Institutions and Discourses on Childcare for Children under the Age of Three in a Comparative French-Czech Perspective

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Abstract

The article compares the development of policies pertaining to care for preschool children since the late 1940s in France and the Czech Republic. It seeks to identify the key factors that led to the differentiation of the policies and institutions in the two countries, especially with respect to support for extra-familial care and formal care institutions (nurseries). We build on the theories of 'new' institutionalisms, and we apply a framing analysis in order to understand the formation of the ideas that form and lead up to policy changes. Specifically, we discuss the role of expert discourse and the framings of care for young children in the process of social policy change. We argue that childcare policies have been fundamentally impacted by expert knowledge and how that knowledge has been presented in public. However, the policy was not influenced by this knowledge alone, but rather by its interaction with specific political, economic, and demographic contexts.

Key words
Childcare, discourse, institutional development, expert knowledge

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the development of discourses, institutions and policies of care for children under the age of three in France and the Czech Republic since the late 1940s.[1] Despite their different pasts, these two societies have several things in common. First, they both have a tradition of taking pro-natal factors into account when designing childcare policies (Hašková *et al.* 2011; King 1998). Secondly, the main outline of childcare institutions in the two countries was originally very similar: both countries traditionally had separate childcare institutions for children of preschool age – health-oriented nurseries for children below the age of three and pedagogically-oriented kindergartens for preschool children aged three and older, with a good reputation among experts and parents (ibid). While hygiene and health prevention was accentuated in nurseries, where most of the staff were paediatric nurses and doctors, educational preparation was the focus of kindergartens, where most of the staff were preschool teachers (ibid.; Sullerot 1981). In both countries nurseries and kindergartens became in most cases all-day facilities rather early compared to other countries in Europe: since the late 1940s (Hašková *et al.* 2011; Saltier & Sullerot 1974). Both countries offer three-year parental leave with a parental allowance. The monthly allowance in relation to the average wage was similar in both places until the Czech Republic increased its allowance in 2007. In both countries, the allowance was first designed for higher-order children and only later was it paid also in the case of first-order children, although for a shorter time in the case of only one child in the family in France (ibid).

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Nonetheless, policies and institutions in the two countries developed over time in very different directions. In France, the parental allowance can be combined with part-time employment and parents are offered significant financial support for non-parental care. Moreover, since 2015, French parental leave, as well as the allowance, includes non-transferable parts for both parents. Czech law states that only the parent providing full-time care is entitled to the parental allowance (since 2004, there are no restrictions on the allowance recipient working, but they cannot use childcare facilities for more than a very limited number of hours per month; since 2012 the limit placed on the number of hours childcare facilities can be used applies only to children under the age of two). In France, many measures have been introduced supporting alternative types of childcare, and nurseries have moved away from the health-oriented model. Most of the nurseries that used to exist in the Czech Republic have been closed over the past two and a half decades, but the health-oriented model was so entrenched in the country that it has blocked development of any alternative types of childcare (Hašková & Saxonberg 2016).

Currently, there are considerable differences between the available options, opinions and practices of the French and Czech populations as regards caring for children under the age of three (Hašková & Saxonberg 2016; Pélamourgues & Thibault 2010). In 2014, in France, 59% of mothers with a child under the age of three were in paid employment, while 22% of mothers of children under three were in the Czech Republic (OECD 2016). In France, 50% of children under the age of three were enrolled in formal care in 2013, while only 4% of children in this age group attended any type of formal care in the Czech Republic (ibid). Moreover, it is widely accepted among French mothers that children under the age of three attend an all-day childcare facility, while 78% of Czech mothers with a preschool child consider it best to stay at home full-time when a child is between the age of two and three. Czech mothers consider it best to

wait until a child is between three and five before going back to the workplace (Credoc 2003; Paloncyová et al. 2014).

What is the source of these differences? Below we examine the factors that have influenced childcare policies and institutions in both countries since the late 1940s. We focus on the 'formative moments' (Peters, Pierre, & King, 2005): the time periods when a significant change in policies and institutions occurred. Specifically, we are interested in the different ways in which care for young children has been framed by different actors, and in how these framings, in interaction with socio-political and economic contexts, influenced policy-making during the formative moments analysed here. We focus on the period between the late 1940s and 2012, which laid the ground for the two countries to follow different paths of development in childcare policies and institutions. We do not aim to present the latest changes to childcare policies in the two countries. By presenting a historical case, our article aims to contribute to the debate on the role of ideas and discourses in the process of policy change.

Institutions and discourses

In the last three decades, a new approach to studying institutions was developed that draws attention to the influence that cultural meanings, ideas and discourses have on the structuring of institutions, including social policy (Padamsee 2009; Schmidt 2010). This approach provides a dynamic approach to institutional change by introducing the role of ideas and/or discourse in institutional change. Steinmo observes that more recent work on institutional development shows that institutional change results from changes in ideas among actors: change becomes possible 'when powerful actors have the will and ability to change institutions in favour of new ideas' (2008:131). According to Kulawik (2009), institutions are constituted by discursive struggles and can be understood as sedimented discourses. Institutions should not be treated as neutral structures of incentives, but rather as the carriers of ideas, which make them the object

of mis/trust, that change over time as actors' ideas and discourse about them change (Rothstein 2005: 168–198 in Schmidt 2010: 9). 'How ideas are generated among policy actors and communicated to the public by political actors through discourse is the key to explaining institutional change (and continuity).' (Schmidt 2010: 15)

In our analysis we identify the formative moments that led to a window of opportunity being opened to assert a new policy programme. According to Donnely and Hogan (2012), a critical juncture (formative moment) that sets institutional change in motion consists of a crisis, an ideational change, and subsequently a radical policy change, and this means that, altogether, it may occur over a relatively long period of time. A 'crisis' can be anything from a war, a revolution, an economic crisis or some kind of demographic change (Donnelly & Hogan 2012). All four formative moments that we analyse started with such a 'crisis': the political upheavals and socio-demographic changes that occurred in France in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the economic crisis in the first half of the 1980s; the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the political crisis in 1968 (preceded by an economic crisis and demographic changes in the 1960s). In the aftermath of a 'crisis' the existing policy cannot be sustained (without it deteriorating). The 'crisis' may lead to a window of opportunity opening up – for example, an exchange in the ruling elites (Garrett & Lange 1995). Other authors show that a 'crisis' is not required for policy change to occur – it may be triggered just by uncertainty over a problem (Meijerink 2005). It is moreover argued that a 'crisis' may result in just minor adjustments to a particular policy if there is no accompanying ideational change, in which case the critical juncture does not occur (Donnelly & Hogan 2012: 344).

The ideational change (a change in the ideas underlying policies) determines whether the critical juncture will occur (Donnelly & Hogan 2012) and the direction that the policy change will take. In this article, we focus on this stage of the process of institutional change. How does

ideational change occur? Where do new ideas come from and how do they become the 'carriers' of new policies?

Expert discourses

Experts played an important role in formulating childcare policies in state-socialist countries. Experts' input was applied to those policy issues that were problematic but did not threaten the existing political order or leaders (Wolchik 1983: 115). In state-socialist Czechoslovakia, the State Population Commission (from 1971 the Governmental Population Commission) was the main channel through which experts exercised an influence on the political elites. The commission had the authority and the power to propose new legislation (Heitlinger 1987; Dudová 2012). In France, experts have frequently been sought out and invited to write reports and speak at hearings by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Senate or the Parliament (or other executive or legislative body), or to join a state body of experts (commissions, councils) (Restier-Melleray 1990). According to Kulawik, expert knowledge plays a special role in the national discourses of all modern states (2009: 268-269). Given that the form and content of the expert discourse differed in the two countries, the comparison allows us to trace the influence of experts on childcare policies and institutions.

When comparing the expert discourse in the two countries, we adhere to Schmidt´s definition of discourse and Foucault´s (1980) and Schneck´s (1987) understanding of knowledge and (scientific) 'truth'. Discourse encompasses not only the substantive content of ideas but also the interactive processes by which the ideas are conveyed' (Schmidt 2008: 305). Knowledge is considered to be a product of human communication (Schneck 1987: 18). To know is not to discover the truth, but to *make* the truth – and in every society and period there are different 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980: 131).

Methodology and methods

In our analysis of discourse, we use the framing analysis approach (Snow & Bedford 1988; Entman 1993; Donati 1992). Frames work as the guiding models for what is to be understood in the discourse. Framing is the action of selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a text in such a way as to promote a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or recommended solution (Entman 1993: 52).

We focus on the frames employed by experts and used by other political actors in the process of legitimating or arguing against certain policies and institutions. The frame that becomes dominant in the political and public debate is decisive for the prevailing definition of the problem and for creating policies and determining which institutions get support (Kulawik 2009). Although we focus on expert discourse we cannot ignore how it interacts with and is interdependent with other factors, such as the country's political and economic situation and the impact of generational change and social movements (Padamsee 2009: 414).

First, we followed the approach put forth by Donati (1992), which involves the following steps:

1. Topic selection and definition, which means choosing a social or political issue: The issue we research is childcare and the object that is framed in the discussions is 'proper care' for a young child.

2. Selection of texts, because texts represent relevant voices from the discourse: We analysed documents relating to childcare and focused on the period from the late 1940s to 2012. The documents included: 1) legal regulations pertaining to childcare; 2) published scholarship on childcare; 3) books and articles popularising expert knowledge pertaining to care for children under the age of three; 4) statistics on the public opinions and the use of different types of childcare; and 5) interviews with experts on the issue. In the case of France,

we included official reports prepared by (or for) different governments and parliamentary bodies. In the case of the Czech Republic, we analysed parliamentary debates, official government statements, and – for the period before 1989 – reports from the State (later Governmental) Population Commission.

As for the analysis of popular media, in the case of France we analysed the magazine *L´Ecole des Parents* (Parents' School), along with popular monographs on the subject of childcare. This journal was first published in the 1950s and has since remained very popular. For the Czech Republic, we looked at popular books on childcare and articles on this issue in the magazine *Vlasta* (the title is a female name). This magazine was first published in 1947 and became the second most-read periodical in Czechoslovakia throughout the 1950s–1980s. It regularly covered topics such as family, child psychology, education and lifestyle. We focused mainly on the periods around the major childcare policy changes that were introduced in the 1970s and from the second half of the 1980s till the early 1990s in France, and from the late 1940s till the early 1950s and in the 1970s in Czechoslovakia.

3. Identifying and describing the frames: The method of identifying the frames was inspired by the grounded theory methodology, as applied to the text analysis. With the assistance of the computer program Atlas.ti, the individual arguments used in the texts were identified, coded and then grouped into categories, through comparisons on multiple, intratextual and intertextual levels (e.g. comparisons of different codes and 'families of codes', comparisons of texts by different authors and from different types of sources, etc.) until several 'systems' of argumentation emerged. After having identified the frames, we specified the frame's main characteristics. We analysed who was using the frame and how the frame was presented and communicated.

4. Inspired by Snow and Bedford (1988), we added a fourth step to Donati's approach: we analysed the relationships between the frames in order to explain their success in influencing policies (see also Dudová 2010).

A short overview of childcare policies and institutions in France and the Czech Republic

The post-war development of childcare policies in France was shaped by a gender-conservative family policy tradition. Nonetheless, the post-war generation of women obtained much higher education than their mothers, entered the job market in the late 1960s and early 1970s and began to realise their reproductive plans (Saltiel & Sullerot 1974: 13-19). Consequently, there was an increase in the demand to expand formal care for young children (Cuvillier 1977) and family policy became less gender-conservative in design (namely, 'the single-income benefit' – 'allocation du salaire unique' was partially compensated for in 1972 by the 'childcare allowance' – 'allocation pour frais de garde' and in 1977 was withdrawn) (Laroque 1985). Like in Czechoslovakia, kindergartens at that time fell under and still fall under the authority of the Ministry of Education and are part of the education system; the institutions that provide care for children under three were and still are overseen by the Ministry of Health. In the post-war period the capacity of nurseries was small, they had a poor reputation among parents and professionals, and they served more as a form of assistance to parents in need (e.g. lone mothers). Given the high rate of child mortality in the post-war period, hygienic standards were a primary concern of nurseries (Sullerot 1981: 150).

From the 1960s the psycho-pedagogical model of care and education in nurseries had already begun to move to the fore. A regulation from 1975 raised the teaching qualifications required of nursery staff and abolished some of the strict hygiene regulations; the popularity of nurseries among French parents grew (Neyrand 1999). State support for nurseries increased with the objective of expanding their capacity and improving the qualifications of the staff (Laroque

1985: 334). The late 1960s and early 1970s can be considered a 'crisis' that put in motion ideational change, and subsequently a radical policy change, i.e. the first formative moment in the development of childcare institutions in France after World War II. The 'crisis' contributed to an important change in the discourse and subsequently in the design and support of formal childcare for children below the age of three. Official support already given to formal childcare for children below the age of three was importantly reaffirmed in the 1980s, when a left-wing government was formed. After the publication of the report *L'enfant dans la vie* (The Child in Life, Bouyala & Roussille 1982), commissioned by the government's State Secretary for the Family by a group of experts, the Caisses d'Allocations Familiales (CAF, Fund of Family Allocations), the state body that finances family policy, declared nurseries its priority (Math & Renaudat 1997: 6).

The monetary crisis in 1982-1983, weak economic growth and high unemployment that dominated the 1980s affected further development in childcare policy (Laroque 1985: 31-32). The second half of the 1980s, when the right won the elections, saw a drift away from support for nurseries and state support was transferred to alternative types of care with the aim of reducing costs. Financial help was directed at parents employing either a nanny or 'assistant maternel' (a state-subsidised nanny caring for children from more than one family), or at stay-at-home parents caring themselves for their children (Daune-Richard 1999: 42). Childcare policies were no longer aimed at achieving equality for men and women but at providing parents the 'freedom to choose' how their children are cared for (Steck 1994: 43-45; Martin 2010: 412; to compare the use of the 'freedom of choice' frame in Norway recently, see Eldén & Anving 2016). The pro-natalist discourse that gained a new impetus in the late 1970s and the 1980s, when the birth rate fell below replacement level, also supported the policy changes, in particular the introduction of APE, a policy encouraging maternal (parental) care in the home, in 1984 and its extensions in 1986 and 1994 (King 1998). The period around the mid-1980s can thus be

regarded as the second formative moment in the development of childcare institutions in France after World War II, because policies supporting alternative and informal types of care have been the priority since then.

In the 1990s several attempts were made to reform childcare policies and institutions in France. In 2004, based on the 'free choice' rhetoric, the various allowances for childcare existing at the time were replaced by one multicomponent allowance. This reform did not fundamentally change the overall rationale behind childcare policy (Martin 2010). Developments after 2007 suggest that the rhetoric of economic liberalism made significant headway at that time, bolstered by arguments referring to the global economic crisis, which gave little reason to expect significant changes to the existing path of childcare policy in France (ibid.). Although French parental leave changed in 2015 to motivate men to participate in leave, the 'free choice' rhetoric has remained dominant, especially with respect to childcare services for children under the age of three.

Like in France, post-war Czech society witnessed a drift away from the male breadwinner model. The communists' ideal woman was an employed mother, freed from being economically dependent on a man. The centrally planned economy suffered from a shortage of labour, and the post-war economic situation of households also led to an increase in employment of women. Nurseries were ranked as preventive health-care facilities and as such fell under the authority of the Ministry of Health in 1951 while kindergartens were incorporated into the education system and came under the authority of the Ministry of Education three years earlier (Hašková & Saxonberg 2016). This is the first formative moment in the post-war development of childcare institutions in Czechoslovakia because it is when the strict division of institutional care for children under and over the age of three was legislated. Before World War II several types of formal childcare existed in the country. They were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Care. The boundaries between the existing types of childcare were often blurred

(Saxonberg *et al.* 2012). In the first years after the communist coup a number of laws were quickly passed to bring the country into line with the Soviet model with no proper discussion preceding them. The new legislation on childcare institutions followed the Soviet model. The inclusion of nurseries under the Ministry of Health was also argued for on the grounds of the need to reduce infant mortality (Sinkulová 1950).

The rapid rise of women's employment was not met with an adequate increase in the capacity of childcare facilities; the low-wage income policy meant that there was little interest in working reduced hours, and employers were reluctant to offer part-time jobs. The increase in women's employment was accompanied by a decrease in fertility starting in the second half of the 1950s. In 1957 the State Population Commission was set up to address the problem of low fertility (among others). In the 1960s, the Commission proposed introducing 'extended maternity leave' and a homecare allowance. Both were to be gradually extended up to three years in order to reduce the demand on nurseries (Klíma 1969) because nurseries were criticised for being costly and even harmful to children (Bařinová 1965; Damborská 1957; Koch 1961). There was no longer a labour shortage in feminised sectors of the labour market during the economic recession in the 1960s (Hašková *et al.* 2009). Moreover, employed mothers were criticised for frequently having to stay home from work with their infants because of the high rate of illness among children attending nurseries (Kuncová 1963). The introduction and then broadening of legislation on 'extended maternity leave' and homecare allowance that followed the discoursive struggles of the 1960s constituted the second formative moment in the development of childcare policies in Czechoslovakia after World War II. These developments helped to firmly establish the ideal that children need full-time maternal care up to the age of three, thus altering the direction of childcare policies in the country ever since (Hašková & Saxonberg 2016). As population surveys show, full-time maternal childcare for children up to

age of three had already become internalised as a social norm in Czech society by the 1970s (Čákiová 1977; Kreipl *et al.* 1979).

Despite the revolutionary changes after 1989, Czech childcare policy remained generally constant (Hašková & Saxonberg 2016). The homecare allowance was extended to up to four years in the mid-1990s but parental leave remained only three years in length. Thus, three-year interruptions in mothers' employment trajectories (per each child) remained the dominant pattern (Hašková & Klenner 2010). Nurseries lost state financial support and became too expensive. Consequently, almost all of them quickly disappeared (Hašková *et al.* 2011). As it was already the norm that women were interrupting their careers for three-year periods to take care of their children, there was no public protest against cancelling state subsidies for nurseries. The legislation on childcare for children under the age of three continued to regulate the provision of such care as a form of health-care, so that even private child-minders were required to have an education in health care (Hašková & Saxonberg 2016). Thus, the historical legacy of childcare even obstructed the formation of alternative types of childcare. After 2002 the homecare allowance was made more flexible to conform to EU requirements and demands from new women's organisations. However, even if mothers want to return to paid employment earlier, they have few opportunities to do so, since formal care is mostly unavailable (ibid.).

The discourse and framing of childcare

In order to explain the differences in the childcare policies and institutions in the Czech Republic and France, it is crucial to understand the development of the discourse on childcare in these countries. We identified several framings that influenced the institutions and discovered an interdependence between several main discourses: the discourse of early-childhood experts in the fields of psychology, pedagogy and paediatrics; the discourse of the women's movement and women´s organisations; and the economic discourse of administrative officials in France

and economic experts in Czechoslovakia. Some of the frames within these discourses aligned and produced frame resonance (Snow & Benford 1988). Consequently, they were able to direct the resulting new shape of institutions. Those frames that did not find an alignment with other frames were suppressed.

There was one more important framing in both countries: The frame 'our nation is dying' began to be used in Czechoslovakia from the 1960s (Nash 2005) and in France from the mid-1970s (King 1996), when birth rates declined. However, we do not focus in detail on the pro-natalist frame here, as it per se has not influenced the direction of childcare policy changes in the two countries. This frame has been activated in conjunction with other frames in order to increase the salience of the problems and their policy solutions defined within the other frames. The pro-natalist frame co-determined whether the formative moment occurred, but it did not have a major impact on the direction that childcare policy changes took since the decrease in fertility could be addressed by different childcare policy options – an increase in the length of parental leave (like in Czechoslovakia) or an increase in investments into formal childcare (like in France).

All the frames operated within socio-political and economic contexts that were different in the two countries. The socio-political context did influence the structure and the rules of the discourse: who had the right to take part in the discussion, what means of communication could be used, and what arguments were excluded beforehand from the discussion. In Czechoslovakia, the communication media were limited in scope as well as in content (due to censorship and official propaganda) in the late 1940s and the 1950s. Nonetheless, in the politically more open atmosphere of the 1960s, new actors and ideas entered the stage. Most notably, experts in certain areas were given a great deal of attention, even in the popular media, and their recommendations were taken seriously by policy-makers (Wolchik 1983).

In both countries the 'success' of a specific framing was also influenced by its resonance within the lived world of potential participants and with 'the larger belief system or ideology' (Snow & Benford 1988: 205). This partly explains the success of the familialist expert discourse during the second formative moment in Czechoslovakia, which led to the gradual extension of paid leave for mothers up to three years: a population disgusted by the political situation after 1968 welcomed the opportunity to withdraw into the privacy of their families (Heitlinger 1996). The resonance of a particular framing within the lived world of people also helps to explain the success of the women's movement's discourse in the first formative moment in France: The post-war baby-boom generation of women, who were obtaining much higher education than their mothers, were unwilling to content themselves with the role of housewife (Saltiel & Sullerot 1974). These external factors co-determined the 'success' or 'failure' of a given frame in the discursive struggles over the organisation of childcare. In the following pages, we describe the framings that brought about the ideational change that triggered institutional change in France and in the Czech Republic. We show how the consensus was achieved through frame alignments leading to the activation of one 'master frame' that steered institutional change. We show the importance of the expert framings in the discursive struggles preceding the change of institutions and policies.

The early childhood expert frames

In France, the post-war expert discourse on childcare was dominated by psychoanalysis and the theories of hospitalism and maternal deprivation (Neyrand 1999). Nonetheless, since the 1960s a new psycho-pedagogical framing moved to the fore. A number of experts questioned the importance of the mother-child relationship. The popular childhood psychologist Dolto stressed the importance of the parent-child relationship but also highlighted how important socialisation with peers is for very young children, and she declared institutional care to be

harmless (Dolto 1977). The work of Badinter challenged the idea of the 'maternal instinct' (Badinter 1981). In the late 1960s, eleven experts were appointed by the director of the CNAF (state body financing family policy) to study the conditions of childcare in France and to formulate recommendations in this area. This led to the publication of a very influential book that challenged the belief that maternal care is 'the best and the most natural thing' (Soulé 1972: 26).

> 'Mothers often, when they are not helped, find in this duty more frustration and dissatisfaction than gratification, and thus they risk forming a pathological relationship with the child characterised by an over-investment in and the isolation of the dyad, or, conversely, by indifference.' (Soulé 1972: 25)

During the 1970s, several empirical studies were conducted in France that sought to determine the effects of different forms of childcare on the wellbeing of children (Mermillod & Rossignol 1974). The results, widely quoted and used as 'scientific arguments' in policy reports and hearings, concluded that the effect of the form of childcare depended on the socio-economic status of the parents, not on the form of childcare per se.

> 'The harmonious physical and affective development of children, the absence of function troubles can be found in the same proportions in children cared for by their mother as well as those spending their days in a stable childcare institution.' (Davidson 1980 in Sullerot 1981: 155).

Moreover, nurseries started to be seen by some experts as playing an important role in equalising the opportunities of children (Sullerot 1981).

All these experts appeared in the media and were quoted in legal documents. In their studies as well as in government reports a new framing of care for children under three was employed. The frame 'even babies need education' underscored the positive socialising role of collective childcare institutions and the interdependence of the interests of the child and the mother. It

dominated the writings and speeches of psychologists and education experts and was widely spread by the media. The view came to be accepted that childcare can – and even should – be provided by people other than the parents, not as a substitute for maternal (paternal) care, but in an educational relationship with the child (Neyrand 1999).

> 'Systematic studies of the behaviour of children aged 12-24 months ... revealed that … the children engage in joint activities. ... Not only do they not bother each other, but they share their ideas with the others taking part in joint activities: they thus use the presence of others to enrich their own course of action.' (Rayna & Stambak 1985: 28)
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> 'The nursery… is beneficial for the child when it takes into account the basic needs of the child and organises a triangular relationship between the parents, the child and the staff.' (Norvez 1990: 327).

This expert knowledge had an impact on legislation in France. In the 1970s nurseries began stressing needs other than just the health of children, practices aimed at the development and socialisation of children were introduced, and nurses (in childcare institutions) were thereafter called 'educators'. This frame was successfully communicated to the public (Math & Renaudat 1997).

In Czechoslovakia, post-war public opinion was dominated by conservative views on non-parental care for children under the age of three, similar to the views found in France at that time (Srb & Kučera 1959). However, the change in the country's political direction marked the start of an effort to alter this view. Nurseries were framed as 'necessary to build socialist society and to free women for new tasks' (ibid). Like in France, only the health needs of children were emphasised in nurseries at that time (Langmeier & Matějček 1974).

In the 1960s, the discourse underwent a fundamental change. Like in France, psychologists began to play a bigger role in the discourse, but the content of their statements was different. Psychologists and paediatricians working in children's homes had long observed a higher

incidence of disturbances in the psychological development of institutionalised children (e.g. Koch 1963). They identified the cause as the children's emotional deprivation, which was explained as resulting from the child's long separation from his/her mother and the fact that the separation happened at a young age (Langmeier & Matějček 1974). Although it might seem that studies on emotionally deprived and abandoned children have nothing in common with facilities caring for the children of employed parents, this was not the case in Czech society. During the late 1940s and the 1950s, the long operating hours of production enterprises necessitated an increase in the number of nurseries with week-long and non-stop service, and such institutions were not unlike permanent childcare institutions, as the children spent more time there than in the family environment (ibid). But under the influence of writings by clinical psychologists and paediatricians, the number of nurseries providing week-long or non-stop service began to decrease by the 1960s in favour of daytime nurseries.

> 'If we examine collective facilities in terms of the time children spend in them, we must in principal differentiate between day institutions and week institutions. … In both cases, the mechanism leading to deprivation may indeed be activated, but the risk of this happening and the ratio of these factors is very different. … While we describe it as "dangerous" to leave children under the age of three in a permanent care institution, we would refer to their situation in day nurseries as "difficult" at most.' (Langmeier & Matějček 1974: 125)

Psychologists and paediatricians did not agree either with children spending many hours in daytime nurseries – where they were on average 9 hours a day, 6 days a week (Dunovský & Suchá 1967). The experts thus strove to have the operating hours of nurseries reduced and maternity leave extended so that separation from the primary carer would be shorter and occur later (ibid).

As Langmeier and Matějček noted, separation and deprivation literally began to mean the same thing in Czech discourse on childcare as the conclusions from expert observations in homes for abandoned infants and week-long nurseries were extended also to day-care institutions (Langmeier & Matějček 1974). The discourse of psychological experts was successfully communicated to the public through the publication of instructional literature for parents.

Moreover, paediatricians in Czechoslovakia criticised the higher illness rate of children attending nurseries.

> 'One of the main problems children face in nurseries is a higher illness rate than children cared for at home.' (Bařinová 1965: 11)

Paediatricians associated the illness rate with the lack of time children spend in the family and the fact that children had to get up early and leave the nurseries late in order to accommodate their mothers' long hours in paid employment.

> 'The average length of time a child spends in a nursery is almost 9 hours a day. With the twelve hours of sleep they need and an average of 40 (2x20) minutes commuting, precious little time is left for the family.' (Dunovský & Suchá 1967: 20)

Nurseries and the long hours spent in them were seen as harmful to younger children in particular.

> 'The younger the children are in a nursery, the more often they get sick.' (Dunovský 1971: 154)

The frame 'young children should be at home with their mother' put forth by psychologists and paediatricians was then used by the politicians to extend maternity leave to one year in 1964 and – in the late 1960s – to set up a plan to extend paid maternity leave to up to three years (Klíma 1969). The plan to extend leave to up to three years was then put into practice from the start of the 1970s (Hašková *et al.* 2011).

What is interesting is the absence of any pedagogical voices in the discourse on early childhood in Czechoslovakia. The paediatricians and children's nurses who were responsible for the care provided at nurseries were only expected to have health education. The experts presumed that collective play skills only began to develop in children at the age of three, so education was regarded as only effective for children from that age while for younger children the most important thing was considered to be developing a strong bond with the primary carer (Langmeier & Matějček 1974; Langmeier 1983).

> 'Toddlers, i.e. children of nursery age, do not create play groups … They spontaneously prefer "parallel play" (each child plays alone). For children of this age – for their needs and their identity-formation process – being part of their small, primary social group, i.e. the family, is still the most important thing. … in a larger group of children, their individual needs cannot be immediately met. … The situation of children in a kindergarten is very different. … At kindergarten age, children are able to initiate collective play on their own … Children of kindergarten age already need contact with other children. A group of children in a kindergarten fulfils this need and extends the children's opportunities for social communication and social learning.' (Matějček & Břicháček 1989: 71).

Based on studies that focused mainly on children from children's homes and week-long nurseries, the preferred view was that children should remain at home with the mother until the age of three, at which time, according to Czech developmental psychologists, a child first starts to profit from contact with peers. Even today, the experts quoted above are the most frequently cited experts on this issue in the Czech Republic (Saxonberg *et al.* 2012). This is apparent not only from the statements of psychologists who comment publicly on the issue today, but also from the statements of post-1989 political representatives and conservative civic organisations, who moreover discursively construe nurseries as a 'communist collectivist invention depriving

parents of their influence on their children' (ibid). The above shows how very different the ideas about the psychological effects of collective care for children developed by experts in France and the Czech Republic actually were. In France, the opinion that ultimately came to be regarded as substantiated by science was that non-parental care does not psychologically harm children; on the contrary, it is cognitively enriching and helps to reduce social inequalities. There were of course multiple and contradictory discourses within expert fields, but the frame stressing the desirability of early socialisation and education became the dominant one, even in reports submitted to different government authorities. Conversely, in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, the prevailing view, which established itself as scientific opinion, was that children in collective institutions suffer emotional deprivation and poor development, and that children should until the age of three remain at home with their mother.

These two different frames played a key role in the debates and had a hand in shaping care institutions for small children in both countries. In Czechoslovakia, psychologists and paediatricians together with economic experts active in the State Population Commission formulated a complex programme of 'extended maternity leave' and homecare allowance in the 1960s, which was then gradually introduced. In France, at the initiative of experts who wrote reports for government bodies, regulations pertaining to nurseries were amended in 1975 and formal collective care has since then received stronger financial support.

The question remains why in the Czech Republic the issue was monopolised by conservatively oriented (clinical) psychologists and paediatricians, while in France the discursive space was largely dominated by psychologists and education experts who were more open to feminist ideas. The situation in former Czechoslovakia resulted from the fact that Stalin's death was followed in the 1960s by a period of political reform. Experts were not only allowed to begin their research work again (which in many cases they were prevented from pursing in the late 1940s and the 1950s), they were even asked to join in the public and political

discussion (Wolchik 1983). Many of them were conservative, and in their fieldwork they saw things they ascribed to the negative impact of communist ideas (Saxonberg *et al.* 2012). Their discourse then formed as a reaction to and in contrast to the communist ideology that had dominated to that time (Padamsee 2009: 430). These experts could be described as what Mahoney and Thelen (2010) call 'subversives', who 'bide their time, waiting for the moment when they can actively move toward a stance of opposition'.

Moreover, these experts themselves and their opinions found fertile ground among the public in the 1960s. The experts' call for more time for mothers to care for their children resonated well with the deeply rooted gender-conservative ideology that survived among the population and even grew stronger under the state-socialist regime from the 1960s on (Havelková 2015). In the 1960s, economists claimed mothers were ineffective workers, psychologists censured women for causing 'child deprivation' by leaving their children in collective care, and demographers sounded the alarm about a 'population crisis' (ibid.). The previous period, i.e. the late 1940s and the 1950s, was looked down upon as being too coercive in asserting the principle of equality of the sexes. Radvanová, a female legal scholar, specialising in the position of women, criticised the previous 'equalisation' period of the late 1940s and the 1950s as being too directive about asserting the principle of equality when it 'coerced young mothers into a hasty return to their job' (Radvanová 1969: 509 in Havelková 2014). While the late 1940s and the 1950s saw the state push for women's participation in paid employment, the late 1960s and especially the 1970s saw the introduction of many gender-specific pro-maternity provisions in the area of labour law and social policy which targeted women and cemented their role as mothers and homemakers (Havelková 2015).

In Czechoslovakia (and later in the Czech Republic), the political situation played a decisive role in determining which experts were allowed to speak, when they could do so, and on what topics. Moreover, the gender-conservatism gave credence to framings that were in line with

such ideology. While it was impossible for a feminist movement to exist in Czechoslovakia under the state-socialist regime and support for separate gender roles even began to grow under the regime in the 1960s, in France the women's movement has had some influence on all stakeholders (involved in childcare issues) since the 1960s. In the French case, the same persons were often experts and activists at the same time. This is illustrated in the figure of Evelyne Sullerot, a professor who was active in several feminist and socialist groups and associations, but who also taught at universities and served as an expert in the European Economic Community and, on the national level, on the Conseil économique, social et environnemental (Economic, Social and Environmental Council of the Government).

What is described above shows that the expert framings were not separate from the wider context of society. Expert, political and interest group framings and gender ideologies often bridged and aligned themselves with each other.

The 'equality of men and women' frame

In both countries, childcare mainly entered the political agenda in connection with the mass entry of women into the labour market. The second wave of the feminist movement and its framing played a key role in France in promoting what type of care for children under the age of three should be supported by the state. Since the 1970s the issue of equality of men and women has become the dominant framing in the debates on women's paid employment and childcare. In 1974 the first important institution defending the interests of women was the state Secretariat for Women's Issues (Sécretariat à la condition féminine), which was later elevated to the level of an independent ministry (Laroque 1985). Although it focused on equality in the labour market (Revillard 2007), its representatives also influenced childcare policy.

Care for children under the age of three was constructed in the 1970s as an issue that needed to be solved in order to promote equality of men and women in the public sphere. It has been

repeatedly pointed out in expert and popular publications that the interests of the child and the interests of his/her mother are not in conflict, as the interests of the child can only be met by a psychologically balanced and content mother (Singly 2000). The pedagogical-psychological and feminist framings aligned with each other in France and led to stronger support for formal childcare in the second half of the 1970s. The pro-natalist discourse at that moment also supported this policy solution: '...the Socialists, when in power, fashioned pronatalist policies to accommodate certain feminist goals' (King 1998: 48).

Conversely, in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, the feminist framing did not evolve because no feminist movement existed in the state-socialist period and the influence of feminist organisations after 1989 remained weak (Heitlinger 1996; Hašková 2005). The dominant psychological-paediatric framing of care for children under the age of three reinforced the idea that the interests of children and the economic activity of women are in conflict (Langmeier & Matějček 1974; Langmeier 1983; Dunovský 1989).

In Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s and the 1950s nurseries were promoted by communist women's committees in an effort to emancipate women through employment. In the 1960s, when the only official women's organisation, the Czech Women's Union (Český svaz žen, ČSŽ), was established at the suggestion of the Communist Party, the Union's representatives mainly took into account the heavy burden that was being placed on mothers in full-time employment and supported the introduction of three-year paid maternity leave (Čákiová 2005). Their support for lengthy childcare leave for mothers resonated well with the belief in separate gender roles in society, which has much wider support among post-communist European populations than elsewhere in Europe even today (Hašková & Saxonberg 2016). Given the absence of a feminist movement during the state-socialist period, the still weak influence of post-1989 feminist organisations, and the alignment of the framing of nurseries as a 'communist invention' with the framing that 'young children should be at home with their mother', feminists

have as yet been unable to challenge the dominant psychological-paediatric framing, which is in line with gender-conservative ideology (Saxonberg *et al.* 2012).

The 'choice' frame

In the mid-1980s in France, the 'choice' frame partly replaced the 'equality of men and women' frame (Martin 2010). 'Choice' arguments were initially put forward by some of the pedagogical-psychological experts. According to Soulé (1972), different children have different needs, and the mental wellbeing of a child depends also on the parents' satisfaction with their choice of care. Therefore, it was necessary for everyone to have a range of childcare options. Moreover, some feminists argued for the diversification of social policies and childcare institutions to fit all possible types of families (Sullerot 1981).

However, the 'choice' frame was ultimately translated into an economic argument for less state intervention in an era dominated by neoliberalism, which in turn meant less state support for institutions and abandoning the focus on the quality of care provided (Daune-Richard 1999: 42). This economic framing of childcare characterised the second formative moment in the development of childcare institutions in France. An economic crisis gripped France in 1982. The 'free choice' frame was employed to promote support for alternative forms of care, i.e. maternity assistants, nannies, micro-nurseries, parents' nurseries, and benefits for mothers caring for their children at home. Backed by nationalist-driven, family-conservative, pro-natalist arguments (King 1998), it ultimately facilitated a shift away from support for collective institutions towards other forms of care, those regarded as cheaper and at the same time instrumental in reducing unemployment (Math & Renaudat 1997; Fagnani & Rassat 1997: 4; Martin 2010).

The economic framing also played an important role in Czech society. Like in France, the emergence of this frame helped give rise to a formative moment in the development of childcare

institutions. During the 1960s the Czech economy was facing serious problems and suffering from low work productivity. In the 1960s, when there was no longer a shortage of labour in the feminised sectors of the economy, the Czechoslovak National Assembly decided to extend maternity leave so that mothers could choose to stay at home longer (Hašková *et al.* 2011). It was assumed that, despite the expected decline in women's employment this measure would bring, it would benefit Czechoslovakia both demographically and economically because mothers would be less burdened with work and thus would opt to have more children, the children would be healthier, the demand for costly nurseries would be lower, and mothers would less often be suddenly absent from the workplace because of a sick child (ibid.). The psychological-paediatric frame 'young children should be at home with their mother' fit the economic frame in the sense that both provided discursive support for the introduction of 'extended maternity leave.'

The 1960s was a period of severe economic troubles and demographic decline, which nurtured the discursive struggles over childcare. The *Nová soustava řízení* (New System of Management – a newly introduced programme for the economy and administration) introduced a more liberal programme into the economy and society, and this supplied a narrative of choice (Havelková 2014). The 'choice' narrative was then used in support of longer maternity leave and against the 'equalisation' period of the late 1940s and the 1950s (ibid.). The political crisis in 1968 was the decisive moment that led to the introduction of a pro-population plan that would provide three-year paid maternity leave. This plan created in the 1960s was launched in the early 1970s and continued through the 1980s, during the period of 'normalisation', when the political elites introduced policies that led people to focus on their private lives rather than the public sphere. The introduction of three years of paid maternity leave had a fundamental influence on the direction of national childcare policy even after 1989 (ibid.).

In the 1990s the Czech government spoke about the 'free choice of mothers not to work in paid employment', a choice supposedly not available to them under the state-socialist regime (Saxonberg *et al.* 2012). Like in the period of 'normalisation', the post-1989 governments used the 'free choice' frame to further extend the allowance paid to a parent caring full time for a child. They also abolished the subsidies for nurseries in the hope of cutting public expenditures and reducing unemployment (ibid.).

The 'free choice' frame even entered the post-1989 debate on fertility decline in Czech society. Although the country experienced its lowest total fertility rate ever in the 1990s – at 1.2 children per woman – the pro-natalist framing of childcare has not been re-activated. The post-1989 drop in fertility was framed as the 'free choice' of people to postpone childbearing, in order to have time to build a career and pursue leisure activities, things their parents were not allowed to do (Rabušic 2001).

In the last decade, the rhetoric of free choice has been used as an argument to oppose any kind of investment into nurseries, which are necessarily used by some parents only (Saxonberg *et al.* 2012). The framing used by psychologists and paediatricians claiming that formal care is harmful to children under three has become aligned with the economic frame, and this has translated into more nurseries being closed in 2012 (ibid).

Thus, in both countries, the economic framing of childcare, which highlights the costs of day care, emerged at a time of economic crisis. The crisis drew certain actors (economists, right-wing politicians) into the discussion and their perspectives in turn strengthened the economic framing of childcare. The economic frame became aligned with the frames of early childhood experts: In France, it was the 'diversity of institutions for children with diverse needs' frame put forward by pedagogical-psychological experts. In Czech society, it was the 'children under the age of three should stay with their mother' frame put forward by psychologists and paediatricians. The alignment of the economic frame and the early-childhood experts' frames

led to the prevalence of a specific definition of the situation and possible solutions. In both countries this new framing accompanied a change in the direction of the development of institutions. While in France there was a shift towards diversifying the forms of childcare supported, in Czechoslovakia extended paid maternity leave was introduced, and gradually it became the norm for women to interrupt their careers for several years after having a child. Recently, Czech feminists have been quoting the European Commission to define preschool education and care as a condition for gender equality and social cohesion and arguing for the need for education even for infants and toddlers. The related frames have to compete with the older powerful alignment between the 'free choice of mothers not to work in paid employment' frame and the frame stating that 'young children should be at home with their mother'. This powerful alignment has blocked any further formative moment from occurring in childcare policies in the Czech Republic so far.

Conclusion

We applied framing analysis to understand the formation of ideas and the discursive struggles preceding the policy changes that explain the differences in current childcare policies and institutions in the Czech Republic and France.

The analysis showed that expert knowledge and how it has been presented in public discourse has had a fundamental impact on the formation of childcare policies and institutions in the two countries. In France, the dominating 'regime of truth' differs from that in the Czech Republic. The types of expertise that entered into the discourse have been crucial for the framing of childcare. While in France emphasis has been placed on empirical knowledge, in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic clinical experience and the observation in permanent institutions were the main sources of knowledge. While in France education experts joined the

discussion alongside psychologists, in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic the accent was placed mainly on health and hygiene in nurseries.

Expert discourse was instrumental in determining what kind of care was regarded as 'good' care; experts participated in designing policies and their ideas were used by political actors. However, expert discourse is not powerful enough to determine the shape of institutions on its own. Other factors entered into play, in particular the economic situation and the economic framing connected to it. The economic framing stressed high costs of childcare institutions in the times of economic crises and it was used to support institutional changes supposedly providing a cheaper solution to the provision of care.

An important role was also played by political actors and the political situation in general. Moreover, women's movements and organisations introducing their own framings played a role. In France the 'equality of men and women' frame aligned with the 'babies need socialisation' frame of early childhood experts, and then the 'diversity of institutions for children with diverse needs' frame. It also resonated well with the opinions and experiences of the population. In Czechoslovakia, the promotion of the nurseries in the late 1940s and the 1950s was perceived by the majority of the population as coming from the Soviets. When the 'experts from science' came with an opposing frame that 'young children should be at home with their mother' in the 1960s, it was accepted not only by economists and politicians. It resonated well with overburdened mothers too. The belief in separate gender roles and the underlying gender-conservative ideology gave credence to such framing. We showed how frame alignments and the framings' resonance with 'the larger belief system' help to explain policy change. Emergent and residual frames that have not (yet) found a powerful alignment with some other frame have not led to any ideational and subsequent policy change. This is the case of the education and equality frames used by Czech feminists recently but unable to compete with the older powerful alignment between the post-1989 frame on 'free choice of

mothers not to work in paid employment' and the frame stating that 'young children should be at home with their mother,' promoted by Czech psychologists.

The demographic situation and especially the pro-natalist framing connected with it also contributed to shaping childcare policies and institutions in both of the studied countries. The pro-natalist frame was activated in conjunction with other frames whereby it increased the salience of the problems and their policy solutions defined within the other frames. Interestingly, the pro-natalist frame was not re-activated in the Czech Republic during the 1990s, when the country experienced the lowest total fertility rate ever. This shows that how a situation is framed may be more important for steering policies and institutions than the objective situation alone.

So far little attention has been given to exploring the ways in which the discursive institutionalist approach can help to explain differences in the development of childcare policies among countries. Taking the Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia and France as examples, we argue that framing analysis serves as a useful approach to understanding the development of (childcare) policies and institutions. It makes it possible to make international comparative analyses and study institutional change by examining discursive struggles that preceded major policy changes.

Expert knowledge plays an important role in the complex societies we live in. Analysing the expert framings proved to be crucial for understanding the establishment of the two different 'regimes of truth' on childcare in the Czech Republic and France. The expert framings and their success in influencing institutional changes are themselves shaped by the socio-political situation and its associated framings, deeply rooted gender ideologies and interest groups. Identifying the relationships between the different frames helps to explain their success in influencing institutional change. Therefore, we suggest that identifying how frames align and resonate with 'the larger belief system' is an important analytical step that helps to explain the

direction of institutional change and the differences in childcare institutions and policies among countries.

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