

The Revenge of History – The Institutional Roots of Post-Communist Family Policy in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland

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Abstract

The authors combine historical and sociological institutional analysis to show that despite the political and socio-economic transformation in 1990s, the institutional development during and before the communist era provides the best explanation for current childcare policies in Central Europe. While most authors have concentrated on policy changes that have taken place in the region since 1989, this article concentrates on the historical roots of these policies and shows that today's policies are highly influenced by a certain dynamics that had already emerged under communist rule. It shows that a historical institutional approach, which analyses the 'gendered logic of appropriateness' and policy legacies at various critical junctures, can explain why family policies in Central Europe had already begun to differ during the communist era, why these main differences continue and why even the changes that have taken place follow logically from historical-institutional developments.

Keywords

Historical institutionalism; Family policy; Central Europe; Childcare; Parental leave

Introduction

The collapse of the communist regimes brought about great changes in the Central European societies. Yet, in the area of family policies the changes have been surprisingly small. As under communist rule, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland have all generously paid maternity leaves followed by less generous parental leaves that allow mothers to stay at home for three years (see table 1). As under communist rule, a large portion of preschool children aged three to six attend kindergartens, while a much smaller portion of children aged under three attend nurseries. Even the differences in policies

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Table 1
 Similarities and differences in childcare policies under communist rule and after 1989

	Similarities under communist rule	Differences under communist rule	Similarities after 1989	Differences after 1989
Nurseries	Rapidly expanded, moved to ministries of health	Much greater access in C and H than PL	Decline in access	Slight decline in H and continued subsidies; radical decline in C and PL and elimination of subsidies
Kindergartens	Expanded and high rates of attendance	Much greater access in C and H than PL	Continued high rates of attendance	Continued much lower attendance rates in PL
Maternity leaves	Generous based on income-replacement principle (90% of previous income in C, 100% in H and PL)	PL only 4 months, C and H 6 months	Generous based on income-replacement principle (100% in PL, 70% in H and 69% in CR but higher since not taxed)	PL only 4 months (until summer 2013 then increased to 6 months), C and H 6 months
Extended maternity leaves	Introduction of extended leaves for up to 3 years	C flat-rate benefits; H flat-rate and income-replacement benefits (75% of salary); PL means-tested	Basically 3-year leave norm, but opened for fathers after EU pressure	C flat-rate benefits, but possibility of a 4th year at lower rate; H benefit level decreased slightly to 70%; PL continued means-tested, but additional leave benefit added in 2013

Notes: C = Czech Republic; H = Hungary; PL = Poland.

among the countries are basically the same as under communist rule: access to kindergartens is much greater in the Czech Republic and Hungary than in Poland. Hungary still has a flat-rate benefit that is available until the child reaches the age of three and it still has a two-year benefit based on the income-replacement principle. The Czech Republic still has a flat-rate benefit, while Poland still has a means-tested benefit.

To be sure some changes have taken place since 1989. For example, access to nurseries for children aged under three radically declined in the Czech Republic and Poland, while the decline was much smaller in Hungary. However, we show in this article that this one important change simply constitutes the continuation of a certain logic that was established by the communist regimes in which the norm was established that mothers should stay at home until their children reach the age of three. Furthermore, adjustments were made in the parental leave systems. For example, all countries formally opened up these leaves to fathers, and the Czech Republic added the possibility of getting a fourth year of benefits. In addition, the benefit levels have been adjusted in all three countries.

Taking the example of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, we trace the development of family policies in the region up to the year 2012 in order to explain why the main differences between the countries have remained and why the decline in support for nurseries was a logical continuation of communist-era policies. More specifically, we argue that there were three important critical junctures that influence today's policies:

1. the codification of the division of day care into preschool children aged below three and above three in 1872 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and after the First World War in Poland);
2. the decision in the early 1950s to move nurseries under the ministries of health;
3. the decision in the 1960s to introduce extended maternity leaves for mothers.

We also argue that each country introduced different types of leave benefits because they had different policy legacies.

We have chosen the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, because they share common histories in having previously belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (only part of Poland did), then belonging to the Soviet bloc, and later joining the EU in 2004.

Comparing the Policies

The main differences in family policy among the Central European countries already existed during communist rule. In the communist era, Poland followed the most *laissez-faire*, non-interventionist policies of the three countries. Despite its generous maternity leave paying 100 per cent of the mother's salary, at four months it was two months shorter than in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Along with the other two countries, Poland introduced an extended maternity leave in the 1960s that allows mothers to stay at home

Table 2

Enrolment rates of children in preschool facilities

Age of children	1930s*	1989		2008**	
	3-5	0-2	3-5	0-2	3-5
Czech Republic	20.0	20.3	78.9	6.4***	79.3
Hungary	26.3	11.7	85.7	11.5	88.6
Poland	2.8	9.1	48.2	3.9	63.2
Germany				17.8	92.7
Sweden				46.7	91.1
France				42.0	99.9
Denmark				65.7	91.5
EU15				38.9	81.3

Source: Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006), for 1989. Figures for 2008 from the *TransMONEE database*, <http://www.transmonee.org> (accessed 10 August 2012).

Notes: * Data on the Czech lands from Bulíř 1990: table 2; data on Hungary from Szikra 2011: 373; data on Poland from Wojcikowska 2004. ** Data on Germany, Sweden, France, Denmark and EU15 from *OECD Family Database*, <http://www.oecd.org/social/family/> database (accessed 10 August 2012). *** In kindergartens.

until their children reach the age of three. However, leave benefits were not introduced until 1983 and have always been means-tested (Polakowski and Szelewa 2008). Until the summer of 2013, Poland continued to have a shorter maternity leave than the other two countries and is the only country with a means-tested leave. Although it opened the extended leave for men in the 1990s, means-testing gives little incentives for fathers to take it. Finally, although the communist regime expanded access to nurseries for children under three and kindergartens for children aged three to five, the percentage of children attending kindergartens remained much lower than in Czechoslovakia and Hungary; and again this difference continues today (see table 2). Thus, mothers implicitly face pressure to stay at home for three years, as childcare facilities are rare, but they do *not* face explicit incentives to stay at home for three years, since they do not get paid much for doing so and many families earn more money than the maximum level for receiving this means-tested entitlement.

Under communist rule, Czechoslovak policies promoted the norm that mothers should stay at home for three years more explicitly than Polish policies did. Its six-month maternity leave was generous, paying 90 per cent of previous income. An extended maternity leave was introduced in 1964 that paid a low flat rate. Although the original goal was to allow mothers to stay at home until the child reached the age of three (Klíma 1969), the leave period expanded gradually and did not reach three years until 1987. This system basically continued after the fall of communism. As in Poland, access to nurseries for children aged under three has radically decreased since 1989 and

access to kindergartens for preschool children aged over three remained high (see table 2). Today much less than 1 per cent of children aged under three attend nurseries, but some children aged between two and three attend kindergartens. The post-communist Czech governments introduced other adjustments, such as lowering the replacement rate for maternity leave and making the extended leave available for fathers. However, the flat-rate level for the extended leave remains too low to encourage men to take it. In 1995, the government also increased the extended leave until the child reaches the age of four; however, parents only have the right to get their job back if they return after three years, which gives mothers a disincentive to take the fourth year. Since 2008, more affluent parents can choose shorter leave until the child reaches the age of two and receive more money per month, but few mothers chose this since day care places for children under the age of three are scarce. Since these policies explicitly encourage women to leave their jobs until their children reach the age of three, it is not surprising that the impact of parenthood on women's employment is much more negative in the Czech Republic (32.3 per cent lower employment for mothers with preschool children) than in residualist Poland (11.1 per cent lower employment; European Commission 2009: 30–1).

Lastly, since the mid-1980s, Hungary has had the most generous, universalist policy, with the introduction of an insurance-based extended maternity leave, GYED, which originally paid 75 per cent of previous income until the child reached the age of two. The parental leave follows the six-month maternity leave (paying 100 per cent of previous income). Since the late 1960s, Hungary has also had a flat-rate benefit (GYES), which is available until the child reaches the age of three. Parents choosing the GYED can receive GYES in the third year, when the GYED benefit ends. Today these two extended leaves remain, although GYED's benefit level was lowered to 70 per cent. Although the income replacement level is relatively generous, GYED has a low maximum-income ceiling, which gives middle- and upper-income fathers little incentive to go on leave. Nevertheless, as the only one of these countries to offer an extended leave based on the income-replacement principle, it still gives the greatest incentive for men to go on leave. So while Poland does not even keep statistics on the percentage of parental leave time taken by men, and men only comprise 1 per cent of people on parental leave in the Czech Republic (Maříková 2008: 75), in Hungary 4–7 per cent of the parental leave time is claimed by men.¹ As with Poland and Czechoslovakia, the communist regime radically increased access to kindergartens and nurseries, but in contrast to these countries, post-communist governments in Hungary have kept most of its nurseries open, although the percentage of children aged under three in day care is very low compared to Western Europe (see table 2). Since Hungarian policies make it easier for mothers to return to the labour market than in the Czech Republic (because of greater access to nurseries and a leave system that gives fathers a greater incentive to share in the leave time), the negative impact of motherhood on women's employment is a bit smaller than in the Czech Republic at 27.5 per cent lower employment compared to 32.3 per cent in the Czech Republic.

Explaining the Outcomes

In summary, the radical transformation that took place in post-communist societies in 1989 did *not* cause great changes in family policies. The adjustments in family policies basically followed the institutional legacies and institutional logics of policies from the communist era. Most explanations of post-communist family policies, however, only focus on the few changes that have taken place, while ignoring the impressive continuity of policies. They have stressed the role of international organizations (Ferge 1997a; Deacon 2000), the mobilization of women (Glass and Fodor 1997) or the Catholic Church (Siemienska 1994; Heinen and Wator 2006). These factors explain some of the policy adjustments that have taken place, but they cannot explain the surprising continuity of policies from the pre-1989 era. The other main explanation of post-communist family policy focuses on the anti-feminist communist legacy (Ferge 1997b; Funk and Mueller 1993). This argument *explains some of the lack of change* and unwillingness to introduce policies that would promote greater gender equality, but *cannot explain the differences among the countries*. Thus, none of these explanations can explain the great continuity of policies from the communist era, nor can they explain the main differences in policies, since these differences already existed under communist rule.

For reasons of space we cannot analyze all the important factors and actors (such as women's movements, political parties, the Church, experts, international organizations, etc.) that have influenced adjustments in family policies in the region. Instead, we apply a historical-institutionalist approach, because it is best suited for answering our questions of:

1. why family policies have remained so remarkably stable in the sense that the main differences between the countries already existed in the communist era; and
2. why policies had already begun to diverge during the communist era.

Furthermore, we show that institutional developments explain the logic behind the biggest change since 1989: the decline in nurseries. In summary, we argue that today's family policies in Central Europe – both the changes and lack of changes – were greatly influenced by decisions taken at critical junctures both before and during the communists' rule.

There is a growing understanding of the importance of history for explaining today's policies. Some studies have described the historical development of one country (e.g. Heinen and Wator 2006; Bicskei 2006; Saxonberg *et al.* 2012), but few have discussed how communist-era policies influence today's policies from a comparative perspective. The main exception is Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006) and Saxonberg and Szelewa (2007), who show that the most important policy differences among the Central European countries already existed during communist rule. However, they do not investigate *why* policies developed differently among these countries, nor the *reasons* for the important decisions that communist regimes made, such as introducing extended maternity leaves. This article represents the

first historical-institutional analysis of post-communist family policies in Central Europe, which investigates the reasons why policies had already begun developing differently under communist rule.

Theoretical Approach: Historical-institutionalism with a Sociological-institutional Approach toward Actors

Institutionalists traditionally emphasized the importance of decisions that are made at one critical juncture (Collier 1991), which sets countries on different path trajectories that are difficult to leave (Mahoney 2000). However, we show that several important critical junctures can take place rather than just one. Traditionally, historical institutionalists also claimed that a critical juncture arose when exogenous shocks caused crises (Pierson 2000). Instead, we argue that the critical junctures can take place in periods without clear crises. Some of the critical choices made concerning family policy in Central Europe probably did not even seem to be very important at the time. Recent scholarship has tried to explain changes that are not as abrupt as the critical-juncture approach, but are more incremental in nature (e.g. Mahoney and Thelen 2010 among others). Thus, the issue of incremental change versus revolutionary change or 'punctuated equilibrium' has been recently hotly debated. Therefore, we should point out that our usage of critical junctures does not mean to signify revolutionary change. Rather, we mean something in-between the two extremes of incremental and revolutionary change: it is a change that leads to a change in the logic of the system. In Hall's (1993) terms, the change comes when policymakers change their goals rather than wanting to adjust policy mechanisms.

In order to explain the reasons why policymakers make the decisions they do at critical junctures, we apply a *sociological-institutional* approach to studying these actors from a *historical-institutional* perspective. While historical institutionalism emphasizes the manner in which institutions are path-dependent, sociological institutionalism emphasizes the manner in which institutions influence norms and attitudes (Hall and Taylor 1996) and the manner in which institutions influence how we filter information into 'existing mental maps' (Pierson 2000). Thus, we can use sociological institutionalism to explain *why* policymakers make the decisions they do at critical junctures. As Campbell (2004) points out, institutionalists tend to explain path dependency either in rational choice terms of the increasing returns that come about from repeating previous ways of behaving and start-up costs of starting new institutions, or they explain path dependency in sociological-institutional terms of actors being used to think in certain ways once they are used to their institutions. In our particular case, the sociological-institutional approach toward actors better explains the behaviour of policymakers than rational choice approaches, as the institutional developments have clearly influenced the cognition and norms of policymakers at the critical junctures. As Pfau-Effinger points out:

the transformation process will usually be 'path dependent', since basic elements of the institutional and cultural context are partially

maintained. This is because the social actors in the process are still behaving under the influence of the structures and models they have challenged. (Pfau-Effinger 2005: 14)

More specifically, we argue that when policymakers make decisions at critical junctures, they do so under a *logic of appropriateness*, which induces them to think that certain policies are more 'appropriate than others', even if they are not the most efficient ones. Furthermore, those policies which policymakers consider to be 'appropriate' are influenced by the particular *policy legacies* of each country. Previously enacted policies influence the manner in which policy agendas are set, the manner in which policymakers approach policies in a particular area; and they also 'create normative structures which define the contours of the behaviour of individuals and groups in later years' (Gal and Bar 2000: 585). In other words, institutions and cultural norms continuously interact with each other. When Central European policymakers made choices at critical junctures, they were influenced by dominating cultural norms, as well as by norms within their own groups (such as the Communist Party) and policy legacies that dated back to pre-communist governments. *So at each critical juncture when policymakers made their decisions, they did so by considering what seemed the most 'appropriate' given the logic of appropriateness which was influenced by their country's previous policy legacies.*

As Chappell (2006) noted, the logic of appropriateness is *gendered*, in that gendered biasness exists as to what types of policy alternatives can be considered appropriate. Thus, even if institutional arrangements create a certain logic as to what policy changes are the most 'appropriate', this logic interacts with the gendered norms of the policymakers. Consequently, as Pfau-Effinger (2005) observes, norms and ideas are continuously interacting with institutions.

Along these lines, some feminist scholars have explored the vital role of ideational processes in the construction and reproduction of welfare regimes, which contrasted with the previous emphasis solely on material interests and/or political institutions when explaining either institutional stability or change (e.g. Béland 2009; Orloff and Palier 2009). They show that gendered views strongly influence the manner in which policymakers frame and resolve their policy decisions; therefore, their insights lend support to Chappell's notion of gendered logic of appropriateness. Similarly, Campbell (2004) analyzes how actors and their thinking and ideas matter for institutional change. He argues policymakers work within certain *paradigms*, in which they create their *programmes*. They must then sell their programmes by framing them and taking into account public sentiments. Knijn and Smit (2009) argue that different paradigms about the reconciliation of work and family life lead to very different policies among countries. In Hall's (1993) terms, a programmatic shift occurs when policymakers change the goals of their policies rather than merely trying to make adjustments in policies in order to achieve the same goals as before. Thus, changes in ideas or goals lead to programmatic changes, which constitute critical junctures in our view.

Thus, in analyzing the historical development of family policies, we detect the important paradigms and programmes that influenced the development of

family policies in Central Europe. For reasons of space we do not concentrate on how the policymakers framed the policy changes to meet the sentiments of the population. We rather point out that ideas diffuse, but as Campbell (2004) observes, they get translated when adapted to different institutional settings. Moreover, we argue that differences in how policymakers translate and adapt ideas depend to a great extent on their policy legacies.

Lastly, in linking ideas and institutional change to actors, we find Mahoney's and Thelen's discussion fruitful of how different types of actors cause different types of institutional change. They divide policymakers into four groups:

1. subversives, who are able to add new layers to the system;
2. parasitic symbionts who cause institutions to slowly change by drifting in another direction;
3. insurrectionaries, who openly oppose the system and bring about a change in path (i.e. displacement); and
4. opportunists, who 'redeploy the prevailing rules' (rather than trying to change them) for their own purposes, which leads to conversion.

Space does not permit a detailed discussion here, but what is important for this article is that while policymakers basically acted in accordance with the dominating ideology during the first two critical junctures, when the important change in the 1960s took place and the regimes introduced extended maternity leaves, those making these proposals acted like subversives, who did *not* support the dominating ideology that women would become liberated through work and, instead, by working within the system to some extent wanted to subvert this ideology by making it easier for women to stay at home for longer periods. Yet, in making these proposals and 'subverting' the system, they did not openly criticize the official goals of supporting female employment.

In sum, Central European family policies were influenced by three *critical junctures*. At each juncture policymakers made their decisions based on what seemed the most appropriate given their *gendered logic of appropriateness* and given their country's previous *policy legacies*. Societal *paradigms* and their related ideas created the basis for policy *programmes*. When the programmatic goals diffused, the ideas got translated somewhat differently when adapted to the different institutional settings based on each country's policy legacies.

The First Critical Juncture: The Adaptation of the Two-tier Model

The roots of public childcare in the territory of today's Czech Republic and Hungary date back to the 19th century when they were part of the Austrian Empire. The first critical juncture took place with the signing of the Imperial School Act from 1872 (see table 3). *Kindergärten* and *Volkskindergärten* were to educate preschool children from the age of three under the control of School Offices (§17 and §26). Meanwhile, nurseries were to care for children aged under three and only had to follow sanitary guidelines (§27). This Act codified

Table 3
Critical junctures and changes in family policy

Critical juncture	Paradigm	Programme goal (given the paradigm)	Gendered logic of appropriateness (given their goals)	Policy legacy (influencing how goals get translated to policies)	Outcome
1. Codification of the division of day care into preschool children aged below 3 and above 3 (1872); codification of <i>Volkkindergärten/Ochraniki</i> in PL after unification 1919	Male-breadwinner model and national revival	Providing safety and care to the youngest children of the absolutely poorest mothers, who had to work; supporting education for the older preschool children	Women should not work, so nurseries should only be a last resort; <i>Volkkindergärten/Ochraniki</i> necessary to strengthen national language skills and national identity	C: Conservative-Bismarckian H: Conservative and ethnic nationalist PL: Residualist	Moderately high number of children attend day care in C and H, much less in PL, which was poorer and had less state capacity (having been divided into 3 parts before the First World War)
2. Closing down the ministries of social caring, moving nurseries to ministries of health and kindergartens to the ministries of education (early 1950s)	Marxist-Leninist productionism	'Liberating' women by inducing them to work; increasing production	Nurseries' goal of preventing children from being sick so that mothers could work, so logical to put them under the Ministry of Health rather than Education	Legacy from 1800s of seeing nurseries as places to just prevent children from injuries when not with mothers, while kindergartens had educational goals	Rapid rise in female labour market participation; rapid rise is the number of children attending day care; day care overcrowded; paediatricians complain about high illness rates and deprivation at nurseries
3. Introduction of extended maternity leaves in the 1960s	Marxist-Leninist productionism	Increasing fertility, reducing 'overemployment', solving the 'problem' of mothers staying at home with sick children	Since mothers were often at home with sick children aged under 3 (and paid salaries for this period) and since only mothers were seen as carers, logically appropriate to add extended leaves allowing mothers to stay at home 3 years	C: reverted to conservative legacy and introduced flat-rate leave H: first reverted to conservative legacy and introduced flat-rate leave, then also relied on its ethnic-nationalist legacy and introduced leave based on income-replacement, to encourage ethnic Hungarian mothers to have more children PL: kept residualist legacy and made leave means-tested	Became a norm for mothers to stay at home for three years. The percentage of children aged under 3 attending day care began stagnating

Notes: C = Czech Republic; H = Hungary; PL = Poland.

the division of preschool children into two groups and ingrained into society the notion that only children aged over three should be included in kindergartens. Poland differed slightly because it was partitioned by Germany and Russia as well as Austria. The division of preschool children into two different age groups became part of Polish law when the country gained independence in 1918. All three countries established a two-tier system of nurseries for children aged under three and kindergartens for older children.

This was done under the *paradigm* of the *male-breadwinner model*, in which nurseries were to be limited to the cases of extreme poverty, when mothers were forced to work to support their children. Although the nursery idea originated in France, in the 1850s it came to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Fellner 1884) and the former German and Russian territories of contemporary Poland (Pietrusiński 1988). Kindergartens also emerged in Central Europe in this period, which were based on the model that Fröbel developed in Germany. They had pedagogical goals rather than the goal of enabling women to work, as they developed within the male-breadwinner paradigm. Since kindergartens charged fees and were only open four to five hours per day, they mainly catered to the middle-class.

However, as Campbell notes, when ideas diffuse they develop differently as they get *translated* to adapt to different national institutional systems. As this was a period of national revival, within the Austro-Hungarian Empire national minorities demanded the creation of *Volkskindergärten*, which taught in the national languages rather than German. In addition, the *Volkskindergärten* diverted somewhat from the male-breadwinner model in that they were open longer than the traditional *Kindergärten*, so that poor mothers could work (Mišurcová 1980). Since the *Volkskindergärten* taught in the national languages, while the *Kindergärten* only taught in German (or Russian in the Russian sector of today's Poland), they could be framed as part of a national project and thus, *Volkskindergärten* became much more popular and widespread since they supported the national *sentiments* of the Czechs, Hungarians and Poles.

Hungarian nationalism was more developed in the early 1800s than in the Czech and Polish territories; and Hungary eventually achieved equal status with Austria in the 1860s as the empire renamed itself the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1891, the Hungarian government passed a new Act on kindergartens that aimed to increase the number of *Volkskindergärten* in order 'to promote the cultural homogenization of Hungarian society and teach small children the Hungarian language' (Szikra 2011: 375). It also encouraged local authorities to establish and finance *Volkskindergärten* (Bicskei 2006). In the Czech lands, nationalists established an association, *Matice česká* that subsidized Czech *Volkskindergärten* to teach children the Czech language (Mišurcová 1980). Consequently, *Volkskindergärten* became more popular than the expensive, German-language *Kindergärten*. Poland had *ochronki*, which were similar to *Volkskindergärten*. In the Russian sector of Poland, *ochronki* became centres of social resistance against the tsarist Russification of Polish children (Lepalczyk 1988: 74).

This *framing* of *Volkskindergärten* and *ochronki* as a way of supporting nationalist *sentiments* helps explain why the number of *Volkskindergärten* rapidly increased even before the communists came to power and why the communist

governments met little resistance when they decided to sharply increase the percentage of children attending kindergartens after coming to power. This contrasted to the nurseries. Since nurseries did not play a role in nationalist strivings, conservative-nationalist groups had little reason to support them. Lacking subsidies from nationalist groups, they were not nearly as widespread as kindergartens. Consequently, when the communist regimes started to expand access to these institutions, large portions of the population saw nurseries as part of a communist project, which limited their popularity (Srb and Kučera 1959).

Despite institutional similarities, differences also emerged in the support of childcare (see tables 2 and 3). Hungarian politicians were especially motivated to support childcare facilities as part of their nationalist, pro-natalist policies in response to losing two-thirds of their territory after the First World War. In the 1930s these pro-natalist policies aimed to increase the size of the 'Hungarian nation' and to redistribute wealth from the 'rich Jews' to the 'poor Christian working class' (Szikra and Szelewa 2009: 98). In Poland, the development of childcare facilities was hindered by the partition. Austria, Prussia and Russia considered Poland as belonging to the periphery, so they did not invest in its infrastructure. Once Poland reunited in 1918, childcare facilities also faced opposition from the Catholic Church (Heinen 2008). The new state had a weaker capacity to expand childcare, as three areas with different administrative apparatuses had to be united. Thus, while in Poland hardly any children attended nurseries in 1939 and only 2.8 per cent attended kindergartens in 1937, in Hungary around 1,000 children attended nurseries before the advent of the Second World War, and 26 per cent of children aged three to five attended kindergartens in 1938. The Czech lands had a slightly lower level of childcare support than Hungary, with 83 nurseries in operation in 1937 and around 20 per cent of children attending kindergartens between the World Wars (see table 2).

To this day, the *policy legacy* of less support for childcare continues in Poland (see table 2). Similarly, Hungarian policies continue to be more pro-natalist and nationalist than in the other two countries (Szikra and Szelewa 2009), while the Czech Republic continues to keep pace with Hungary in levels of children attending kindergartens. Thus, important differences in policy legacies had already emerged before the communist regimes came to power.

The Second Critical Juncture: Nurseries, the Productionist Norm and the Creation of the Health Problem

The division of childcare facilities into kindergartens for children aged over three and nurseries for children aged under three is not in itself special for the countries of this study, as this division also exists in most of continental Europe and in Denmark. However, during the first years of communist rule, the regimes took steps that pushed the three countries away from Western Europe. The new rulers worked within the Marxist-Leninist *paradigm* in which the state was to control the economy and all women were to be 'liberated' by having gainful employment.

Thus, in translating their new paradigms into economic *programmes*, the new regimes decided to close down the ministries of social caring, since the command economy was supposed to solve all the social problems, thereby making these ministries obsolete (Ferge 1997c). While responsibility for kindergartens moved to the ministries of education,² responsibility for nurseries moved to the ministries of health, thus turning early preschool care into a health care issue.³ This move was part of the Stalinist era's productionist goal that the state should enable women to remain in the workforce. The emphasis on women's emancipation through expanding access to childcare facilities came from their *programmatic* ideas based on Engels' belief that women would achieve equality by increasing the socialization of care and household duties (Heitlinger 1979). From the productionist viewpoint combined with the remaining conservative views that only women are capable of taking care of children, the *gendered logic of appropriateness* was to invest heavily in nurseries as mini-hospitals. This is because it was important for children to remain healthy, so that their mothers could work, but it was not important to eliminate gender roles by getting men to share in child-raising (see table 3). Since the focus was on health and women's labour force participation, little emphasis was placed on pedagogical-psychological aspects of childcare. Still, the policymakers could *frame* these moves as positive, as health care and infant mortality was a major concern after the war.

The state saw nurseries as being more 'efficient' if the ratio of children per nursery was high. In Czechoslovakia, nurseries were built for groups of at least 20 children and there were about six children per nurse and 20 children per child minder each day.⁴ Paradoxically, because of the problem of overcrowdedness, it became easier for illnesses to spread among the children, which alarmed many paediatricians. Moreover, psychologists complained that children, who spent long days in nurseries, were more likely to suffer from psychological disturbances. They concluded the child's early separation from his or her mother caused these problems and thus advocated longer maternity leaves (Langmeier and Matějček 1974 for Czechoslovakia; Haney 2002 for Hungary).

The higher illness rate of children attending nurseries, their hospital-like design and the increasing critique of their functioning contributed to the poor reputations of the nurseries at the time of their quickest expansion (e.g. Heitlinger 1996). In Czechoslovakia, a survey taken in 1956 showed that only one-third of mothers and pregnant women in gainful employment would place their children in a nursery if they had the chance to do so. The main reason for their hesitancy was the frequent outbreaks of contagious diseases (Srb and Kučera 1959: 115–20). Przybylska (1988: 104) concluded that if nurseries in Poland had adhered to the Ministry of Education, the quality of care would have increased, as the nurseries would have been able to employ pedagogues instead of nurses.

Comparatively speaking, the children's groups were also relatively small in Hungary, with an average of ten children for two nurses, and the facilities even held open-house days (Turgonyi 1977). This helps to account for the fact that Hungary was the only one of the three countries that kept open many of its nurseries after 1989.

If the regimes had moved the nurseries to the ministries of education, then it would have been possible to merge them with the more popular kindergartens and create a unitary day care system as in Sweden. Or as in Denmark, the regimes could have kept nurseries and kindergartens separate but in the same ministry – the Ministry of Social Welfare – and changed the profile of nurseries into more humanistic institutions whose goals are oriented toward pedagogical and psychological development rather than health care (Borchorst 2009).

The Third Critical Juncture: Introduction of the ‘Extended Maternity Leave’

In the 1960s, a ‘discursive opening’ (Naumann 2005) arose in Central Europe that enabled paediatricians, psychologists, demographers and economists to question support for nurseries. The economies throughout the Soviet bloc began stagnating, and some economists argued that the economy could no longer ‘afford’ to employ all the women. Meanwhile, demographers claimed that pressuring women to work led to declining birth-rates. The more open climate also enabled psychologists and paediatricians to question the quality of care in nurseries (Szikra 2011; Hašková and Klenner 2010).

These professional groups acted similar to Mahoney’s and Thelen’s (2010) ‘subversives’, because they held official positions within the system and wanted to make changes from within the system. When the reform debates began in the 1960s and the communist elite began worrying about economic stagnation and drops in fertility rates, they invited experts to discuss family policy issues. They did so, because in these cases ‘there is no obvious, easily-agreed upon solution, but [these issues] do not threaten either the existing political order or the power of top political leaders’ (Wolchik 1983: 114). In other words, they stayed within the Marxist-Leninist *paradigm*, but tried to change some of the *programmatic* aspects. These subversives could still frame their reform ideas within the Marxist-Leninist framework (as the changes would supposedly increase reproduction and therefore contribute to the national economy, and they would still be within the framework of a planned economy) and the reforms were in line with public sentiments that were critical of the hospitalized nurseries and had gender conservative attitudes, so they welcomed the change for mothers to stay at home longer.

In addition to the views of scientists, the Marxist-Leninist productionist view of the rulers also encouraged arguments for introducing extended three-year maternity leaves: if the main goal of nurseries was to enable women to work and women were the sole childcarers at home, then if their children became sick, mothers must leave their jobs to stay at home and take care of their children. Moreover, if children got sick, the capacity of nurseries was not fully utilized. Given the rulers’ productionist norm and their *gendered* view that only women can take care of children, then the most *appropriate* alternative for them was to introduce extended maternity leaves, as it was more efficient if women stayed at home for the whole period of three years than to subsidize nurseries, which were partially empty due to

sickness. Milada Bartošová (interviewed 2 November 2007), who in the 1960s and 1970s was one of Czechoslovakia's most influential demographers and a member of a governmental commission on family policy reform, recalls:

'Mothers with the smallest children . . . stayed at home quite often because their children were ill . . . And the enterprises started to change their approach, because they said that women stay at home quite a lot anyway, so they don't want to financially support nurseries . . . at the same time the paediatricians started to discuss this and argued that the child should stay with mother so like they shouldn't be given to the nurseries.'

Thus, a third critical juncture arose as the communist regimes decided to introduce an extra 'extended maternity leave' in the 1960s, with the new refamilializing goal of encouraging mothers to stay at home for three years, although this goal still remained within the work-liberation paradigm, as mothers were still expected to work full-time both before and after their three-year leaves.

Instead of introducing three-year extended maternity leaves, the communist-led governments could have followed the Danish and French paths by eliminating strict hygiene rules, reducing the size of children's groups and incorporating a social pedagogical focus. However, such moves would have opposed the productionist norm as well as the wish to reduce female employment in the region in the 1960s (Szikra 2011). Furthermore, in contrast to the Danish case where nurseries remained under the Ministry of Social Welfare, discursive space did not open for progressive pedagogues to propose reforms. On the contrary, the health care view had become so entrenched in communist-ruled Central Europe that pedagogues were not able to enter the discourse on nurseries. Moreover, in contrast to France, no feminist movement was allowed to emerge, which could have challenged these 'refamilializing' moves.⁵

Although the idea of the three-year extended maternity leave diffused throughout the communist bloc, the three countries of our study translated these diffused ideas differently depending on their pre-war *policy legacies* (see table 3). The Czechoslovak regime introduced an extended leave in 1964, which was supposed to successively increase to three years to reduce reliance on nurseries (Klíma 1969). Policymakers stuck to their pre-war conservative roots and introduced an extended leave that is similar to that of most of the conservative-continental West European welfare states in that the benefit pays a flat-rate benefit (Hašková and Klenner 2010). This extended leave pushed Czechoslovakia down a more conservative path of development, by inducing mothers to stay at home for long periods.

Meanwhile, Poland stuck to its more residualist *policy legacy* from the inter-war years, by introducing an unpaid extended maternity leave in the 1960s, while access to day care remained much lower than in the neighboring countries. Eventually, the unpaid extended leaves became means-tested benefits in 1981, after the regime caved into demands from the Solidarity movement (Balcerzak-Paradowska 1995: 55). The former Minister of Labor and

Social Affairs, Antoni Rajkiewicz (interviewed in May 2007), recalls the *logic of appropriateness* behind their decision to make the benefit means-tested rather than universal: 'Given the fact that Poland had given less support for childcare facilities than the other communist countries, the demand of mothers to use a universal extended maternity leave would have been greater than in the other countries, as the childcare alternatives were not as available'. Thus, a universal benefit would have been more expensive to implement. Since the Polish economy was in shambles in 1981, the government wanted to keep costs down.

This residualist policy legacy in Poland also comes from its relative lack of state capacity. When the country reunited in 1919 it had to merge three different areas that had developed three different types of administrations under Austrian, German and Russian rule. Thus, the administrative apparatus in Poland was much weaker than in Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Inglot 2008), which made it more difficult to expand day care facilities.

Hungary also introduced an extended leave in the 1960s. In 1967 the government introduced the GYES benefit that paid a flat rate for two years and extended to three years in 1969 (Haney 2002: 104). Populist-nationalist intellectuals built on the pro-natalist *policy legacy* of the 1930s in arguing that the flat-rate benefit rewarded poorer, 'undeserving elements' (i.e. the Roma) and cost the country 'intellectual capital', since wealthier, 'deserving elements' (i.e. ethnic Hungarians) had less incentive to have children. In this atmosphere, the vice-minister in charge of family issues, Judit Csehák, developed a proposal for an extended maternity leave based on the income-replacement principle to encourage women with higher incomes to have children (interviewed on 23 January 2008). Consequently, in 1985 the regime introduced the GYED, which allowed mothers to receive 75 per cent of their salary up to the child's age of two. This shows that even if policymakers can fall back on policy legacies for guidance, individual actors can still exert influence over policy innovation in deciding how to transform these legacies into concrete policies.

Thus, before the collapse of communism the main pillars of present family policies were already in place. Parental leave schemes have not changed much in the three countries, although the post-communist governments have opened the extended leaves for men and the governments have introduced other adjustments. Furthermore, the share of children attending kindergartens has not declined and it remains much lower in Poland than in the other two countries. All three countries gave some support for nurseries during the communist era, which at the time was rather high by international standards, although low by today's standards. The only big difference in policies since 1989 is that Poland and the Czech Republic have cut off support to nurseries, while Hungary has kept most of its nurseries open.

Post-1989 Consequences

Even the *gendered logic of appropriateness* that led to the post-communist cut-backs in nurseries comes from the pre-communist as well as communist era:

the artificial cut-off point of three years for kindergartens coupled with the discussions of the dissatisfactory functioning of the health-oriented nurseries and the introduction of 'extended maternity leaves' all contributed to the creation of the norm that the mother should stay at home until the child is three years old. The fact that nurseries became unpopular among the population made it much easier to cut off support for nurseries after 1989.

Hungary provides a relative exception because of its combination of having a nationalist-pronatalist *policy legacy* coming from the interwar era and a pragmatic policy legacy coming from the Kádárist reform era in the 1970s–80s. Building on these legacies, conservative, post-communist Hungarian governments have made higher fertility rates an explicit policy goal. To prevent fertility rates from dropping too much, they pragmatically decided to prevent nurseries from disappearing, so that career-oriented women would start their families despite their engagement in the post-1989 market economy. They have even moved responsibility for nurseries to the ministry in charge of social policy. Furthermore, the government also decided in the 1990s to start subsidizing nurseries again (Korintus 2006: 34).

Not surprisingly, no norm of three-year maternity leave has arisen in countries such as Sweden and Norway that have a generous, high-quality and unitary childcare system, which has never divided children into two different institutions above and below the age of three. However, this norm of 'threeness' did not develop either in West European countries that have divided children into different institutions around the age of three (such as Denmark and France), because these institutions operate differently and developed under different conditions there. Consequently, in the Czech Republic and Hungary, while only 15–19 per cent of mothers with a child under the age of three work, in France and Germany, three-fifths of such mothers work, while in Sweden and Denmark more than 70 per cent of such mothers work. The employment rate of such mothers is a bit higher in Poland than in the Czech Republic and Hungary, because the benefits are means-tested, which leaves many mothers without any payment if they stay at home. Nevertheless, since Poland has the lowest access to childcare provision in Europe, the employment rate of such mothers is in Poland still well below the EU average.⁶

International surveys show that in Central Europe, support for paid leaves is among the highest in Europe and that Central Europeans are much more likely than those from Western Europe to think that preschool children suffer if the mother works (e.g. Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006). Given the norm of threeness, it has been politically difficult for Central European policymakers to contemplate measures to reduce lengths of parental leave or to radically worsen their conditions. The one time that a government tried to radically change the parental leave system was in 1995, when the Hungarian socialist government passed a law removing the insurance-based GYED leave and making the flat-rate leave means tested. This immediately led to protests (Haney 2002), with women shouting 'we are still mothers'. Once the socialists lost the 1998 elections, the new conservative government immediately reinstated the previous system and no government has dared to touch it since then.

Conclusion

This article analyzes the development of family policies in Central Europe. It supports previous studies showing that important differences exist in family policies in Central Europe and that these differences already existed under communist rule. Then it moves beyond these studies and investigates *why* policies began developing differently under communist rule and *why* there was a relative lack of change in these policies after 1989. We base our explanation on the types of gendered logic of appropriateness and policy legacies that emerged, given the main paradigms within which policymakers worked. Moreover, we use these two concepts to show why the only big change in family policies in the region after 1989 – the decrease in support for nurseries – was a logical continuation of communist-era policies.

At the theoretical level, through the notions of policy legacies and gendered logic of appropriateness, this article shows how ideas influence institutions, and how institutions influence ideas and thus, also programmatic shifts. At the empirical level, this article shows that post-communist family policies in Central Europe were highly influenced by the norm of threeness, which has been ingrained there through pre-communist and communist institutional developments. It also shows the irony that policy decisions that were made with certain goals (e.g. increasing women's employment) can – thanks to these processes – lead to completely different results later on. For example, the decision to rapidly expand nurseries and to improve their safety by strengthening hygiene rules and health care, contributed to the rapid increase in women's employment. However, the unexpected consequences in terms of nurseries' poor reputations as over-crowded mini-hospitals, harmed women's employment in the long term. Given the poor reputations of the nurseries, the regimes followed their gendered logic of appropriateness and policy legacies in creating extended maternity leaves with the new programmatic goal of inducing mothers to stay at home until their children reach the age of three. Although the idea of three-year leaves diffused throughout the region, each country relied on different policy legacies to translate the idea of threeness differently to their leave benefit schemes. Since the norm that mothers should stay at home for three years had become established through the parental leave system and through the low popularity of nurseries, post-communist politicians met little opposition when they cut funding for nurseries. Although each country adjusted its parental leave policies after 1989, the main differences to the parental leave systems between Central European countries remained similar to the communist era, as did support for ever popular kindergartens in the region.

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Notes

1. In 2008, ministry officials estimated that 6–7 per cent of parental leave time was taken by men. Frey 2009, by contrast, estimates the percentage to be 4.1 per cent.
2. In Poland, kindergartens were under the Ministry of Education since 1932 (Graniewska 1971: 15). In Czechoslovakia, kindergartens were moved there shortly after the Second World War, although this move had been in preparation since the 1930s (Mišurcová 1980). In Hungary, kindergartens were partly under the Ministry of Education since the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and in 1949 they were moved there completely (Bicskei 2006: 162–3).
3. For Poland, see Graniewska 1971: 31 and Przybylska 1988: 103; for Hungary, see Haney 2002; for Czechoslovakia, see Ministry of Health Act no. 130/1951 Coll. and Act no. 24/1952 Coll.
4. See Act no. 43/1966 Coll., Act no. 92/1978 Coll. and Jančíková 1979.
5. For the Danish and French cases, see e.g. Borchorst 2009; Martin and Le Bihan 2009.
6. *OECD Family Database*, <http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database> (accessed 8 March 2013).

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