

MONEY, TIME, AND INFRASTRUCTURE AS ELEMENTS OF A NEW GERMAN FAMILY POLICY

Hans BERTRAM

The Seventh Family Report of the Federal Republic of Germany, published in 2006, presented a family policy concept which provided the basis for most German family policy decisions over the following decade (Bertram, Krüger, and Spieß 2006; BMFSFJ 2006). This concept was a continuation and integration of various political notions which until then had been interpreted quite confrontationally in political discourse between the conservative and social-democratic camps.

Until then, from the conservative perspective, the special protection of the institutions of marriage and family as laid out by Article 6 of the German *Grundgesetz* ('basic law') had been understood above all as an economic commandment (BMFSFJ 1994). According to this interpretation, burdens carried by families and services they provide to society must in turn be supported or 'reimbursed' by society and the state – in a way that does not disadvantage those individuals who form families in comparison to those who do not. Following this logic, the minimum subsistence level must be taken into account for all family members, even if only one family member earns income. In addition, the family's care for their children is compensated through monetary child benefits (*Kindergeld*) or individualized tax reductions in the case of high income (e. g. expenses for childcare or school fees can be taken into account for tax purposes). Likewise, non-employed wives' social- and health insurance is covered as well as that of the children by the government (Trzcinski and Camp 2014).

The social-democratic perspective supports many elements of family policy based on the objective of securing families' livelihoods. Since the early 1970s, however, there has been a special concern in this line of thinking to create family policies which are not only aimed at securing the needs of society through the protection of the family, but also take into account the different interests of individual family members. The main focus here has been the guarantee of economic autonomy and independence of mothers. It has been argued that this can only be guaranteed if the state and local authorities build an infrastructure allowing mothers to be active in the labor market and earn an income sufficient to secure their existence, independent of the number of children. Simultaneously, the thus established infrastructure

of daycare centers and kindergarten should help to reduce social differences by providing competent and equal support for children from various socio-economic backgrounds.

These different positions – emphasizing the utility of the family as an institution for society while preserving it financially on the one hand, and addressing the interests of individual family members on the other hand – can be combined into a joint model. This can be achieved through a family policy which is not conceptualized statically as either financial family support or institutional support targeting children’s education, but which integrates both of these aspects in a way that is also sensitive to the family members’ time resources. The family as an institution differs from most social institutions in being subject to constant changes in its relations between the family members and in the relations of the family to others. Other social institutions, such as companies, schools, or hospitals are also confronted with changing environments, but their institutional structures are comparatively stable.

The family can sustain itself as a permanent institution only if it continues to adapt to the constantly changing conditions of the lives of its individual members. For the family members themselves, this insight is self-evident: Every young couple learns, as soon as a child is born, that the new family design is compatible with their previous relationship only if they adequately consider and adapt to the new relationships between themselves and their child. These dynamics in family relationships are constitutive of the family system. Therefore, a family policy not taking these constitutive dynamic elements into account is doomed to failure, even if it supports families with a lot of money.

This dynamism is further strengthened in modern society by the fact that the roles of ‘father’, ‘mother’, and ‘child’ themselves are subject to social change, which means that the relationships within the family are to be perpetually negotiated. Reflecting on the fact that parents and children alike cannot adjust themselves to each and everyone’s changing needs over the life course based on predetermined role expectations, but that these configurations are in a continuous flux, the concept of the “negotiating family” has become established (Bertram 2017a). The dynamic of the life cycle has two different time aspects. On the one hand, there are tendencies to change the life course, characterized by education, career, the birth of a child, the care for one’s parents and individual life perspectives. In addition, there is still a dynamic in everyday life because in a family, time structures are to be renegotiated every day, for example if one of the members becomes ill, or if further professional training or specific challenges in the profession and environment of the family require new time arrangements.

This is exactly the reason why monetary as well as infrastructural family policy measures have to be embedded into appropriate concepts of family time budgets. Doing so, there are always two aspects of time to be addressed: One is the immediate structuring of everyday life, the other is time as representation of the life course which can be very diverse among the individual family members, and which must be negotiated within and outside the family. Therefore, concepts such as “work life balance” are well-intentioned but rather misleading as the outlined dynamics of modern day familial life and family development make it almost impossible to achieve such a balance both in everyday life as well as over the life course in general. Instead, new and complex temporal arrangements have to be found. For such a necessarily flexible model, an equilibrium for all parties involved is rather unlikely.

Reconsidering the triad of financial support (money), infrastructure (daycare/kindergarten/full-day school), and time in the life course as well as in everyday life does not only open up the possibility of melting politically hitherto controversial positions into a uniform concept, but also encourages a perspective on questions of gender equality as part of family policy. As family members’ time arrangements and life circumstances are so diverse, a good set of indicators needs to be the basis for making the distribution of benefits and the distribution of care work within the family over the life course transparent.

From a political perspective, such transparency gives the opportunity for a rational discussion in order to address the consequences of an uneven distribution of tasks in more detail. It can also be taken as a starting point to develop temporal strategies and structures in order to eliminate a potential disadvantage arising from the uneven distribution of tasks or at least to mitigate the possible consequences, for example in the professional sphere of the life course.

By taking into account these two dimensions of time, parents’ welfare services for the children as a basis of the human capital of modern society should be made visible in relation to the contributions to society by those individuals who have not yet formed a family. It is thus possible to achieve a balance between these different groups not only through economic support, but also through the reorganization of long-term life processes and everyday life.

A number of different political concepts do exist (BMFSFJ 2006), but they cannot be dealt with here. In the following, we will present the attitudes of German parents on various political measures of the last few years concerned with time, money, and infrastructure.

THE LIFE COURSE AND FINANCIAL BENEFITS: THE INCOME-RELATED
PARENTAL ALLOWANCE

Even if the public support for families in Germany is in some respect confusing, it is nevertheless controlled by a few identifiable principles. As a basic principle of tax law, the individual is taxed according to his or her "efficiency" ("Strong shoulders must carry more than weak shoulders."). Further, the family is understood as a "solidarity community", in which the mothers and fathers support each other financially and at the same time have to care for their children economically. Through the care for their children, parents simultaneously provide a service to society. Another guiding principle is that of individual justice, which provides compensation when individuals cannot earn enough income to keep themselves and their family above the subsistence level for reasons that they are not responsible for.

These principles help to secure the minimum subsistence of fathers and mothers together with their children. In addition, there are possibilities to receive an allowance for education and to deduct the cost of child-care from the tax burden. Anyone who is unable to apply for a tax deductible due to low income is generally entitled to a child allowance intended to cover the amount saved by others via tax reduction. Within the framework of family solidarity, statutory health insurance also covers health costs for children, and the costs for unemployed housewives' health insurance and pension insurance as well as survivor's pension are also provided (Kuller 2009).

This structure is clearly reflected in the living arrangement where the head of the household is the main source of income and obliged to provide economic care for the children and their caregiving parent. This basic pattern becomes clear whenever the living situation of families in which father and mother live together is compared with families in which only one parent raises the children. Single parents provide their children with the same care as non-working mothers in a family with two parents, but are nonetheless liable for social security contributions with their own income and pay the same contributions as those without children. It is only the children who are supported by the child benefit. Beneficial tax regulations such as spouse income splitting cannot be applied here either (Bonin et al. 2013). While a number of measures are being tried out in order to mitigate this unequal treatment, the effects on the "normal family" remain extraordinarily clear. Historically, this is linked to the fact that this system was developed at a time when industrial society shaped the image of the Federal Republic; it was common in this society that mothers with children did not work until their children had reached the age of six

or even ten, and in 1970, more than 60 percent of children grew up in such families.

Since the 1970s, the opinion has emerged in the Federal Republic that a society without the human capital of mothers will not be sufficiently competitive against other countries in the international arena (see my chapter on care and demographic transformation in this volume: Bertram 2018). As a consequence, corresponding campaigns for the professional qualification of young women and for their integration into the labor market were implemented, which is no longer an issue in Germany today. This change took place in Germany essentially in the late 1980s and 1990s; in the economically particularly successful federal states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, this process could be observed already ten years earlier (Bertram and Bujard 2012).

Great effort was put into the attempt to influence and control this process of change, but only since the beginning of the 2000s the political reaction became more consequential in this regard; this also applies to the economic support of families. Only the income-dependent parental leave allowance (“Elterngeld”), which the Seventh Family Report (BMFSFJ 2006) suggested in line with the Finnish model (Hampden-Thompson 2013), made it clear that the economic foundation of families in Germany was based on two incomes. All previous regulations in this area were replaced by a payment of 67 percent of the parents’ income for 12, respectively 14 months, of childcare leave. Anyone claiming this leave allowance receives the same social insurance rights in terms of pension and health insurance as an employed person; in addition, it is legally ensured that upon their return to work, parents can take up the same position they previously occupied. The justification for this equality of income-dependent parental leave allowance with professional salary is that the care for children during their first year of life is regarded as equally important for the development of the human capital of modern society as active employment. Thus, care activities for the development of human capital in modern society are no longer regarded as a voluntary service, but as an activity on par with professional work activities (Seeleib-Kaiser and Fleckenstein 2009; Bertram 2017a).

In addition, as already mentioned, it is also acknowledged that the economic foundation of modern families is based on two incomes. Therefore, when one income is lost, for example due to one partner taking care of the children, a kind of “roller-coaster effect” (“Achterbahneffekt”; Hoem 2005) arises, because during this time the family lacks their second income and the risk of having to sustain the family with low economic resources rises. The income-dependent parental leave allowance ensures that this effect will not take place, and the abovementioned guarantee

concerning the same occupational position ensures that one's own labor activity can be continued without discrimination.

By considering time as an essential element of family policy, income-related parental leave allowance also addresses the question of gender equality because it can only be received for the full 14 months if the other partner, generally the male partner, is willing to stay at home for two months of childcare. The acceptance of this law is very high among young women as well as young men: Not only mothers usually use the twelve months offered, but by now, up to 50 percent of men take the two "father months". It should be emphasized that this ratio is particularly high in regions with an advanced modern industrial production and service structure, whereas this law is hardly used by men in the traditional industrial areas of North-Rhine Westphalia. This illustrates that the structure of industrial goods production can also have a decisive influence on the development of men's and women's attitudes and life prospects.

Even if it is still too early to assess this more precisely, the increasing birthrate in Germany seems to indicate that these legal measures have also contributed to making it clear to young adults that such cuts in the career path due to childcare are possible without personal disadvantages relative to other groups. However, the effects of laws cannot be judged in such short periods, because of the usually very long-term nature of such processes.

THE LIFE COURSE AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CHILDREN

With the strong position of the parents against the state and other social institutions, as laid down in the Constitution, the Federal Republic of Germany has placed the responsibility and decision-making concerning the care of their children before school age and for after-school care alone in the hands of the parents. This principle of giving parents the decisive authority over children's everyday lives up to the age of six did not result in parents taking care of their children exclusively at home, but in developing quite distinct conceptions of childcare dependent on confession, region, or city. Therefore, an unusual variety of very different institutionalized care providers with different ideas for childcare is to be found in Germany. In doing so, parents took full advantage of childcare facilities even without state regulations. The expansion of childcare for three- to six-year-olds in the mid-1970s quickly resulted in three quarters of all children visiting these facilities; today more than 95 percent of children aged between three and six years visit these institutions. In contrast to France or the Benelux countries where the in-home childminder is the

preferred and most dominant provider of non-parental care, parents in Germany prefer the institutional support provided by confessional, municipal, and other private institutions to the in-home childminder model, similar to parents in Northern Europe.

The idea that the parents themselves decide whether and how long their children visit such facilities, however, is linked to the expectation that these offers are indeed available. Therefore, in 1995, the German Bundestag anchored the legal claim to a kindergarten spot in the form of a law, giving parents the right to place their children in an appropriate institution in the vicinity of their residence. This entitlement, at first including only all three to six-year-old children, has by now been extended to include children from the age of one – in unison with the introduction of the income-dependent parental leave allowance. Thus, a daycare center at a reasonable distance from the parents' house must be available for every child from their 14th month of age. The expansion of parents making use of this childcare offer to under three-year-olds has been very rapid. During the financial crisis, this had been part of an economic stimulus program in which the state created more than 500,000 jobs for young women who worked as nurses or in social services and the associated administration between 2008 and around 2013. Eventually, about 40 to 50 percent of children under three years of age are expected to attend a daycare facility, a decision solely made by the parents, not the state or society (Bertram 2017b). These numbers show that the parents' acceptance of these facilities is very high.

However, it is also clear that the institutional care for children in daycare centers and kindergarten can produce compatibility problems of family and career for parents, as children enrolled in such institutions have a relatively firm daily schedule, which is not to be altered depending on parents' specific needs. Above all, children need stable relationships in their kindergarten or daycare center (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Flexible working hours, which are the standard for such professions as nurses and other providers of social services, can lead to considerable time conflicts between the fixed times of the infrastructure for the children, which is quite in the interest of the children, on the one hand and the employers' expectations regarding the flexible presence of their employees on the other hand.

Today, grandparents play a bigger role in childcare than for example in the 1990s, because they are needed alongside the partners to compensate for these incompatibilities between institutional care and flexible working hours. However, a large portion of families in Germany with children under three years of age have to solve this problem by taking care of their children alone, and mothers with three- to six-year-olds usually switch to part-time work (Bertram 2017b).

THE LIFE COURSE AND TIME POLICIES FOR FAMILIES

Since the year 2000, there exists a general right to part-time work in Germany, which does not only apply to parents who want to spend more time with their child(ren), but also includes the possibility for part-time work in order to qualify for a job. In the design of the Part-Time Act, a number of regulations further ensured that part-time work would not lead to any disadvantages in terms of pay, career perspectives, training, and other operational measures in comparison to full-time employees. This was an important concern of the legislature in view of the fact that mothers generally work part-time.

These general statutory regulations are supplemented by part-time provisions included in the Federal Law of the income-dependent parental leave allowance, but also by laws regulating part-time for family care (up to 24 months) or part-time for general care. All these statutory provisions are based on the assumption that such care benefits throughout the life course are not restricted to the care of small children, but should generally be available as an alternative to full-time professional activity. Therefore, corresponding legal regulations have been created according to the different welfare services over the life course. In principle, they assume that care benefits for others are of the same importance as professional work, but should be designed as transient activities. Therefore, professional activity is reduced due to these care provisions, but still remains and may be fully absorbed later.

Thus, the laws document the departure from the classical notion that caring for children or for one's own parents and relatives is an independent lifelong role like the classic role of the housewife and mother. On the contrary, these laws make it clear that in view of a significantly extended life course, phases of care for others indeed have to be integrated into one's life course but cannot determine one's whole life. As a consequence of the low child mortality rate and the low number of children, the reproductive phase has shortened to about four years. Even if the socialization period is interpreted as "welfare time", as done by historical demographers, it now lasts an average of 16 to 17 years, which – in light of a life expectancy of more than 80 years – is not a period of time sufficient to define the life of a person in the long run.

The notion that care work takes up only a limited part of an individual's lifetime and therefore is to be integrated into the professional biographies, necessarily leads to the question of how men, who are traditionally little engaged here, are involved in and committed to care work as well – in light of the fact that the care for others requires personal commitment and a close connection to the one that is provided for. For this reason, the

income-related parental leave allowance, adopted in 2007 (BMFSFJ 2013), provides an incentive for the extension of the parental leave allowance from 12 to 14 months, if fathers are also prepared to work as “welfare workers”, through reducing their outside work, and to provide childcare for their children. Whether two months is enough or whether a more even division of the welfare period between fathers and mothers is more important can certainly be discussed, but the incentive for fathers to apply two months to the raising of their own children has had positive effects.

In the beginning, the Federal Law offered the parental leave option for parents only during the phase of early childhood of their children (BMFSFJ 2013). In the meantime, however, regulations have been extended so that parents now have the possibility to divide the care leave months in the childhood phase according to their subjective preference and needs. This flexibility of the measure has the great advantage that the different needs regarding child development as well as parents’ own professional development can now be decided by the parents themselves, according to what they regard to be appropriate to their personal situation.

Similar to the right to a spot in kindergarten or daycare center, the legislature also expresses the right of parents to decide how to plan their welfare (care work) and working time, so that the parents are bound as little as possible by rigid requirements. Such a flexibility has the advantage that parents can react specifically to the needs of their children: One child may feel comfortable in the daycare center without major difficulties at only six months of age, while it might take another child much longer to learn how to deal with other children. Or parents may have made different experiences with their first and second child or even be influenced in their decision by certain career developments.

This development, which equates welfare times to professional activities, as well as the different temporal requirements, leads to the differentiation of three temporal aspects. Welfare times for children, or later also for older relatives, can be planned only partially, because the individual biographical development of people is not foreseeable. In this respect, the concept of the right to claim such welfare periods means that the person who wants to engage in these tasks can also do so against the wishes of the employer.

Moreover, the gender-specific distribution of care in society means that the presence of women in the working world is lower than that of men, which has a negative impact on the professional development of women. This does not even necessarily refer to top positions alone. Even in the organizational reality of everyday work, a lack of presence leads to the needs of those who are present to be taken into consideration more thoroughly than those who are not present. For this reason, a gender

equilibrium orientation, especially with regard to working hours, is a prerequisite for not simply depreciating the care for others as “typically feminine”.

Thirdly, care for others is not just about reducing the daily working time at different stages of the life course, but also about ensuring that these disruptions can be integrated into the professional career in such a way that they are considered as enriching and not disadvantaging the life course. In no country has this integration been solved – both in regard to the course of the day and over the life course – so that significant time restrictions do not occur at certain times of life. For the development of such time concepts it is therefore extremely useful to involve those actors concerned and learn from the perspective of those affected by these regulations by regularly checking their satisfaction.

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