" (Verloo & Roggebrand, 1996, 3). This is the case with both explicitly unequal policies, aimed at achieving equality, such as positive discrimination, as with 'gender neutral' policies, such as equalising pay. It is this very issue that is both one of the core motivations to conduct the current analysis, and draws attention to an important issue at stake in this research.

Large social changes are not easily achieved. Consequently, reservations about the actual effect of public policy will be in order throughout. Public policy will not resolve gender inequality regardless of how many policies are formulated; the matter is simply too complex. This is by no means an argument not to study public policy's outcomes and compare international differences. Especially the relatively unpredictable outcomes that are possible as a result of a highly visible and conceptually controllable means to achieve gender equality, makes it of utmost importance to analyse what policy does function and in which context it does.

The addressed policies and every other policy work within a social context and many different discourses, making it impossible to derive simple causal relations and conclusions between implemented policies and social realities. This poses an obvious problem when trying to compare the resulting gender equality situation of specific policies in two countries. To deal with this pertinent problem a framework will be discussed here that will be implemented in the next chapter. This framework provides some interesting insights in which factors interplay in gender equality policies allowing for a better analysis of possible gender equalising potential.

Policy intervention framework

Pascall and Lewis developed a framework to specifically identify the *levels* of policy intervention aimed, both implicit and explicit, at achieving a more (gender) equal society (2004: 373-374). This framework is of interest for two reasons. Firstly it has been used to frame the policies that will be addressed in this research and thus has proven to be able to situate them in a wider context. Secondly it draws attention to the most salient

essential constituting practices and components of a gender regime, the “key policy logics of welfare states in relation to gender” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 373). This framework will therefore enable a steering of attention towards elements fostering both equality and inequality.

Within the policy intervention framework there are four levels of policy intervention, individual, household, civil society and the social/collective. The individual level is the level that accounts for policies aimed “to change individual women’s ability to compete with men at work” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 379). The household level is intricately connected to the individual with the addition of the interpersonal dynamics that occur in the institute of the family. These two levels will be often taken combined here to address the influences of policies ‘on the ground’. Civil society can be understood as policy developments involving social movements and organisations in society. The highest level is the most institutionalised; this is the government and actual policy and its more abstract equalizing potential. This highest level of abstraction will be the starting position of my analysis, moving down the ladder along the way.

The framework works with five parameters; voice, time, paid work, care work and income. These constitute the playing field of institutionalised actions affecting gender equality. All five these parameters need to be incorporated into public policies and their analyses to adequately address gender equality issues.

Voice

The idea of voice is abstract but nonetheless essential in the context of policy analysis concerned with gender equality. In a primary sense, policies can be seen as an institutionalized manifestation of voice, understood as having influence and self-determination. Although in current context, such a manifestation does require an equal representation of women in policy formulating elements of governments. Another way in which voice is of essential importance, is the extent to which income and care work influence someone’s access to it. These matters have important influence on getting oneself heard, acknowledged and the power to influence processes elementary to someone’s existence. What must also not be forgotten in relation to voice inequality questions is the way in which unequal stereotypes and normative beliefs have negative influences on both men and women’s access to forms of voice. When putting it all together it is “inequalities in paid work, care, income and time bring unequal voice in

households, civil society, local politics, state and European governments” (Pascall & Lewis: 2004: 387).

Time

Most of the issues dealt with in equality politics come down complicated discussions about time. Time as a concept is often gendered either by unequal worth of someone’s time, unequal amount of time available and securities involved with money paid for ‘worked’ time. Social policies play an important role in the way such differences affect individuals and “have often supported these differences” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 386). In this analysis the balance between work time and care time will be of essential interest. In addressing these issues, policies have to deal with “the quantity of working time, its distribution between men and women, and between households, as well as autonomy for individuals to control working time in the interests of care and leisure” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 386).

Paid work

One of the historically most elementary constituents of gender equality is the access to paid work (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 381-382). To achieve any form of (economic) emancipation, some form of (economic) self-sustainability is essential. This makes paid work an important pillar in formal gender equality. This is also one of the reasons women’s access to paid work has received a great deal of attention from policy makers. All of the policies that will be discussed in this work have to do with goals aimed at achieving a higher participation of women in paid work, one way or another. Yet, the mere access to paid work of its own is not enough to institute an equal situation between men and women. It is the interplay with the other factors treated in this framework that allows for an impression of gender equality.

Care work

The sharing, or lack thereof, of care work is a crucial part of the interplay of factors in gender equality related to policies in work-family balance. Where paid work is seen as one of the most primary elements of gender equality there is almost always a trade off with care work. A person that has a great deal of care work to perform is by definition in a disadvantaged position when it comes to many aspects of personal freedom and specifically paid work. The fact that women still carry the greatest load of care work

responsibilities “has limited their access to incomes, but also to voice, inside relationships and out, in civil society and the public sector” (Pacall & Lewis, 2004: 383). Important to note in this respect is the fact that moving women to participate in paid work is far more often aimed for by the formulation of policies than male care work (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 383). An interesting way to look at the interplay between care work and paid work are state services concerning care work. Such services provided by a state “may be seen as social commitment to children and disabled or older people. But under conditions of gender inequality in paid and unpaid work – which are likely to persist – they may also be seen as compensation for women’s unpaid care work, through redistribution from earners” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 385).

Incomes

Income is another primary element in achieving gender equality very intimately connected to paid work. The equality concern comes down to “equal pay, a fairer share of quality work, decent minimum wage levels, and sufficiency of work for self-support” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 382). The fact is that within the discussed policies in this research the actual level of payment will not be discussed to great extent. It is however part of the context in which the discussed policies operate and therefore of essential importance to achieve a more complete image.

Two main issues related to income are important to consider along with the policies under attention here. The first is general equality in pay, which simply comes down to equal earnings for men and women. Beyond the simple fact that an equal reward for the same work is essential to gender equality, the access to income has an important influence in the decision to act towards a specific family model as was treated earlier. Secondly differences in full-time and part-time work create possible sites for gender inequality both due to lower wages paid as well as less time worked. Since it is often the case that an “individuals’ opportunit[y] to earn meet[s] only part of the need for income, especially for those with care responsibilities” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 383).

Definitive analysis framework

In judging if and how the policies have influence or the potential to change gender equality in Sweden and the Netherlands it will still be impossible to simply infer causal relations. This analytical framework combined with the notion of care models treated in the introduction provides both insight on what drives couples to take on a certain division of labour, as well as which parameters and dimensions need to be considered in policy analysis.

The care models indicated some of the main considerations any analysis of gender equality policies has to deal with: human capital, economic necessity, available facilities and social norms. These core elements mentioned in addressing care models can be related to the five parameters of the policy intervention framework: voice, time, paid work, care work and income. Paid work and income have a strong relation to human capital and economic necessity. The available facilities often cost money thus putting a strain on economic necessity. Care facilities can also open up time and are also related to the uptake of care work. Finally the social norms will have an effect on each parameter and will simultaneously be influenced by each parameter itself.

To sum up all insights taken together the current policies will be analysed based on five parameters being voice, time, paid work, care work and income that will be discussed in relation to four different levels, social and collective, civil society, household and the individual. The highest level being the social and collective origin of policies. The second will be civil society, the organisations in society. The third level is the household that will often be discussed in relation to the individual level.

Policies

The first of the two core policies is parental leave. Since many forms of leave have a relation to parenthood the exact meaning of parental, paternal and other forms of leave will be addressed in the following section. Second policies are those dealing with (subsidized) childcare. Since childcare is organised in different ways across Europe some context will be provided allow for a better understanding of the treated countries' position. Finally some policies dealing with working hours will be addressed in relation to the first two policy forms. This field will only be selectively addressed and is therefore not treated extensively.

Parental leave

The idea of providing parents with young children time off from work to care for their children most often emerged along with women's growing labour market participation turning the combination of labour and care into a major policy issue (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 195). Essentially, parental leave is a form of job protection that allows parents to take time off from work, sometimes paid, to take care of their children. When policies of work-family balance are discussed, different forms of leave are seen as an important means to achieve changes in gender balance (Moss & Kamerman, 2011: 1-15). Although it is not uncontested, as will be seen later in the analysis.

There are a couple of general qualities that can be identified in order to distinguish between the different forms and understandings of leave. First element that is of importance is job protection. The core quality of any form of leave is the fact that using it, thus not being active in the workforce for a set amount of time, cannot result in involuntary resignation. Job protection is considered to be in place when laws or law binding agreements protect employees' right to certain amounts of free time whilst being protected from losing their job for using that time (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 196-198).

This ties in with a second important quality of leave: whether the leave is a statutory right or not, implying that the leave is a right and employers cannot simply refuse a request from employees (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 196-198). Government mandated leave means the government has provided a statutory right to a certain amount of leave. In practise this cannot exist without the previously mentioned job protection, whilst non-statutory leave with job protection is technically possible, for example when it is stated in an employment contract. When the parental leaves are not statutory, employers and companies sometimes provide it through such contractual agreements with personnel.

A third element of interest is whether or not the leave is paid and by whom and how it is paid (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 196-198). This simply comes down to the question if and if so how much of the salary normally earned is paid to the employee for the period leave taken. This can be the full 100%, or any other percentage. Flat-rates are sometimes implemented which can be understood as the lowest amount of money paid, ceilings can also be implemented which restrict the maximum height in similar fashion. Finally the origin of the money will prove to be of importance as well; in some cases this is the employer, either by choice or by law, whilst in others the state pays the salary of

the employee for the leave period.

Tying in with the question of payment the fourth element, the duration of leave, is important (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 196-198). The length of leave can differ greatly between countries and there are many different combinations of paid and unpaid leave possible. This can mean a certain period of the leave is paid at a certain rate, with a following period paid at a flat rate combined with even some unpaid leave. At this point the interaction with the other parameters becomes clear, for it makes a big difference if only two days are paid of a statutory year of possible leave. The prospected loss of income will greatly influence the uptake rate in such a situation.

The fifth element that is related to the questions if the leave is paid and the length of the leave is the matter of flexibility (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 196-198). This concerns “the possibility of taking leave part time, of taking it over a specific period of time, and the number of years during which entitlement to parental leave remains valid” (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 198). The possibility of taking part time leave has been implemented in many European countries and in some cases has been the only possible form of parental leave (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 198).

This is important because part-time work should allow for a better balance between work and care while maintaining a connection to the workplace (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 198). This connection is essential for continuation of work at later stage of childrearing. Also the ability to take up leave over different periods of time also grants more autonomy to the parents whilst possibly entailing fewer complications for employers. On the other hand it can be a restrictive condition for prospective parents if they are in need of full-time leave. Finally the number of years the leave remains valid can affect the uptake of leave and poses similar acceptance issues in employers.

The sixth element that plays a part in forms of leave is if it is a family right or an individual right. This means whether or not the leave can be transferred from one parent to another. In some cases leave is an individual right in which case only one parent can take up the leave. There are also examples in which a certain amount of time is granted to both parents to share, this shared leave is sometimes combined with periods assigned to specific parents. Every combination has its own theoretical pitfalls and advantages.

The many different elements that play a part in constituting parental leave forms shows this is a complex field of policy that greatly differs in its implementation per country. Although arguably all forms of work leave deal with work-family balance a

selection has been made here based on the ascribed gender equalizing potential, relation to care work and paid work balance and occurrence in both Sweden and the Netherlands¹. It is for this reason a selection has been made concerning leave forms related to work-family balance as mentioned, with childcare responsibilities in particular. The three main forms of leave are focussed on are maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave. The first two forms of leave are essentially different from strict parental leave but intricately connected and often supplementary to parental leave providence. It is the supplementary relation between these three forms of leave that makes it illogical to address either without the other.

Maternity leave

The first form of leave is maternity leave, commonly understood as the leave provided to a mother right before, during and shortly after birth. Policies insuring this form of leave are most often implemented to ensure the health of mother and child and provide some time of recovery for both. The amount of time granted varies across countries and sometimes it is not provided separately from paternity leave that will be discussed next.

Paternity leave

Similar to maternity leave there is a variant destined for the father often referred to as paternity leave. This is a similar period of leave reserved for the father. It is also granted in the period around childbirth often on the basis of providing care to mother and child and a benefit to the father-child connection.

Parental leave

Finally, the form of leave of most interest to this research is parental leave. This is a form of leave that is most often instated to allow parents to combine unpaid care work with paid work. It has been stated that “various kinds of parental leave may be seen as enabling woman’s labour market participation or as promoting men’s care work” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 384). Most commonly it is a set amount of time that parents can use to take care of their children, yet it is formulated differently in each country along

¹ There are many more forms of leave that are intricately connected with work-family balance and arguably every form of leave is. An important form that will not be looked at is for instance the leave granted to parents to take care of a sick child. Although this is intimately related to the work-family balance it contains a much less heralded potential to bring forth gender equality and will only be briefly addressed when necessary to contextualise other policies.

the lines of the treated qualities of leave, length, statutory/non-statutory, paid/unpaid and shared/individual. This variability is one of the reasons why it is an interesting policy to compare.

Reasons for implementation vary from state to state. Motivations can be interest in the well being of newborn citizens, considered positively influenced by the presence and attention of both parents, or increasing gender equality by granting women job protection and allowing or pressing men to take up care work (Ray et al. 2008: 4). It has been found that the way “the available time and money for parental leave are allocated between mothers and fathers has a significant influence on how time for child care is shared among adults in adult families” (Ray et al., 2008: 4). This is an interesting statement and a common motive for the implementation of policies concerning parental leave in the context of gender equality. The issue of implementing parental leave policies to further gender equality is complex nonetheless. Even with the best intentions towards gender equality, the broadening of these kinds of policies can lead to bigger inequalities. “[Parental leave] may damage women’s labour market position, promote their labour market exit, entrench their caring roles, and exempt fathers” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 384). This will have to be taken into account when analysing the results of both countries’ implementation of parental leave policies.

Childcare

Another important field of policies that has been related to the improvement of gender equality is childcare or ‘childminding’, specifically the availability of day-care facilities. In spite of this it must be noted that “[t]hus far, parental leave has received more legislative attention than childcare in nations associated with the European Union” (Haas, 2003: 90). Arrangements in this respect can therefore vary greatly between countries.

The main question is if day-care is a state provision or in any way governmentally subsidized and how this is done. When day-care is a state provided facility, the state is in some way responsible for the providence of day-care services centrally, nation-wide or through municipalities organising childcare locally. This can have an effect on both the social norms as well as availability of the possibility to outsource care. The relation to the state differs since the costs can be paid by, be it fully or partially, either the state or the parents. If the latter is the case, it is important if this is done based on the height of income, for that ties in with considerations of economic

necessity.

Then there is an important difference between 'home-based' and 'centre-based' arrangements. In the first case the care takes place at the child or childminders home. Differentiating between formal and informal arrangements can specify this further. The informal being family and friends whilst the latter consists of professionals subject to governmental rules and taxation (van Dijke & Terpstra, 2000: 16-17). Centre-based refers to a societal provision where the care is situated in an institutional setting, it is this version that will get the most attention in this research. There are a number of important other parameters that have to be analysed to acquire a sense of which issues influence parents' decision to use forms of childcare.

A final issue of importance is the age group of children placed in childcare. This is related to all considerations related to care, the age of acceptance in childcare facilities, the policy goals related to childcare, social norms concerning care outsourcing and the time granted to take care for children through for instance parental leave policy.

Working hours

The last field of policies that will be treated are regulations and situations concerning working hours. Working hour policies have a direct relation to gender equality considerations related to work-family balance. Historically women have had to work in the 'non-standard' forms of employment of which part-time work is the clearest example (Boje, 2006: 201). This fact has a profound influence on paid and care work distribution within families. Thus working hour policies and situations signal a possible site of gender equality issues. For instance the "[r]educing the maximum working week could be a strong policy for gender equality sharing work between men and women and reducing poverty by spreading work, working within households as well as between them" (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 387).

Both previously treated policy field's deal with the possibility of negotiating between working hours and care hours. It is for these reasons that attention will have to be given to working hour policies. Yet it must be said this entails a vast amount of possibly interesting policies in both Sweden and the Netherlands and only very few of these and the accompanied governing dynamics can be discussed. Such decisions will be made with the previous two fields of policies leading in this respect. The treatment of working hour policies and governmental considerations is used for illustrative purposes to contextualise the previous two policy forms and address important contextual

information where needed. It is for this reason there will be neither extensive treatment nor binding definition of the considered working hour policies here.

In the next chapters, the policies of both Sweden and the Netherlands will be analysed. For each country the policies will first be contextualised by historically positioning their emergence. Secondly, the policies that are currently in effect will be described along with their intended gender equalizing effects. Thirdly, the social situation will be addressed to see what can be revealed of the results of the previously mentioned intentions and if effects have actualised that where not intended.

Swedish policies

Sweden has had an interesting and complex history concerning gender equality policies starting in the 1900s (Cronholm, 2009: 229). Although these early developments have been important in the emergence of the current policies, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address all these developments. The 1950s and 1960s can therefore be seen as an important prelude when discussing the context in which Sweden's policies of interest emerged. During this time, women began to participate in the labour force and the concept of 'full employment' of the nation was defined with women's, and notably mothers', labour in mind for the first time (Leira, 2006: 31). From the 1950s this change in definition has been a source of policies intended to activate and facilitate women's labour participation. Therefore this is my starting point in treating Sweden's policy history.

In the 1960s, Sweden entered a following stage, implementing policies concerned with work-family balance. There was a movement from some public insurances to more service providence, forms of care where continuously starting to be defined more as rights and becoming state organised (Leira, 2006: 30). It is important to note that during this time, the movement of women to the labour market was accompanied by a decline of the earlier dominance of the male-breadwinner model. In Scandinavia the

[d]emand for mothers' labour increased demand for extra-family day care services for children. However, nowhere in Scandinavia did the *first* generation of mothers heading for employment in the 1960s and early 1970s enjoy generous statesponsoring of services or benefits for childcare. Motherhood change preceded large-scale policy reform. (Leira, 2006: 33)

This is an interesting course of development indicating that the formulation of the implemented policies occurred, at least partially, reactionary to social developments.

Other developments of interest are the availability of oral contraception during the 1960s and abortion on demand in the 1970s. Both gave more control over parenthood and family planning for women in Sweden. From the 1970s onward there was a higher rate of divorce, acceptance of non-marital cohabitation and general existence of single-parent families (Leira, 2006: 34). Although such developments were not confined to Sweden:

Increasingly, the conciliation of work and family has been acknowledged as a major challenge for European welfare states, and some common policy approaches to motherhood and fatherhood change have been instituted. (Leira, 2006: 30)

These social and cultural shifts made it necessary to come up with new ways of dealing with work, family and the balance between these two. This provided fertile ground for the progressive and ambitious legislations of interest here.

Within this context, the 1970s have been characterized as “a watershed” in Swedish work/family policy due to a profound and explicit commitment to gender equality that was openly propagated in the formulation of policies (Leira, 2006: 31). This included parenthood policies that promoted both ‘defamilisation’ and ‘refamilisation’ of childcare, characterised as “a moving out of the home of mothers, and a returning home of fathers” (Leira, 2006: 31). Whilst a general argument towards gender equality was used, the way it was explained differed:

Since the early 1970s, social democrats and parties to the left have advocated policies for the more equal sharing of economic provision and caring. While parties to the centre and right have been the main supporters of more traditional family forms. (Leira, 2006: 29)

These sometimes-conflicting discourses created the context in which the discussed policies have been developed.

Parental leave

The first form of leave for parents in Sweden was introduced in 1931, “providing working mothers with newborn children with compensation for one month’s loss of income” (Cronholm, 2009: 228). This leave was extended to 3 months paid, and 3 months of unpaid maternity leave in 1955 (Cronholm, 2009: 230). As said, it was in the 1970s when the foundations for more extensive policies were laid. One policy formulated in 1974 was especially revolutionary at the time. Sweden started politicizing father care through the provision of paid leave to take care of a newborn, for both parents (Leira, 2006: 34). Sweden took the international lead in that year, being the first in the world to instate a statutory, sharable and government paid parental leave (Duvander & Andersson, 2005: 4; Cronholm, 2009: 227; Leira, 2006: 39; Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 384).

Historical context

This implementation of a paid leave for childbirth in 1974 was mainly intended to serve as addition to the public childcare system (Cronholm, 2009: 232). It was based on a 'choice argument', stating that parents should be able to choose who cares for the child. This policy advanced the 'universal carer-parent model', "emphasizing the importance of both father care and mother care during the first month's of the child's life" (Leira, 2006: 38). Another important aspect to this development is the mandated job security and wage payment during the leave. Both genders got this right, thus institutionalising a precedence of care over work (Leira, 2006: 38). The idea of the later implemented 'reserved' parental leave, also known as 'daddy quota', was also first aired in Sweden's parliament during this time, but did not pass because it would be an impairment of parents' autonomy. The sharable parental leave introduced in 1974 was extended from 6 to 7 months in 1975, 9 months in 1978 and eventually 12 months in 1980 (Cronholm, 2009: 232-233).

The 'daddy quota' of four weeks non-transferable parental leave was put in place in 1995 (Cronholm, 2009: 235). It reserved two four-week periods of the total leave, which was freely available for both parents to share: One month for the mother and one for the father on a "use-or-lose basis" (Leira, 2006: 39; Haatja & Nyberg, 2006: 220). As said, this legislation is often referred to as 'daddy quota' although it reserved leave for both parents. This approach is a form of "gentle force" towards getting fathers into caring, contrasting the earlier autonomy argument (Leira, 2006: 39). In 2002, Sweden even instated a two months 'daddy quota'; now two months were reserved for the father and two for the mother (Cronholm, 2009: 235). Arguments to press for this expansion of the quota stated that this policy was in everybody's best interest. This was based on the importance of early bonding between father and child and reducing work related obstacles for the father that impaired him from caring for his child. The promotion of gender equality was also an explicitly used argument for expanding the quota.

The latest development has been the formulation of a 'gender quality bonus' in 2008. This provides the parent that uses the most leave with a tax-reduction (Cronholm, 2009: 236). This policy should improve equal uptake by providing an extra financial incentive to share the available leave.

Current policy

In Sweden's current parental leave policies "[t]here is no general entitlement to statutory maternity leave" (Cronholm, 2009: 227). This is partly compensated by the parental leave system and "pregnant women are eligible for 50 days of leave paid at 80% of income if they work in jobs considered injurious or involving risk to the foetus" (Cronholm, 2009: 227). Contrasted with a paternity leave of "10 working days at 80% of earnings with a ceiling of SEK 410.000 per year (36.815, - euro) (Cronholm, 2009: 227).

The Swedish parental leave currently comes down to a total of:

480 days of leave at 80% of earnings for 390 days up to a ceiling of SEK 410.000 per year (36.815, - euro); the remaining 90 days are a flat-rate payment of SEK 180 a day (15, - euro). Sixty days are only for the mother and 60 days only for the father. The remaining 360 days are a family entitlement. In addition, each parent is entitled to take unpaid leave until a child is 18 months. (Cronholm, 2009: 227)

To have the right to high rates of parental leave compensation, employment is an important prerequisite for both parents. They must be employed "at least one year before their babies are born or adopted" (Björnberg, 2002: 34; Haas & Hwang, 2008: 90).

The parental leave can be used until the child is 8 years old and it is paid through the tax system (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 197; Duvander & Andersson, 2005: 4). Additionally there is "time off for parent education before birth or adoption, [the mentioned] 10 'daddy days' after childbirth that can be used to help manage the household and be with partners and new children, and 60 days off per child per year to care for a sick child" (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 89).

Finally there is a 'gender equality bonus' ensuring "the parent using most parental leave days will get a tax reduction, up to SEK100 per working day, during the time the other parent uses parental leave" (Cronholm, 2009: 236). The reserved 60 days of leave for both parents are not used in the calculation of used leave days for the bonus, these should be used first to be able to apply for the bonus. "The more equally the parents share the parental leave, the more bonus they will get, up to the maximum of SEK 13,500 (e1.210) per child" (Cronholm, 2009: 237).

Childcare

In the 1960s, ten years before the parental leave scheme, the foundations for the Swedish day-care system were laid (Gustafsson & Stafford, 1994: 344). Public day care was justified “as a way to erase disadvantages arising out of working-class origins” (Mahon, 1997: 390). Providing enough government subsidized day care was an important policy goal. Consequently, the expansion of public day care got high priority by the Swedish government to improve women’s labour position in the 1970s (Sundström & Stafford, 1992: 205).

Historical context

One of the important points pressed during the 1970s was legislation concerning children’s welfare, which came down to state, and local government providence of education and care, but also a long-term aim towards publicly funded day care service (Leira, 2006: 34). These developments meant a general redistribution of childcare responsibilities was necessary (Leira, 2006: 31). It was in this context that there was big expenditure to make more spaces available in both municipal daycares and in family care between 1965 and 1980 (Mahon, 1997: 390).

This resulted in an increase of the number of children and personnel in public childcare “between 1970 and 1988, [...] by 500 per cent and 600 per cent, respectively” (Bjurek, et al., 1992: 173). These developments also made it possible that “[i]n 1987 about 70% of children aged 1-6 years and 40% of the 7-9-year-olds had a place in public day care” (Sundström & Stafford, 1992 :205). The extended parental leave in this period is seen as the reason for a minimal attendance of children below one year of age (Sundström & Stafford, 1992: 205). Important note is that it was the “[d]emand for mothers’ labour [that] increased demand for extra-family day care services for children” (Leira, 2006: 33). Again, this shows the movement of women into paid labour preceded the policy development.

The increased participation of women in the workforce did not coincide with an uptake of care by men resulting in a ‘care-gap’, which was to be filled through institutionalized care (Leira, 2006: 33). This resulted in 48% of preschool-age children attending public day care by the year 1990 (Bjurek, et al., 1992: 173). Of these, “approximately 65 per cent were placed in public day care centres, while the rest were in day care homes” (Bjurek, et al., 1992: 173). In following years the public sector

started running most of the childcare and currently “nearly all privately organised childcare institutions are highly subsidised by the welfare state” (Boje, 2006: 205).

Current policy

The current Swedish childcare scheme is municipally organised, day care services are provided by “the 285 Swedish municipalities with extensive government subsidies; parents’ fees are normally income related (lower for single parents) and cover an average of less than 10% of costs, which are currently about 60.000 SEK [...] per child per year” (Sundström & Stafford, 1992: 205). Municipal politicians allocate resources to public daycares and negotiate with day-care directors to get children placed (Bjurek, et al., 1992: 173).

This system causes many local differences and “[v]ery little information on day care fee systems is available for the country as a whole” (Hiilamo, 2006: 186). Every working or studying parent has the right to place their child in state funded public day care between 1 and 12 years of age (den Dulk et al., 2003: 72). In 2004 this came down to a universal entitlement with a maximum fee for first child of 137 Euros’ a month (Hiilamo, 2006: 190). It is important to note that there is still relatively a low coverage of childcare for children aged 0 to 3 years old due to the “highly paid parental leave” (Boje, 2006: 205). These forms of institutionalised “childcare [are] provided on a full-day basis, making it possible for both parents to take up full-time jobs (Boje, 2006: 205).

Working hours

The extensive policies concerning parental leave and childcare are the main institutional instruments in Sweden to influence gendered working hour differentiation. The Swedish employers on the other hand do not offer supplementary leave arrangements but do offer flexible work arrangements (Lyness & Krompf, 2005: 38). This is partly compensated by an institutional right parents have to a 25% work hour reduction until the child is eight or passes the first grade in school (Cronholm, 2009: 227).

In 2000, many Swedish mothers “maintain their labour market affiliation by reduced working hours while their children are young” (Boje, 2006: 198). Along with this fact, the possibility to reduce working hours given as part of the parental leave ensures the prolonged participation in the work force of Swedish mothers (Boje, 2006: 200-203). In 2001, “most women – mothers as well as non-mothers – work full time, which is [...] 40 hours in Sweden” (Boje, 2006: 203). In addition, there is a “statutory and

collective norm of working 40 hours per week” in Sweden (Cousin & Tang, 2004: 535). A reduction of the total proportion of women working part-time in Scandinavia as a whole accompanied this development, “from about 40% in the late 1980s to less than 20% in 2002 (Boje, 2006: 203). In Sweden, part-time work is thus still mostly reserved for women but full time work by no means reserved for men.

Policy analysis

Voice

Institutionally, the policies of interest should improve women’s position to participate in labour and have fathers do more care work. Both these movements potentially increase women’s access to voice. On an institutional level, providing women with means such as state funded childcare allows them to combine childrearing with active politics thus facilitating participation in representative organs. On a civil society level, these legislations themselves did not necessarily improve women’s voice in joint organisations. Although, feminist movements have played an important part in the instigation of parental leave policy in Sweden, thus making it an example of voice in itself.

Within the household, the parental leave policies have a larger theoretical influence. The fact that it is a family right, which is partly reserved, can give women some pressure arguments about the leave and in the household. Yet, this potential does not have to work in a direction that equalizes care and paid work. Ascribing leave to the father may be an incentive for him to take up leave, so does the equal parenting bonus, giving women arguments to have fathers share the caring with them. A problem is that an “important reason for unequal sharing of leave offered by parents is that mothers want to monopolize the leave” (Haas, 2003: 108). This paints an image of the mother as ‘gatekeeper’, controlling the father’s access to parental leave (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 91). This reveals a control of voice by the mother that would be detrimental to the equal share of care.

This negative role ascribed to mothers is contested with the argument that it is the father’s relation with the child rather than his relation with his partner that serves as main factor causing the differences in uptake (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 91). Additionally the glass ceiling effects, narrow opportunities for full-time employment and occupational segregation causing women’s difficulty to have a strong relation to the workplace have been argued as motives against shared parenting (Haas & Hwang, 2008:

91). In all cases, the explanation builds partly on voice in family matters. These will be extensively discussed in the care work section.

Time

The institutional allocation of care time is a very influential example of time considerations in relation to Swedish policies. The parental leave scheme in Sweden provides an incentive for fathers to take up 2 months to care for their children, thus having the potential to motivate fathers to take up more care work previously done by the mother. On the other hand, by arranging childcare institutionally, the Swedish state also opened up the care time perspective in another direction.

In theory, state-funded childcare granted mothers more time for paid work through outsourcing care time to the state. State providence of childcare facilitates women's (full-time) labour participation but does not really do anything about the relatively low occurrence rate of men's care-work. By combining these two, it even seems theoretically plausible that providence of external childcare facilities could reduce the effectiveness of a reserved father leave. The care time that a father should fill in is supplemented by childcare facilities. The actual outcome of this theoretical dynamic will be discussed in relation to paid and care work.

The increase in voice is accompanied by a possible increase in time control in the household. Contrary to the mentioned issues stating policies can sometimes push women to work and not men to care, the 'daddy quota' originating in Sweden is seen as "the first significant policy to change men into carers, rather than women into workers" (Pascall & Lewiss, 2004: 384). This would suggest at least some potential to change men to spend time as caregivers. "However, in practice, women choose to take the major share of parental leave and also choose to work part-time. Men take only a minor share of parental leave (and some of this is enforced) and generally continue in full-time work" (Björnberg, 2002: 47). Time allocation in the household has thus seemingly not fundamentally changed, but women have indeed acquired a larger control over their own time, whether to spend it in paid work, or on care work in the home.

Paid work

In paid work the policy considerations of importance are twofold, firstly the improvement of equal access to jobs and secondly improving labour market attachment for women. Arguably, "Swedish social policy encourages families to follow a dual-

breadwinner model; paid paternal leave is designed to encourage both parents to have a continuous connection to the labour market, while compensating them for time off work” (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 86). This would seem to be a positive argument for Sweden and in respect to paid work balance. The question is if this picture holds true and how the discussed policies are related.

Evaluating the collective level of paid work, the fact that the Swedish parental leave payment is income based is very important. The paid parental leave scheme design meant, “to help women develop and retain a strong occupational identity throughout adulthood”(Haas & Hwang, 2008: 90). An incentive to work was created by allowing access to more funds when a person worked prior to the uptake of parental leave. The governmental aim was to increase women’s labour participation and attachment. In the case of Sweden, it has been said that “[s]ince the monthly payment during parental leave is based on the income of the parent prior to birth, it has contributed to a strong incentive [for women] to be well established in the labour market” (Björnberg, 2002: 40). This seems to indicate at least part of the endeavour succeeded.

On this matter of women accessing the labour market, some successes of the policies seem apparent. An increase of women’s participation in the workforce on full-time basis correlates with the implementation of both institutionalized childcare and the parental leave scheme (Evertsson & Duvander, 2011: 437). Labour force participation between genders is almost equal, and “among women aged 25-44 with children under the age of 7, 82 per cent are part of the labour force” (Evertsson & Duvander, 2011: 436).

An interesting indicator of the success is that the amount of women on parental leave receiving the basic minimum wage compensation “has been reduced from 36.7 percent in 1974 to just 11.4 percent in 1994” (Björnberg, 2002: 40). This means of the mothers that took parental leave in 1994, 88.6% worked enough before giving birth to be entitled to more than the minimum. The investigated Swedish policies have been argued to be “successful in supporting long-term employment as a vital part of women’s lives” (Björnberg, 2002: 46). In Sweden, a strong attachment to the labour market is normatively considered important, and lack of it an economic risk for both genders (Björnberg, 2002: 44).

Despite these positive arguments, parental leave has an ambiguous relation to accessing and retaining jobs. The prospect of an employee taking leave can cause (sex) discrimination by employers, fearing loss of income and staff or general inconvenience

(Evertsson & Duvander, 2011: 435). An important equality potential of the Swedish parental leave scheme is the idea that “[n]ow that employers must allow both parents to take time off work for paid parental leave, theoretically it becomes more difficult for employers to discriminate against women because of their motherhood status” (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 90). In relation to the Scandinavian models the reality of generous parental leave schemes does not fully live up to this expectation (Versantvoort, 2008: 205-207).

The market position of women in Sweden, especially the highly educated, is worsened by the generous leave taking possibilities (Versantvoort, 2008: 205-207). This is at least partly caused by women generally ending up taking up more leave than men and the persistent job segregation (Versantvoort, 2008: 205-207). Employers thus still see women as big leave takers, and they effectively are, due to the high leave uptake levels of mothers and low uptake levels of fathers. These differences in uptake are related both to social norms, which will be treated in the following care work section, and to the labour market segregation.

The Swedish sector and occupational segregation is frequently related to gender inequalities with regard to women’s participation in paid work (Evertsson & Duvander, 2010: 436; Versantvoort, 2008: 205-207; Björnberg, 2002: 48; Haas & Hwang, 2008: 91). The fact that the majority of women are working in the public sector, only few in the private sector and even fewer in higher occupations is a serious problem that the Swedish government has tried to alleviate (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 90; Pascall & Lewis: 2004: 379; Versantvoort, 2008: 205-207).

Two third of all the people employed in the Swedish public sector are women, in contrast to only one third in the private sector, and only 24% of management functions are fulfilled by women (Evertsson & Duvander, 2010: 436; Haas & Hwang, 2008: 90). An additional remark here is that women in Sweden regrettably still earn less, partly due to the segregation, as private sector occupation is often better paid than public. Another reason is the clear income difference between sexes for the same work, although relatively small in international perspective (Evans, 2002: 193; Pascall & Lewis: 2004: 379).

This segregation has a negative effect on women’s labour market attachment caused by limited chances to promotion, low prospective earnings and little or no room for self-realisation (Versantvoort, 2008: 205-207). Women lose motivation due to these issues and are thus prevented from having a strong labour market attachment. In a

vicious circular motion (Yerkes, et al., 2010: 416), these elements of labour segregation would steer women into taking more parental leave, which then lowers their chances, especially in private and higher occupations.

It seems probable women take up more parental leave based on economics. There is always a loss of income involved and it is arguably highest when the man loses a percentage of his share to the family's income. The women will therefore be inclined to take up the most parental leave (Björnberg, 2002: 40-41). This consideration corresponds with the argument of a loss or waste of human capital discussed about the care models. Yet, this must not be taken as the sole argument for such an uptake divide because many other factors play a role in the decision which parent takes up the leave (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 91). Some of the important ones are the mothers' desire to stay home, the individual parents' relationship to the child, education (higher educated parents both take up more leave), male attitudes towards paid work and finally the maintained gender ideologies (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 91).

The act of taking up parental leave by Swedish mothers has also been empirically shown to create fewer possibilities for career advancement and lower levels of women making upward occupational moves upon return to work (Evertson & Duvander, 2010: 435). It is important the worsening of such career prospects was directly related to the length of leave taken (Evertson & Duvander, 2010: 435). This would seem a logical consequence of absence from the labour market, and in that *sec* interpretation not directly problematic. This is an important problem when related to the still relatively low uptake of parental leave by fathers. When this is combined with the segregated workforce there is still a harder choice placed on a mother's shoulders concerning the combination of childrearing and career prospects.

In relation to this dynamic, an interesting development has occurred on men's side of this story. Employers are now under more pressure to allow and facilitate men's use of parental leave caused by the economic incentives and have even have started to "rethink the way work is organized" (Haas 2003: 107-108). The fathers are starting to be seen by employers to have additional skills such as coping with stress and multiple responsibilities. These leave-taking fathers are seen as more valuable and some employers even provide more incentives to take leave (Haas 2003: 107-108). Although this is a good development from a gender equality perspective, since it positively values the practise men taking parental leave, it is somewhat ironic in respect to the previous information about parental leave and its ambiguous relation to women's labour market

position.

In contrast, the public childcare provision facilitates a high rate of full-time employment of Swedish mothers in European perspective (den Dulk et al., 2003: 72). As was seen in the discussion of care-models, the availability of care outsource facilities is elementary in families decision for a model in which women work. The Swedish day-care system is related to a high level of mothers' return to full time work after child rearing, but this is after having taken up most care work during parental leave (den Dulk et al., 2003: 72). Yet, despite this potential

[w]omen tend to work full-time prior to giving birth but, when returning to the labour market after parental leave, many women start to work part-time – although this is 'long' part-time, averaging over 30 hours per week and normally with the same work conditions as their full-time colleagues. (Björnberg, 2002: 40)

Thus, women's flexibility towards care and paid work can be increased when childcare services are provided but it does not simply make all mothers work full-time. The fact that women still take up most of the parental leave also shows the extensive, partly reserved parental leave policy did not pose a sufficient challenge to the social norms of men as provider and women as carers to equalize uptake.

In practise, the large occupational segregation, with women working predominantly in the public sector, causes women to still do most care work - be it paid - since most paid, care related work is found in the public sector, childcare and forms of education for example. Although this not immediately problematic considering the current definition of gender inequality, it does indicate that 'paid work' has different meaning for women than men, even though there is a high number of full-time working women. It also indicates that, although unpaid care work might be better balanced than many other European countries, a gender differentiation is still present in paid care work instituting women as stereotypical 'carers', something that will be extensively discussed in the next section.

Despite some of the more negative results stated here, in historical perspective a larger labour market attachment of women seems to correspond with the emergence of parental leave policies and publicly financed daycares in Sweden. As was highlighted earlier many of the legislations came into effect after a major increase in labour market participation of women. This is an interesting development, providing some

reservations in assigning positive effects to the different policies. Additionally, the relatively positive image of female labour market participation in Sweden must not be taken at face value, since segregation and income differences still effectively show there are important gender inequalities present.

Care work

When looking at care work the main questions are: who is doing the caring and how is it divided? The Swedish parental leave scheme is institutional interference in the private domain and engages in this spectrum by assigning importance to a fathers' participation in care work. On the other hand, the Swedish childcare system is seen as the state taking responsibility for care-work. The division of care work in a home is more indirectly challenged by state funded childcare, for this essentially adds the option of externalising care work without a direct connection to the division of care work in the home. Parental leave should actually 'work' within the family institution.

The choice between paid work and care work is actualised within the family because there is an alternative, institutionalized childcare. When state-friendliness is taken into perspective, the fact that there is such a collective responsibility for the care of children relieves some of the difficult decisions for women, in theory. Women should no longer be confronted with the same dilemma of care work as they are when there is no collective childcare. This does not take away any norms that women should take care of their children, thus it complicates the choice regardless. By providing means to income for women and incentives to care for men, the latter can be expected to take up more care work in response to these policies. Formulated positively, men are granted the possibility and invited to perform more care work.

It is interesting that “[i]n 1974, only 2.8 percent of fathers took parental leave”, this had increased to over 30 percent by 1996 (Björnberg, 2002: 40). Yet, “large numbers of fathers taking some leave does not, however, imply that fathers generally are long-leave consumers” (Leira, 2006: 40). The system of shared parental leave as promoted in the 1970s had a relatively slow start and was initially not very efficient in its goal of turning fathers into carers (Leira, 2006: 40).

In 1993, 51% of fathers in Sweden took some leave and 30% of fathers took a whole month, while in the three years that followed the first implementation of the quota in 1995, an increase of 40% percent of total fathers taking some leave was achieved, amounting to 90% of all fathers taking some leave in 1998 (Haas & Hwang,

2008: 90). Of all Swedish fathers, 77% used the available quota month completely (Björnberg, 2002: 40).

This shows that uptake of parental leave was positively influenced by the first instated quota of one month. Although, even with a reserved use-or-lose 2 month daddy period, women still take most of the leave and are the core care providers, fathers still generally take up a lot less leave (Björnberg, 2002: 33; den Dulk et al., 2003: 72). Worse still, the public norm states that women should take up the 'lion-share' of the leave (Björnberg, 2002: 33).

The household and individual level provides an even greater contrast to the idea of a gender equal work and family balance in Sweden. It has been stated that "[i]n Sweden the strong political commitment to gender equality has not fundamentally changed the gendered division of childcare" (Boje, 2006: 206). As a positive effect it must be signalled that "the majority of fathers take leave, [but] fathers still take much less leave overall, with only 12% of all parental leave days taken" (Haas, 2003: 108). For example, around 2002 "mothers use[d] around 85-90 percent of the available days – a figure that has been reduced only about 10 percent since 1974 (Björnberg, 2002: 40). Positively speaking "the introduction of the 'daddy month' in 1995 had a positive effect on father's take-up of parental leave. Of children born in 1995, 77 percent had a father that used the whole available month compared to just 30 percent of those children born in 1993 and 1994" (Björnberg, 2002: 40). An interesting side note is that the uptake of parental leave by Swedish fathers was higher in 2006 than elsewhere in the EU (Boje, 2006: 206).

In a more recent effect study of the implementation of the parental leave quota, its expansion and the addition of the gender equality bonus, Duvander & Johansson revealed a number of interesting results (2010). The introduction of a reserved month had the biggest effect on uptake for both genders, "mothers use decreased by 27 days whereas father's' days increased by eight days" (Duvander & Johansson, 2010: 22). The lower increase on the father's side was ascribed to late uptake in the child's life, thus appearing in later statistics. The total percentage of fathers taking some leave rose from 40 to 69 percent (Duvander & Johansson, 2010: 22). It is interesting that "the propensity among fathers to use around one month of leave increases sharply, whereas the propensity to use longer leave is mainly unaffected" (Duvander & Johansson, 2010: 22). This would indicate that not only does the instated quota increase average numbers of uptake; its effects are very direct. With this in mind, it is disappointing to see that the

second month did not achieve the same level of change, increasing fathers' average from 37 to 43 days (Duvander & Johansson, 2010: 22). The day's not used are lost, apparently a price families are willing to pay. Finally, introduction of the gender equality bonus did not seem to affect the usage among Swedish fathers. It is important to note Duvander & Johansson are careful not to discredit any of the policies solely on the lower increase of leave taken with each implementation, "as they can be seen as stepping-stones towards the same goal" (2010: 22).

It should be clear that providing childcare and extensive partially reserved paid parental leave has "not resulted in the complete sharing of childcare among mothers and fathers in Sweden" (Haas, 2003: 108). Thus even though "[t]he Swedish system for combining work and family life seems more gender-balanced than the system in other European Union countries" (Boje, 2006: 206), this is by no means enough reason to accept the Swedish system as the ultimate solution.

Income

As treated in relation to paid work, there are still important income differences in Sweden. This is partly due to job segregation as well as clear income inequality. The potential for change offered by the addressed policies has minor potential in changing these differences. Since the Swedish female labour force contains a large number of mothers and the women already work many hours, the providence of childcare has seemingly opened up the room for long-hour work engagement, having a positive effect on income.

Summary

In Sweden the implementation of policies such as paid childcare and partly reserved parental leave coincided with an increase of women's labour participation. This is an indicator that the policies facilitate woman's labour participation. On the other hand, it shows women's entrance to the labour market instigated many policies concerning work and family balance. The parental leave is a family right, allowing parents to negotiate the divide of leave. It is also mostly paid, financed through taxes, allowing parents to take it up more easily without losing income.

Currently, women seem more inclined to work prior to having children which has been related to the fact that the compensation for parental leave is income based. Sweden's workforce is almost equal in the sense that most women work, many full-time, and labour market attachment is seen as an important trait for both men and women. There is however a strong labour market segregation with women working in the public sector and lower positions. Additionally, extensive use of the publicly funded childcare is considered normal. Funded childcare has opened up time for women to participate in the workforce and facilitated the relatively high full-time return to work of mothers after taking up, regrettably still the most, parental leave.

Reserving some of the parental leave should motivate fathers to take up more parental leave, since otherwise the leave is lost. In addition, the equality bonus should further increase equal uptake. The parental leave quota did improve uptake by fathers. Especially the first quota month had a direct effect on uptake of parental leave by fathers. This has resulted in a situation in which most fathers actually take up some leave. The second month and equality bonus did less to improve fathers' uptake of leave.

Despite these positive developments, mothers are still the predominant parental leave takers. The Swedish parental leave system has seemingly improved gender equality in some respects, but also left some situations unchanged and worsened the situation in others. Fathers take up more leave than they used to, which is a plus. Mothers still take up most leave and there is still a strong segregation amongst the working population, indicating a continuation of a previous situation. Ironically, the uptake by fathers has resulted in a positive influence on their employability. There is the fact that mother's' take up of more parental leave has been argued to negatively influence their market position, also causing mothers to work and earn less. These are ambiguous, even negative, results when viewed from a gender equality perspective.

Dutch policies

As stated in the introduction, gender equality is 'an important part of the Dutch political agenda' (Versantvoort, 2008). In this section the most salient Dutch policies concerning gender equality and work-family balance are discussed based on a historical interpretation and the current social reality in which they are effective. An important point of reference when discussing social policies in the Netherlands is the Sickness Benefit Act of 1930 (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 176). This act insured the first instance of government-mandated leave concerning the upbringing of children. It instated the right of married women to 12 weeks pregnancy and maternity leave. After this act there was little to no development in the area of gender equality policies until the end of the 20th century.

Parental leave

In the late 1980s, the debates started to focus on "entitlement, length of leave and income support" (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 176). First, maternity leave was extended from 12 to 16 weeks in 1990 (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 176). A year later a 'parental leave' was formulated, which allowed for leave to be taken up part-time and unpaid for a maximum of 6 months within 4 years after childbirth, this was an individual right granted to both parents (den Dulk et al., 2003: 73; Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 176, 180). Formulation of this form of leave was motivated based on the idea that it could increase the employment rate of women and "should favour the equal division of paid and unpaid work between men and women", creating a strong emphasis on individuality and intended on "making the leave arrangement attractive for men" (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 177). Then in 1992 paternity leave was introduced (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 176).

Historical context

The baseline for the current situation can be found between 1991 and 2001. Politically, the focus on responsibility for balancing work and family was seen as shared by employees, employers and government. On the first of December in 2001 the Work and Care Act was passed concerning a paid maternity leave of 16 weeks, a paid paternal leave of 2 days and an individual part-time parental leave of a maximum of 6 months (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 181). Finally, it was in 2009 when the total of free time was extended to 26 weeks, although still aimed at part-time arrangements (Plantenga &

Remery, 2011: 187).

The legislation concerning parental leave was revised in the late 90s. From 1 July 1997 onward, parental leave extended to part-time workers and can be taken up until the child is eight, although it was still unpaid. Additionally the legal right to lower working hours by 50% over a period of 26 weeks was changed, coming down to a 13-week total of free time. Now “the total amount of leave was related to actual working time, being set at 13 times the number of contracted weekly working hours” (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 180). In addition to this, the possibility to spread the leave hours over a longer period than 6 months was granted, making it possible to request less hours per week off for a longer period and vice versa whilst employers can only refuse if it severely damages their interests (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 180-181).

Although the parental leave that came into effect with the Work and Care act is technically unpaid, there was a way to both acquire and accumulate payment for this period. This was called the Dutch life-course scheme, which came into effect in 2006 (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 186). It allowed employees to save up some annual income on a tax-free basis. These savings should be for a ‘life-course product’. This practically comes down to a ‘period of non-participation’ that can have many different purposes; of which providing care services are the most interesting in this discussion (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 186). Along with the emergence of this life-course scheme a previous tax benefit for employers providing paid parental leave was terminated. The life-course scheme itself was subsequently terminated first of January 2012 as part of budget cuts, thus leaving the Dutch parental leave generally unpaid, and unattractive for employers, once again.

Current policy

The passing of the last alterations to the Work and Care Act in 2009 is taken as reference for the current Dutch policies. This comes down to a paid maternity leave of 16 weeks, 10 weeks before birth and 6 after, a paid paternal leave of 2 days and an individual part-time parental leave of 26 weeks per parent that is non-transferable (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 181). The matter of payment is important, for it is the employer who pays the maternity and paternity leave. The parental leave is essentially unpaid unless arrangements are made with employers. Another exception is the public sector that also provides paid parental leave as an example to private companies (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 207).

Childcare

Before 1990, day-care in the Netherlands was mostly a subsidized provision that required income dependent contributions from parents (van Dijke & Terpstra, 2000: 18). From the 90s onwards there is an increasing amount of attention to gender equality and work-family balance in Dutch policy considerations. In the beginning of the 90s the first serious state originated stimulation of childcare services emerged, this came down to a financial stimulation of childcare provisions such as day-care facilities (den Dulk et al., 2003: 74).

Historical context

This movement was captured in 1991 in the 'Stimuleringsmaatregel kinderopvang' making the government, employers and parents jointly responsible for financing the childcare provisions (den Dulk et al., 2003: 73; van Dijke & Terpstra, 2000: 17-18). This caused many parents to arrange childcare through their employer and the ones whose employer did not provide such arrangements ended up paying more than before this policy was implemented (van Dijke & Terpstra, 2000: 18).

End of 1997, a second policy was forwarded called 'Tijdelijke stimuleringsmaatregel buitenschoolse opvang' aimed to provide both an impulse of available capacity of daycare for children between 0 and 4 years old as for children in preschool (van Dijke & Terpstra, 2000: 17). Both were formulated explicitly with female labour participation in mind (van Dijke & Terpstra, 2000: 17). These policies resulted in three positions in childcare. A child's placement in day-care was either; subsidized through municipalities, or a corporate spot paid by parents' employer or a private place fully paid for by the parents. Until the changes in 2005 were implemented, most children had either a subsidized place or a corporately financed one.

On 1 January 2005 a new law was passed, 'Wet kinderopvang' or Child Day-care Act, dealing with the quality and financial support of childcare. This law still presumes a shared financial responsibility between the government, employers and parents, and made municipalities responsible for quality checks. The law states working parents can get a state contribution and there is no more difference between private, corporate and state funded places, the parents strike a deal with the centre, when the employer does not contribute, the parents are all eligible for a state contribution depending on their income. The "households with the lowest income receive the highest subsidy" which could be as high as 96% compensation (Bettendorf et al., 2012: 8). The total childcare

subsidies were increased considerably and it reduced “the average effective parental fee by 50%” (Bettendorf et al., 2012: 1).

Then with the current financial crisis, “the Dutch government cut a number of social programs including childcare subsidies” (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5). The subsidies paid to parents for the ‘first child’, the child taking up most costs in childcare, were cut for all income groups “by several percentage points and subsidy for the care of a second child was reduced substantially” (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5). Subsidies for childcare are paid based on a calculation that uses “a set maximum hourly price” (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5). This means that, if the price per hour of the centre is above the set maximum, this does not influence the calculation of subsidy (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5). Not only were subsidies reduced, “the maximum hourly price was not increased from e 6.36 in 2012 while the average prices continued to rise from e 6.32 to e 6.45” (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5). The increase in prices that was not combined with an increase in funding led to an additional “e 0.13 extra that parents have to pay for which they do not receive any subsidies” (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5).

Current policy

At this point the Netherlands’ formal child care centres can be divided into day-care centres (kinderdagverblijf or creche) aimed at children from 0 to 4 years of age, host families aimed at 0-4 and 4-12 years of age and playgroups (peuterspeelzaal) aimed mostly at 2 till 4 years of age (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5; Barnekow et al., 2013: 20-24). Additionally there is afterschool care for children between four and six (Barnekow et al., 2013: 20-24). In this situation there are “[c]hild care subsidies [...] paid directly to parents, meaning that the demand side is subsidized rather than the supply side” (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5). Only “[p]laygroups are funded by municipalities with minor parental contributions and playgroup use is not subsidized on the demand side” (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 6).

There is a set maximum hourly price used in calculation of the granted subsidies. In 2012 this price did not increase along with average prices for childcare, which rose from e 6.32 to e 6.45. The actual net cost of monthly childcare differs along with family configuration, income and number of children in childcare (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 6). For a presumed 120 hour use of childcare for 1 child a single parent now pays approximately e 109, - whilst a 1.5 income family pays e 175, - and a dual income family e 225, - (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 21).

Working hours

When the Netherlands are discussed in relation to gender equality the high participation of women, and a notable amount of mothers, as part of the work force is often mentioned. This has been referred to as “the Dutch ‘employment miracle’” (Cousins & Tang, 2004: 533). This situation began to come about around the 1980s when women’s participation accounted for 30% of the total workforce and rose to 61% in 2012 (Merens et al., 2013: 1). Interestingly this happened “in the context of a scarcity of child care provision and parental leave measures” (Cousins & Tang, 2004: 533). This shows how the policies concerning work-family balance have been part of a reactionary process. Interestingly a similar process was seen in the Swedish policy development.

In this context the first mayor moves towards legislation of parental leave were made (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 177). There have been concerns about women leaving their jobs after giving birth and a fairer disposition of paid and unpaid work and responsibility for support of parenthood combined with paid employment was to be shared by the society, employees and employers (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 177). Tying in with the part-time work ideal a part-time leave structure was deemed ideal as it maintained the workers connection to the work (Plantenga & Remery, 2011: 177). The reason for this movement of women to participate thus preceded great legislation interest in woman’s labour participation and or gender equality.

It was only in the beginning of the 90s that the Dutch government started actively supporting working parents. In the 90s there was a big increase of two-earner families, only 30% of couples in 1986 to 58% in 1998 (den Dulk et al., 2003: 69-70). Most women who started working in this time were working part-time. It was the development of women entering the work force that made it necessary for the government to take steps in granting part-time work the same legal status as full-time work in the mid 90s. This concerned matters like payment of overtime, vacation days and other reservations such as bonuses (den Dulk et al., 2003: 74-75).

The ‘Combination Scenario’ is an interesting model concerned with working hours launched in 1995, that aims to “promote the sharing of part-time paid and unpaid work by men and women” (Plantenga, 2002: 54; Cousins & Tang, 2004: 532), it’s core concept “that both paid and unpaid work are equally valued” (Plantenga, 2002: 54) and it was “intended to bring equality of unpaid work by 2010” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 378). These aims were combined with a “new vision of households in which men look after children too, discouraging men’s free-riding on care work” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 390).

It was under the influence of this ideal that a societal context has developed in which “[i]n the Netherlands the emphasis is on women’s part-time work covering care, bringing major gender differences across all dimensions” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 379). The goal of moving women into part-time care-work and part-time paid work was quite successful when the labour force is taken into perspective; the movement of men from full-time paid work to a similar divide was not.

Policy analysis

Voice

One element regarding equal voice to be considered in relation to the discussed policies is the fact that Dutch parental leave is an individual right. This has a distinct theoretical consequence for the distribution of ‘voice’ in the household. In one explanation this can lead to a situation in which both parents get equal right to decide upon what happens with their leave. On the other hand this makes the arrangement rather strict and rigid for transfer of leave is not possible. Concerning the matter of proportional representation the social policies could result in better representation of women through opening up some to participate in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of opinion making.

Time

On the collective level the institutionalised allocation of care and work time is a potentially influential development in the Netherlands. Especially when combined with the Dutch focus discussed as “the Combination Scenario, which aims to promote the sharing of part-time paid and unpaid work, by men and women” (Plantenga, 2002). This concept has been very influential in the allocation of time concerning both work and care in Dutch households. Under the influence of this ideal a very large female part-time work force has risen.

Part-time work for women does not represent the equality ideal that was aimed for in the Combination Scenario, but it is an improvement from a single-breadwinner situation nonetheless. As was noted in the historical analysis, Dutch women’s “move into part-time work has been rapid, but the official Dutch ideal of a combination model for both sexes is still far from reality” (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 386). Important in this respect is that the Combination Scenario is mostly a social-economic model and its elements were also part of a societal discussion. This makes any ‘effects’ the result of a

dialectical process between many occurring discourses and legislation and therefore hard to analyse. Nonetheless it has been very influential in the current situations of paid work and care work, which will be discussed next.

On a different note the state subsidized childcare and parental leave providence, opened up time for female institutional participation and influence at the level of the family and individual. Most of these issues will be treated in the care work and paid work section or have been discussed in relation to the Swedish situation. Nonetheless it is both parental leave and subsidized childcare that have played an important role in bringing the Netherlands “in line with the Western European norm of a one and a half worker pattern, with women as the half, rather than transforming the gender division of time” (Pascall & Lewis 2004: 386). The question is how this can be seen in the actual work and care time balance.

Paid work

Again, the policy considerations in paid work of importance here are the improvement of both gender equal access to jobs and labour market attachment for women. When considering these matters it is interesting that one of the main characteristics of the Dutch labour market is part-time work. In the Netherlands 37.1% of all employment consists of part-time work, defined as 35 hours or less (Benschop, 2013: 701). Current Dutch labour market participation of women is high at 71.5% in 2011, only second to Denmark within Europe (Merens et al., 2011: 101). These numbers shows the high level of women working in the Netherlands, who work mostly part-time, 74% of all women who work do so part-time, against 22% of all working men (Cousins & Tang, 2004: 533; Benschop, 2013: 701).

Equal access to paid work, the first criterium, is a complicated issue in the current discussion. Most women have access to a form of paid work in the Netherlands, which is a positive fact, but the vast majority of these opportunities seem to entail part-time work. This shows a clear form of working hour segregation. This has direct consequences for the gender equality situation as was discussed in relation to the Swedish labour market segregation, although it is a different situation. Here too the limited chances to promotion, low prospective earnings and little or no room for self-realisation can influence women drastically (Versantvoort, 2008: 205-207).

Many women work in the Netherlands, thus they are providing for themselves, but only very few are the breadwinners within a family balance. As treated in the time

section, this high participation has not changed the situation in which women have a harder decision to work instead of taking care of their children. The 'Combination Scenario' was partly an institutional idea set out to have men and women equally distribute paid and unpaid work, but this is not the case by far. "Reality remains a long way from the ideal that paid and unpaid work should be equally valued and shared, with mothers more likely than fathers to do part-time work though policies on working hours make a significant contribution" (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 378). Additionally the Dutch emphasis on "women's part-time work covering care" has been argued to bring "major gender differences across all dimensions" (Pascall & Lewis, 2004: 379).

It is interesting the Dutch emphasis on female part-time employment, causing a great employment expansion since the 80s, happened "in the context of a scarcity of child care provision and parental leave measures" (Cousins & Tang, 2004: 533). The increase of female participation in the labour force was great in this time from 30% 1980 to 61% in 2012 (Merens et al.: 2013, 1). The policies formulated by the government to support working parents, such as stimulating childcare and instating a form of parental leave, where thus preceded by women entering the labour force (den Dulk et al. 2003: 74). This is important since a similar movement was seen in the Swedish case.

When addressing actual influence of some of these policies on labour market access, the childcare subsidies in the Netherlands have been found to have a modest impact on the total labour participation, suggesting an increase of female labour participation (Bettendorf et al., 2012: 5). Looking at the parental leave system in the Netherlands, the fact that substantial paid leave is ensured only for women can create a situation in which job discrimination becomes immanent.

Another issue is the fact that the leave is paid by the employer. This puts a strain on the relationship of employer with employee due to the fact the former has to pay the latter during childcare without (financial) compensation. In practise, parental leave has been related to reduce full-time employment chances for women in the Netherlands based on these reasons (Versantvoort, 2008).

An important question is if women work continuing to work after childbirth; is there improvement in labour market attachment. In this regard the Dutch childcare policies have been found not lead to a significant improvement in women's labour participation after childbirth, although it has been found to prevent women from leaving the labour market once they have entered it (Fouarge, 2006: 276). When taking into

account that in 1999 “around 15 percent of female leave takers stop working at the end of their leave, a figure that is comparatively low” (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 207) there has been some progress. Recently, more mothers continue to work after childbirth, 38% in 2001 to 50% in 2009 (Merens et al., 2011: 113). Another example that workingwomen who become mothers do not stop working altogether is the fact that “[a]bout 66% of mothers with children under age 6 are employed in paid part-time work” (Thomese & Liefbroer, 2013: 406).

In the Netherlands, it is “[a] common life-course pattern [...] that women work full-time until the birth of the first child and then reduce their number of work hours” (Wielers et al., 2013: 4). It has even been found that more than half of mothers taking parental leave reduce the number of worked hours upon their return to work (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 207). This reduction of working hours is arguably caused by a strong motherhood ideal since “the prevailing norm in the Netherlands is that a mother ideally works two or three days per week” (Cloïn et al., 2011: 469) and “long working hours for mothers are not accepted by large parts of the Dutch population” (Benschop, 2013: 701).

The situation that has unfolded can be interpreted as both a good and a bad result for the Dutch policies since many women and mothers are employed in paid work but end up reducing their hours after childbirth and, consequently, increasing their economic dependency on either state support or partner. Based on satisfaction indicators the situation with women working in part time jobs has been suggested to be “what most Dutch women want” (Booth & van Ours, 2012: 263). Taking that information into consideration the situation would seem in accordance with the wishes of Dutch women. The problem remains that the question if this constitutes a gender equal situation remains unanswered based on that assumption. The divide of care work helps to shed some more light on this matter.

Care work

In the Netherlands women still take up most care work, strongly representing the one-and-a-half earner model and an unequal divide of care work, which is considered at least partly an institutional problem (den Dulk et al., 2003: 70). Women spend about two third of their combined paid and non-paid work time on care work whilst men do the opposite (Merens et al., 2011: 108).

When considering care work on an institutional level, the fact that the state has taken up proactive responsibility for the externalisation of care work is important. As

was mentioned in relation to Sweden, an equality problem with institutionalised childcare is the fact that it can open up time for women to do paid work but does not necessarily provides the same impulse for men to do more care work. In contrast, one could take recent increase in Dutch men's part-time work as a sign of improvement, yet this has only been "as young and older workers, rather than as parents" (Pascall & Lewis 2004: 386).

When taken at family level the parental leave institution in the Netherlands is not used in equal fashion between sexes, women take up much more parental leave (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 207). There is however, a high parental leave uptake amongst people who work in the public sector. This concerns women but also a notably high amount of men, explained by the fact that public sector workers always get their parental leave paid (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 207). In other situations mothers use twice as often/much parental leave (Merens et al., 2011: 125). In 2009, 41% of entitled women used some leave against 19% of men. This is a smaller difference than 2005 where women used 8% more compared to men, but still a poignant difference.

In 2009 compared to 2005 a little less of all women used some leave while a few more men did (Merens et al., 2011: 126). Women took longer and more hours of leave per week than men. Men spread the leave out more, whilst women cluster the leave (Merens et al., 2011: 126). Women kept working more hours during their parental leave, where they used to work at 50% of their usual hours they moved to 60% (Merens et al., 2011: 126). This divided uptake of parental leave supports the opening claim that women take up more care work, especially when combined with the fact that women mostly work part-time and men full-time. In respect to the gender equality definition this indicates a less equal situation.

When these policy matters are further considered in respect to the family level it is interesting that Dutch women have been found to experience a relatively low level of work-family conflicts (Boje, 2006: 210). In 2004, it was more often the father who indicated "conflicting pressures between work and family life" (Cousins & Tang, 2004: 533). This is an important fact considering their position has not been influenced greatly by the analysed Dutch policies. Such experienced conflicts are related to a strong norm to care for own children in the Netherlands in general, also resulting in relatively low uptake of childcare facilities (den Dulk et al., 2003: 75). It must be noted both these matters were reported before some significant cuts in government funding. Nonetheless, that would indicate this sense of conflict has possibly increased, causing a

gender equality issue on the Dutch father side.

The fact that the Dutch parental leave scheme is based on a non-transferable amount of leave for each parent can be seen as a theoretical plus towards equal sharing of care since the right to leave is lost when it is not used. A problem arises once again with the fact that is generally not a paid form of leave. This makes it more likely the father takes up less leave based on the economy argument stating that the least amount of income is lost that way.

This type of argument was already discussed in the Swedish case and many of the other motives for uptake by mainly the mother can be ascribed to the Dutch case. As a reminder examples are the mothers desire to stay home, the individual parents' relationship to the child, education with higher educated parents taking up more leave, male attitudes towards paid work and finally the maintained gender ideologies (Haas & Hwang, 2008: 91).

Income

Considering Dutch incomes in relation to the treated policies it is important to consider that even though parental leave is not paid by the state, in practise a lot of parental leave is actually paid by employers. In 2009 50% of lower and middle educated women, 59% of higher educated women taking leave got paid and of men this was 55% against 59% (Merens et al., 2011: 127). As stated earlier the parental leave is always paid, effectively from the government's tax-income, for public sector workers (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 207). Within the context of day-care an interesting fact is that "[d]ay-care centres are generally used by dual-income families and can be utilized for enough hours to allow for full-time employment of both parents. Playgroups are generally used for shorter periods of time: between two to four half days a week" (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 5).

Summary

The growth in Dutch female labour participation began before the social policies analysed were concretely in effect, interestingly similar to Sweden's historical development. The Netherlands currently has a high female work participation of 71.5% in 2011, 74% of those women work part-time, defined as 35 hours or less (Benschop, 2013: 701). These employment numbers indicate an increase in gender equality through economic independence and yet as been accompanied by a continuation of care-norms.

After childbirth, the childcare policies did prevent women from leaving the labour market completely. It is currently a normatively accepted life-pattern in the Netherlands for women to work after childbirth, be it part-time, which was a very fast increase from the 1980s. Childcare subsidies where shown to have a small improving effect on labour participation, with a slight increase in labour supply. Yet still, women take up most care work in the Netherlands.

The fact that the parental leave is individual allows both parents to consider taking up leave to care for their children. A theoretical issue with the Dutch leave scheme is the lack of financial compensation, which can force women in an economic headlock to take most leave. The actual amount of paid leave is hard to analyse since this based on agreements between employer and employee.

The current working hour segregation in the Netherlands creates a situation in which women work mostly part-time and in lower paid jobs, making the decision for the mother to take up most leave prevalent. Adding to this economic argument there is a strong societal norm that parents, especially mothers, should take care of their own children. This results in mothers remaining the main caregiver and fathers the main breadwinners in Dutch households.

Comparison

Now naively proclaiming either system as the best is impossible due to the many factors at play. It is however interesting to see which social-societal mechanisms have been related to these different forms to get a sense of their theoretical potential. The previously acquired results conform “[t]he dual-earner couple characterised by two full-time jobs thus prevails in [Sweden], while most couples in the Netherlands [...] are one-and-a-half earner of solo male breadwinner families” (Boje, 2006: 203). This is not surprising considering the discussion of the different policy schemes. It has been argued elsewhere that for women in the Netherlands “the effects of children on employment hours are quite large” compared to Sweden (Misra et al., 2011: 142). This is supported by the results, showing mothers generally return to work part-time more often in the Netherlands whilst the level of full-time return is higher in Sweden.

Parental leave

In comparison, Sweden has by far the largest amount of leave available to parents with 480 days total, with 390 days at 80% compensation of earnings prior to childbirth and the remaining 90 days at a flat-rate of approximately 15, - Euros’ a day. In the Netherlands, both parents get a non-transferable 130 days leave that is unpaid unless there is an agreement with the employer. There is however, no statutory maternity leave in Sweden, while in the Netherlands mothers get 80 days of leave paid leave financed by the employer. Finally, the employer-paid two-day paternity leave in the Netherlands is contrasted by a tax-paid 10 days paternity leave at 80% of previously earned income in Sweden.

Within this comparison, it is striking that “in Sweden [...], despite the establishment of gender equality and work–family reconciliation policies, [...] higher proportions of both mothers and fathers than in the other two countries [the Netherlands and United Kingdom] report a conflict between their work and family lives” (Cousins & Tang, 2004: 533). This has been explained because “Swedish women are more integrated in the labour market and are thus in a position where work interfered more with household demands” (Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006: 609). This indicates the norm of mothers taking care of their children did not shift by the added norm requiring women, and mothers, to have a strong job attachment and work. When put in

perspective, this is important for it shows unintended negative effects of the policy reforms and changing societal norms in Sweden.

Analysis

Regarding parental leave policies' potential to "promote an egalitarian distribution between mothers and fathers of the time devoted to child care" (Ray et al., 2008: 2), five qualities have been distinguished as the most important in contributing to this equal divide:

(1) [G]enerous paid leave; (2) non-transferable quotas of leave for each parent; (3) universal coverage combined with modest eligibility restrictions; (4) financing structures that pool risk among many employers; and (5) scheduling flexibility. (Ray et al., 2008: 18)

Based on these criteria, the Swedish case is the better alternative. In contrast to the Netherlands, Sweden accommodates nearly all these qualities. The first point is problematic, since the Dutch parental leave is not always paid. This is left up to negotiations between employers, employees and partly the government. To compare the Dutch to the Swedish situation is therefore complicated, since the Dutch parents who work in the public sector are paid during parental leave, as do some in the private sector.

Yet, on an institutional level, the fact remains that the Dutch scheme is not universally paid. In relation to the definition of gender equality, the choices that have to be made are harder for women. The fact that payment for parental leave has to be negotiated with, and paid by the employer, is an example of this added complexity for women. The forced payment of maternal leave by employers is another. Taking into account that employers have to pay for the maternity leave in situations where payment is not even considered for the parental leave, this element poses additional boundaries against hiring women that can be expected to get children, further complicating the gender equality situation.

The second criterion is not applicable to the Netherlands' leave scheme directly, since there is no reserved part of the leave. It serves to note here that, since the leave is an individual right in the Netherlands, it is a form of reserved leave; reserved for both parents completely, and by consequence non-transferable. Formally the Dutch system thus facilitates this rather well, be it very strictly. Regardless, the Swedish position is

superior in this respect due to better uptake rates that followed the quota's there. It serves to note once more that the uptake of parental leave amongst men is notably high in the Netherlands for public sector workers. Since this relates to the fact that this leave is paid an interesting image emerges. When combining this fact with the positive effects of reserving parental leave an indication seems clear that reservation in combination with payment could to entice father's' uptake, in Sweden but possibly also in the Netherlands. Also providing an argument to organise this payment institutionally since the public sector parental leave salaries are also tax paid like Sweden's system.

The first part of the third point, universal eligibility, is implemented in both countries'. The right to leave with job-protection is roughly a universal right in both countries, provided people have been employed for a certain amount of time. This employment demand is important, seeing as parental leave eligibility and payment in Sweden is dependant on previous employment, which has been shown to be an incentive to participate in paid work for women prior to childrearing. The Dutch situation effectively lacks such a clear incentive, which is directly related to the difference in payment scheme, or lack thereof.

Considering the financing structures that should pool the risk among employers, the Swedish situation qualifies for its payment is institutionally organised and tax-paid. This takes the consideration of payment out of employers' hands and spreads financial risks of employee investments. The Dutch situation is almost antithetical of this consideration since it relies primarily on private parties paying for the parental leave. The public sector workers are effectively paid from taxes like Sweden, consequently resulting in high male uptake. This problem is thus somewhat alleviated based on the agreements made with employee-organisations and the government, but this quality is essentially not met by the Dutch system

The last point taken to show good gender equality improvement in this context is scheduling flexibility. This is somewhat ironic, considering reserving some of the leave has also been associated with gender equality. It is nonetheless shown to be important parents get enough say in when they use their parental leave and (male) uptake increases when the leave can be spread (Ray et al., 2008: 16-18). The Netherlands provides a relatively flexible leave and it can be taken up until the child is 8 years old. Sweden also allows parents to spread their leave until the child is 8 years old. Both countries also allow part-time uptake of leave (Ray et al., 2008: 17). The Dutch situation is a little less flexible in that the employer has a say in whether or not the spread is

accepted while in Sweden these possibilities are less extensive.

In sum, the Swedish system has more of the qualities related to a positive outcome of the policy and therefore a theoretically stronger model. When the uptake rates are taken into perspective, it seems the Swedish system is more successful and surely more transparent than the Dutch equivalent.

Childcare

When comparing the current policies of childcare, both countries have intricate systems intent on providing, at least partly, publicly funded childcare. The Swedish system provides the right to each working or studying parent to place their child in state funded day care until the child is 12 years old (den Dulk et al., 2003: 72). The Dutch system works in a similar fashion providing subsidies to either the parents or institutions depending on which part of the system is considered.

Both systems do not fully provide in the costs of having a child in public care. The contribution of parents with one child is 137 Euros' a month in Sweden (Hiilamo, 2006: 190) and in the Netherlands this varies from 109, - for a single parent, 175, - for a one-and-a-half earner model and 225, - for a dual income family (Akgunduz et al., 2013: 21). This shows that the differences can be quite large between Dutch families that earn a double income compared to other family forms and the Swedish situation. The Swedish municipally organised system is opaque due to local differences and these differences could not fully analysed here.

Analysis

Since the differences in childcare subsidies are not as large as was concluded in relation to parental leave it is not so surprising the difference in gender equality potential is smaller too. In Sweden women's full-time workforce participation has been seen to improve along with the implementation of childcare although this cannot be seen separate from the implementation of parental leave policy (Evertsson & Duvander, 2011: 437). The Dutch situation has also shown such an improvement although part-time work is still prevalent amongst the female labour force (Bettendorf et al., 2012: 5). In Sweden this resulted in a high full-time participation of women and a high level of mothers' return to full time work after child rearing, be it after having taken up most care work during parental leave (den Dulk et al., 2003: 72). In the Netherlands, after childbirth, the childcare policies also prevent women from leaving the labour market completely but, again, they end up working part-time far more than Swedish mothers

(Fouarge, 2006: 267).

The fact that Dutch parents in a dual earner situation have to pay more does provide a negative incentive for both parents to work, considering part of the extra income is funnelled away. This combined with a strong care-norm in the Netherlands shows a caveat in the Dutch system and in its potential to facilitate equal access to paid work for both genders. It is interesting in this respect that in Dutch discourse “the image of the Scandinavian countries in which much more responsibility for children is allocated with the state, often functions as a negative reference point when children’s interests for the best care (as given by the mother) are played out against women’s interests in paid employment” (Van Den Berg & Duyvendak, 2012: 559). This shows again that social norms are essential in parents’ consideration of a family model to attain and the general success of social policy implementation.

The results also indicate childcare has a positive influence on the participation of women. Considering the positive effect of childcare are mostly effective in the direct of women from private to public whilst leaving the male perspective relatively untouched is worth some consideration. The mere implementation of childcare policies would seem less likely to succeed if not accompanied by a norm change both on the divide of care work in the family and the outsourcing of childcare. Additionally, it is not likely to equalize the uptake of care work and mostly affect uptake of paid work.

Conclusion

In sum, a better gender equality result seems apparent for Sweden. On a theoretical level, more parental leave criteria are met by the Swedish system compared to the Dutch equivalents. When the data analyses are taken into perspective, this conclusion is contextualised, showing parental leave, even theoretically solid, as a policy tool does not simply result in a strictly positive outcome. This will be discussed further in the discussion, but overall it does seem to improve the work-family balance.

The Dutch situation is less transparent because the parental leave system is not completely collectively organised, leaving the matter of payment up to negotiating between employers and employees. This makes it hard to draw direct conclusions about the gender equality situation. On the other hand, the comparison does indicate that publicly funded parental leave forms in the Netherlands could create a significantly higher uptake of fathers, a prediction that would be consistent with the Swedish policy analysis.

This is very important: the fact that Dutch fathers report problems balancing work and family shows there is a problem for which lessons learned from the Swedish parental leave system might work as solution. By taking this fact, combined with the higher uptake of parental leave by fathers in public service where the leave is tax-paid, empirical evidence seems to indicate there is social desirability and policy potential to change the system in the Netherlands. This is consistent with literature on fatherhood suggesting there are indications that fathers wish for a better balance in countries with policies concerning work-family balance (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009: 217). This could be done by first making the parental leave paid (for both parties) and second it would be important to pool the risk for employers by running this payment through taxation.

Discussion

Throughout this thesis, the intention was to find an answer to the question how Sweden's public policy concerning work-family balance compares to Dutch policy equivalents and how these affected gender equality differently in these countries. Arriving at the end there are three general conclusions resulting from the analyses.

A first general conclusion is that social policy follows social movements, not the other way around. In both Sweden and the Netherlands, it has been the social development of women entering the labour force that instigated the formulation and implementation of policies intended on facilitating, maintaining and even increasing this very development. This is an important conclusion for it could put serious restraints on the possibility to draw inferences about policy effects based on the analysis of female labour participation. Taking this consideration to its extreme would indicate the policies might never have contributed and the effects inferred here were bound to happen, regardless of policies implemented later.

This is obviously an exaggeration that cannot be tested. The policies and policy considerations have a role in the social field even before official implementation. Information about what would have happened if the policies had not been implemented or even discussed cannot be gathered. It is not likely the policies did not affect the socioeconomic situation in both countries, but this does provide an important and interesting consideration regardless. It is an indication that policies are less directive and more indicative and facilitative.

Secondly, parental leave is an ambiguous policy tool to improve both work-family balance and the gender equality situation. There are theoretical and practical problems with merely implementing parental leave schemes to these ends such as sex discrimination and reduced promotional opportunities for women. Still, implementing well-formulated, generous, flexible, tax-paid, partly reserved parental leave has, both theoretically and practically, shown to improve work-family balance. The parental leave schemes analysed here have also shown how conditional parental leave provision can actively affect social norms. This provides some contrast to the previous conclusion as it was seen in Sweden there was a clear effect of especially the first month of parental leave quota.

Thirdly, government paid childcare is a complementary policy tool to achieve better gender equality. It does little for men's share in care work as part of the work-

family balance but does provide mothers with means to outsource care work. This allows mothers to provide an income base and has shown to facilitate mothers' return to work after parental leave. This policy has shown a less directive potential than parental leave schemes and its successful implementation relies more strongly on the previously mentioned changing of social norms, instead of changing them through the policy.

Concerning the specific analyses and comparison of Sweden and The Netherlands their success in implementing these policies and their outcomes, several conclusions have been formulated. For better clarity it serves to recap the how gender equality was defined. Gender equality was taken to be the extent to which both men and women can achieve work-family balance and the extent to which a state is 'woman-friendly' because of policies concerned with work-family balance.

Taking this understanding of gender equality, Sweden has emerged as better system overall. A more woman-friendly state, based on its provision of generous and theoretically solid parental leave and subsidized childcare, which allow for better balance in families with an effectively more equal distribution of paid work. This was seen by higher uptake of parental leave by fathers, higher full-time employment and return to work of women, notably mothers.

Another, perhaps more interesting result, is the policy potential revealed for the Netherlands. By providing a theoretically stronger parental leave system compared to the Netherlands, Sweden accomplished a better gender equality situation. This theoretical potential of Swedish policy is supported by results in the Netherlands. An example is the higher male uptake of parental leave in the public sector, where it is tax-paid like Sweden. Additionally, in the Netherlands the fathers report higher work-family balance conflict, indicating there is both theoretical and empirical basis combined with normative room in society for the implementation of more extensive parental leave policies in the Netherlands. A tax-paid parental leave system could relieve fathers of part of this conflict as well as relieving women from some care work. This would come down to a Dutch tax-paid system in which the parental leave is paid, at least partially, providing sufficient compensation for lost income.

These conclusions cannot be drawn without some serious side notes. The consistent forms of segregation, in both countries, and the experienced work-family conflicts, show these policies are not enough. In Sweden, women's labour position has improved as result of the parental leave scheme, but the very same scheme has also worsened it. Parental leave, public childcare and changing norms have also resulted in a

normative conflict wherein mothers are expected to be both workers and carers, consequently always being 'bad' at one of both. The resulting catch-22 situation is an unintended policy effect, which has not been accompanied by a similar development for fathers. In fact, fathers actually gained an ironic advantage when taking parental leave, seen as more competent workers due to their added experience in multitasking. A saddening development considering mothers are still, even though the Swedish leave is paid through taxes, considered a liability for being the biggest leave takers. These policy outcomes show the importance of evaluation and policies must therefore be actively monitored and such outcomes prevented where possible.

In conclusion, the results in Sweden show positive signs with a relatively equal sharing of work and improving father participation in the family. The Dutch gender equality situation might not be at this level but it is definitely not bad considering a large female workforce and high uptake of parental leave by fathers in the public sector. To improve gender equality institutionally in the Netherlands, Sweden can provide helpful inspiration, and there are indications this can be successful. However, this does not mean there is an easy 'gender equality recipe'. A kind of cookbook approach, in which the right mix of policies, will result in a gender equal society. It should be clear that implementing such policies might even have detrimental effects along with good ones. Social policies must therefore always be congruent, in line with social developments, socially supported and continuously evaluated to become and remain effective.

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