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# **How can we orientate the reform of childhood policies? Challenges, dilemmas and proposals**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the WELLCHI NETWORK is to improve our knowledge of the impact of changing family forms, the working conditions of parents, social policy and legislative measures on the well-being of children and their families. One of the main themes underlying the project is that equal opportunity for all children has become more necessary as a result of the rise in the pluralism of family forms. The project focuses on the analysis of the potential consequences of family diversification for the welfare of children and their parents. Research has concentrated on the extent to which various processes of family transformation, such as the decline of the male breadwinner model and the emergence of new household forms, may have been associated with adverse outcomes for children.

The WELLCHI network has attempted to bring together the two main theoretical paradigms that are currently dominating the sociology of childhood: the social investment approach, and what can be termed the 'new studies of childhood' or the 'child as a fully-fledged citizen'. Our network has successfully hosted contributions from these two approaches, and this has indeed provided considerable opportunities for cross-fertilisation. In my view, in today's Europe, both paradigms are still useful and necessary. Children have become an investment for the future as well as being intrinsically valued in and for themselves. Both perspectives convey a notion of children as a public good, albeit with quite a different meaning; the former in a more instrumental sense and the latter in a more expressive one.

**Keywords:** family change, divorce, child poverty, intergenerational transmission of inequalities, work life balance, childcare, child citizenship, child participation, research findings, policy implications, policy recommendations.

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# *How can we orientate the reform of childhood policies? Challenges, dilemmas and proposals<sup>1</sup>*

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of the WELLCHI NETWORK is to improve our knowledge of the impact of changing family forms, the working conditions of parents, social policy and legislative measures on the well-being of children and their families. One of the main themes underlying the project is that equal opportunity for all children has become more necessary as a result of the rise in the pluralism of family forms. The project focuses on the analysis of the potential consequences of family diversification for the welfare of children and their parents (Acock and Demo, 1994). Research has concentrated on the extent to which various processes of family transformation, such as the decline of the male breadwinner model and the emergence of new household forms, may have been associated with adverse outcomes for children. Although a special emphasis has been placed on partnership dissolution and single parenthood, differences in outcomes for children in single-earner vs. dual earner families, as well as in differing family forms related to ethnic heterogeneity, have also been considered. As factors impinging on the well-being of children, the interplay between the nature of welfare state regimes, the regulation of the labour markets and provisions in the field of family law were specially highlighted. Lack of opportunity for children has been examined using child poverty and material deprivation indicators, as well as other adverse cognitive outcomes such as low school achievement and early school leaving.

One of the main assets of the WELLCHI network is that it endeavours to bring together different approaches to the study of the factors affecting the well-being of children. In the first place, it has suggested different ways of dealing with the problems

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concerning the ‘children of divorce’: through family law or social policy. Academics and practitioners in both fields often find themselves addressing the same fundamental issues; for example, the problem of child poverty, or the role of fathers in caring as well as providing for children. In many countries researchers in these two fields have different research cultures, their discourses remain very separate, and it is a challenge to foster dialogue and exchange of views across their respective fields as they try to analyse the effects of different legal and welfare provisions on children. In fact, the international WELLCHI conference held in Oxford in January 2005 was the first to bring together issues concerning the welfare of children in family law and family policy (Lewis and Maclean, Oxford, 2005).

## **2. Theoretical underpinnings**

Similarly, the WELLCHI network has attempted to bring together the two main theoretical paradigms that are currently dominating the sociology of childhood: the social investment approach, and what can be termed the ‘new studies of childhood’ or the ‘child as a fully-fledged citizen’. Our network has successfully hosted contributions from these two approaches, and this has indeed provided considerable opportunities for cross-fertilisation.

The approach based on a child-centred social investment strategy stems from the pressing need for welfare state reconstruction. According to this view, the guideline for welfare restructuring should be investment in human capital rather than the direct provision of economic maintenance. The traditional welfare state should be replaced by a *social investment state*, operating in the context of a positive welfare society, insofar as positive welfare is functional for wealth creation (Giddens, 1998; Lister, 2006). In the new economy, life chances depend increasingly on the cultural, social and cognitive capital that citizens can accumulate. The origins of people’s life chances lie in the family conditions of their childhood, and the crucial issue lies in the interplay between the investments that parents and society make in children’s development (Esping-Andersen, 2002). In an economy emphasising human capital as the basis of sustained growth, rich parents have an increased opportunity to invest in their children, and the

effectiveness of these investments increases. This places more challenges in the way of equality of opportunity (Corak, 2004).

On the other hand, one of the basic assumptions of the 'new studies of childhood' is that childhood is not to be merely treated as a universal, biologically-given phenomenon, but rather that it must necessarily be placed in its social and cultural context. Childhood is to be examined as a social construction, and children studied not as passive objects of socialisation but as social actors in their own right (Prout, 2005). This approach is therefore more reflexive and child-focused, and tries to look at how the notion of childhood has been differentially constructed by welfare states as a way of questioning the status of today's children (Smart, 2004).

The child is a person, a citizen, and an individual in his or her own right, of equal value to that of any other individual. The difference is that children may not be able to express themselves or represent their own interests at a time when they are vulnerable to the action or inactions of others, or to the effects of adverse social or physical environments (Rigby and Köhler, 2002). In this conception, children are then treated not merely as objects but rather as subjects of rights, having their own special needs and interests that we can discover from social research.

Children's citizenship has remained largely invisible until very recently, and scholars have just begun to examine how it relates to existing views of citizenship in terms of rights, responsibilities, identity and participation. However, children's dependence upon adults, especially the ways in which parents must act as proxies for their children in relations with the state, calls into question for some authors the extent to which the latter have direct, independent relationships to the state (Leiter *et al.*, 2006; Cockburn, 1998).

In policy-oriented research, not only the need for children's social protection is emphasised but also their capacity for agency and participation. Over the past decade there has been a growing policy and academic interest in the participation of children and young people across a broad range of aspects of life and citizenship. One of the main key policy drivers for children's participation is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, whose Article 12 states that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (Mantle *et al.*, 2006). Within the sociology of childhood there has been an increasing focus on children as participants and subjects,

breaking with earlier views of children as being dependent and incomplete. The notion of the vulnerable and dependent child has been replaced to a great extent by the view of a competent and participating child. However, it is important to go beyond the dichotomous construction of children as either competent and autonomous, or vulnerable and dependent, and to be able to preserve a delicate and fragile balance between both the children's right to participate and their legitimate need for protection (Haugen, 2005; Bühler-Niederberger, 2007; Komulainen, 2007).

Key elements in this perspective would be the acceptance of the following four assumptions: (1) The general subordination of children as a social group in late modern society; (2) The importance of a critical understanding of adults' representations of children; (3) Individual children's active agency in influencing the world they live in; (4) Children's perceptions and use of social space (Hill *et al.*, 2004; Mantle *et al.*, 2006).

Finally, this approach advocates policy responses that are actually child-centred and driven by concerns about the well-being of children *per se*, as opposed to alternative views that can be described either as instrumental, i.e. focused on the obtainment of other goals such as encouraging fertility and facilitating women's employment, or as adult-centred, i.e. focused on the views and interests of adult people rather than those of children (Corak, 2004; Lewis, 2006).

The tensions between different paradigms in the sociology of childhood are echoed in differing views of the multifaceted and elusive notion of individual well-being. There are a number of concepts of well-being that may lend themselves to interpersonal comparisons. According to one view, they may be divided into subjective mental states (hedonic satisfaction), degree of objective satisfaction of subjective desires, and objective states. According to another view, they may be differentiated by means of the principles by which states of pleasure or desire-satisfaction are admitted or discarded as components of well-being (Elster and Roemer, 1991).

The concept of well-being has been mostly developed by economists and psychologists. Objective views of well-being are widely employed by economists. Economic literature argues that individuals derive well-being from the satisfaction of their wants according to their own preferences. Real income and other monetary measures are the most common proxies for the individuals' well-being. Although measures of GDP per capita and economic growth remain critical for any assessment of well-being, they need to be complemented with measures of other dimensions of well-

being such as leisure time, the sharing of income within households, distributional concerns, and environmental quality (Boarini, Johansson and Mira d'Ercole, 2006). Additionally, considering that levels of GDP per capita across OECD countries are only weakly related to survey data on happiness and life-satisfaction, some social analysts have come to express doubts about the validity of monetary measures as indicators of well-being.

Indeed, welfare is not in essence an economic concept, but a psychic one, concerning as it does well-being (Giddens, 1998). Subjective well-being is a concept that has mainly been used by psychologists (Kahneman, Diener and Schwartz eds., 1999; Diener, 2000; Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002); Van Praag, Frijters and Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2002), but it is also gaining acceptance among sociologists, anthropologists and economists. Finally, a number of researchers have tried to identify links between socio-economic conditions and subjective well-being (Fahey and Smyth, 2004), or they have advocated multi-dimensional, composite measures of well-being, including the subjective dimension (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2007).

When we come to discuss children's well-being, a new complication arises. Young children may not be able to express their condition of well-being verbally, and to get this information we have to rely on informants such as their parents, carers or teachers. In the second place, survey data on the well-being of children are seldom produced using the child as a unit of observation, as the purpose of many statistical sources is to get information about adult conditions, practices and representations. However, one must not forget that in the tradition of qualitative analysis very valuable research on children's well-being is being conducted by means of observant participation and ethnographic techniques, and that the results of these studies have provided very helpful insights into the ways in which children view their lives, voice their concerns and participate in family dynamics (Smart and Neale, 1999; Smart, Neale and Wade, 2001; Smart, 2002; Neale, 2004; Highet, 2004).

In order to integrate and profit from this variety of approaches, in this report an eclectic notion of well-being has been adopted. On the one hand, self-perceived states of life-satisfaction reported by children themselves are taken into consideration. On the other, well-being is defined as the full potential for self-realisation unimpaired by lack of opportunity and diminished outcomes as a result of certain deficits in the access to various forms of capital, including material, human, cultural, social, personal or

emotional capital. In particular, levels of child poverty and inequality concerning school achievement are examined.

This takes us to the analysis of social risks affecting children that can negatively influence their well-being. In recent decades factors impinging on the well-being of children have become more complex, so that nowadays they are not only affected by the old but still persisting class inequalities but are also challenged by new social risks (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Jenson, 2006). The analysis of risk perception, management and prevention is a fast-growing interdisciplinary research area (Zinn and Taylor-Gooby, 2006).

The new risks tend to affect people at younger stages of their lives than the old social risks did. They involve both labour market and family life, and thus extend demand for state intervention into areas of life that had been formerly seen as private. New social risks for those in intimate relationships result from interrelated changes in the labour market and in family formation (Lewis and Sarre, 2006). They are associated with access to employment and opportunities in work, and with managing the conflicting pressures of family life, social care, paid work and career. Fresh social needs and demands linked to new social risks include issues such as reconciling work and family life, lone parenthood, long-term unemployment, the working poor and insufficient social security coverage. These new risks tend to be concentrated among women, the young and the low skilled. Successfully managing new risks is increasingly important, particularly for the more vulnerable groups (Taylor-Gooby, 2004, Bonoli, 2005). Children make up one of the social groups that are most affected by these risks, insofar as they have a diminished mobilising capacity and greater difficulties in representing their interests.

More flexible labour markets, greater freedom to divorce, cohabit and re-partner, and a greater diversity of life-styles erode the certainty with which people can map out their futures (Taylor Gooby and Zinn eds., 2006). Risk society corresponds to a stage of radicalised (second phase) modernity, where individualisation, globalisation and risk undermine the first phase of industrial nation-state modernity and its foundations. Modernity becomes reflexive, that is to say, it becomes concerned with its unintended consequences and risks, and their implications for its foundations (Beck, 2000; Jans, 2004).

All Western societies are still 'modern societies'. There is no clear break with the basic principles of modernity, but rather a transformation of essential institutions such



as the nation-state and the nuclear family. We are therefore witnessing a second modernity. Globalisation, individualisation, the gender revolution, underemployment and global risks have come to undermine 'early modernity', i.e. a modernity based on nation-state societies, where social relations were essentially understood in a territorial sense. All these interlinked processes are simply various unforeseen consequences of reflexive modernisation, i.e. a radicalised modernisation which transforms the institutions of simple industrial modernity in a way that is often neither desired nor anticipated (Beck and Lau, 2005).

The theory of individualisation provides a paradigm that might be very useful in order to understand changes happening to children and their families. Individualisation can be described as a process by which individuals become viable reproductive units in social life, thereby taking the long-established place of families in that important function. The individual is indeed removed from traditional commitments and support networks, but exchanges them for the constraints and controls of the labour market and other secondary agencies and institutions (Beck, 1992).

In recent publications individualisation has often been used with the meaning of institutionalised individualism, in the sense that most of the rights and entitlements of the welfare state are designed for individuals rather than for families, and that in many cases they also presuppose employment (based of course on an individual contract) (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Individualisation concerns the way in which basic institutions like civil rights, education, and equal opportunities produce and enforce individualisation (Boyne, 2001, 2003).

Sociologists have also used the concept of individualisation to refer to the way in which people's lives have come to be less constrained by tradition and customs, and more subject to individual choice, and this can only be understood against the background of changes in the family, the labour market and the welfare state. The gradual entry into a 'second modernity' is marked by a process of emancipation of social actors from tradition and from other determinants characteristic of industrial society, and by a primacy given to individual choice and self-determination. There is a measure of agreement that the trend towards greater individualisation cannot simply be conceptualised in terms of selfish individualism or increasing atomisation. On the contrary, individualisation means a special kind of social sensitivity and social reflexivity (Boyne, 2001, 2003; Lewis, 2002; Lewis and Sarre, 2006; Martin, 2007).

Finally, individualisation depends on developments that foster “de-familialisation”, i.e. the citizens’ capacity to maintain their level of welfare without having to depend, in case of need, on their close kin either for income support or for the provision of essential services. De-familialisation consists of policies that lessen individuals’ reliance on the family and that maximise individuals’ command of economic resources independently of familial or conjugal reciprocities. A de-familialising regime is one that seeks to unburden the household and diminish individuals’ welfare dependence on kinship (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

### **3. Overview of family change**

Many of these new social risks result from family change. A number of ongoing social processes, such as the trend towards individualisation of family relationships, the de-institutionalisation of marriage, the growth of marital instability and partnership dissolution, and the proliferation of new household forms, together with the intensification of labour market insecurity, have led to an increase in the hazards that often involve cumulative high-risk vulnerabilities for some groups of children and their families.

In recent years there has been a greater interest in many western countries in the relationship between family change and welfare state change. Many analysts have begun to realise the extent to which household change in respect of both family form and the contributions that adult men and women make to families is driving policy, as well as being shaped by it (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Lewis, 2006).

One of most relevant changes underlying the transition to a post-industrial society is the loss of legitimacy of patriarchal domination (Flaquer, 1999). The patriarchal family, the cornerstone of patriarchalism, is being challenged by the inseparably related processes of the transformation of women’s work and the transformation of women’s consciousness. The driving processes behind these developments are the rise of an information-based, global economy, technological changes in the reproduction of human species, and the powerful emergence of women’s struggles and of a multifaceted

feminist movement -three trends that have developed since the late 1960s (Castells, 1997).

Patriarchy is in full retreat everywhere. The legal rights of women and children have been extended in all countries, and the expansion of education and paid work has extended autonomy. Dramatic socio-economic, political and cultural changes have undercut the authority of fathers and elders (Therborn, 2004). The massive incorporation of women into paid work has increased women's bargaining power with respect to men, and undermined the legitimacy of men's domination as the main economic providers in the family (Castells, 1997). All these developments could not have not been possible without the fall in the birth rate, due to the drastic reduction in infant mortality, and the consequent rise in life expectancy.

Whereas in pre-industrial society, the family was mainly a community of need held together by an obligation of solidarity, the logic of individually designed lives has come increasingly to the fore in the contemporary world. Thus, the family is becoming an elective relationship and an association of individual persons (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Increases in divorce, cohabitation and childbearing outside marriage have all contributed to the separation of marriage and parenthood (Lewis, 1999, 2001; Kiernan, 2004). Marriage is less an act of economic necessity and more a question of personal choice. There is evidence that the traditional family model and traditional patterns of family formation are gradually losing their hegemony in most Western countries. Most of the changes involved simply reflect the emergence of alternative living arrangements and more complex ways of organising the individual family life (González-López, 2002).

The de-institutionalisation of family life is associated with major shifts in value systems away from collective responsibility and duties towards a post-material conception of individual rights and personal autonomy (Hantrais, 2004). In advanced modern societies each person is expected to engage actively in their own life project, setting personal goals and monitoring their performance. Put simply, the trend toward individualisation means prioritising individuals' aspirations over those of the social groups to which they belong, the associated emphasis on achievement rather than status, and the belief that both are by-products of modernisation. However, individual progress is shaped by the interaction of individuals with new secondary institutions that create risk and opportunity in unequal measure (Walker, 2005).

In the context of development of a new 'active citizenship', the social rights of family members have become increasingly individualised, whereas derived social rights have lost their importance. Claiming responsibility for one's own life and well-being is, in this regard, not merely an option; to an increasing degree, it also represents an obligation. However, the 'active citizen', in a similar vein to the 'homo economicus', is merely a construct without family and care responsibility, since the concept of the 'active citizen' that is based on full engagement of the citizen for his or her working life and career contradicts in part the idea of family life, which rests on the assumption that parents spend time with their children and take on care responsibility within the family (Pfau-Effinger, 2006). In this sense, one must take into account that the trend toward individualisation does not necessarily mean more individualism. In fact, couples try to strike a balance between autonomy and togetherness (Björnberg and Kollind, 2005).

The 'second demographic transition, which began in the 1960s and is still under way, involves a marked rise in unmarried cohabitation, divorce and partnership dissolution, births outside marriage and lone parenthood, and sets the stage for a progress of family diversification (Cliquet, 1991; Hantrais, 2004). The demographics of divorce in most Western nations over the decades leading up to the 1960s were relative stable with respect to age structure, ages of children and so on (Goode, 1993). Divorce and births outside marriage were relatively rare until the last thirty years of the 20th century, and cohabitation was at its nadir in the 1950s and 1960s, when marriage was almost universal (Lewis, 2001). The 1960s and the early 1970s was a golden age of marriage in Western European nations. Never had marriage been as popular or been embarked upon at such young ages. This tide of youthful marriage receded during the 1970s and continues to do so unabated into the new millennium. It is the new type of cohabitation that is strongly implicated in the decline in marriage (Kiernan, 2004).

In fact, the dynamics of marriage and divorce have undergone major changes in the last two decades. The declining frequency of marriages, the increasing incidence of divorce, the increase of births out of wedlock and the rise of new forms of union such as premarital and consensual unions and LAT couples are the main characteristics of the new scenario (Bégeot and Fernández-Cordón, 1997).

Divorce rates are reflecting fewer and fewer disruptions of couples with children. Whether because of the spread of informal marital break-ups or because of the rise in the number of separations affecting consensual unions, the trend towards the de-institutionalisation of marriage has brought about the proliferation of a variety of new

living arrangements very dissimilar to the monolithic traditional patterns. In this way, individual life courses have become increasingly diversified. Taking into account that many divorced people later remarry or cohabit with a new partner who was also married before and may also have children of their own, more and more children thus grow up with a non-biological parent (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The most dramatic change in children's lives over the past one hundred years has been the growth in the number of children spending at least some portion of the childhood in a single-parent family. Although most single parents are women, in recent times a growing number are men (Waldfogel, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Flaquer *et al.*, 2006).

The changing nature of families and the contributions that men and women make to them as well as the restructuring or recasting of modern welfare states are processes that constitute important variables in the understanding of variations in children's well-being throughout different countries. In modern welfare states, there has always been a fundamental obligation on the part of the able-bodied man to engage with the labour market, but historically, the same expectations have not been applied to adult women. This is not to say that women did not enter the labour market, but it was perfectly acceptable for married women, especially mothers, not to do so; in other words they could be dependent on men. This 'male breadwinner family model' effectively made provision for the support and care of children, albeit at the price of female economic dependence on men (Lewis and Maclean, 2005).

In contemporary societies the dominance of male breadwinner families is losing ground in practice and in terms of cultural legitimacy (Björnberg, 2006). The decline of this family model, and the transition towards an emerging universal adult breadwinner model in which it is assumed that the majority of the child population lives in dual-earner households, is the backdrop against which we have to understand most of children's issues we are dealing with here. The universal adult breadwinner model corresponds to a post-industrial, informational economy leading to a knowledge-based society. The shift to tertiarisation created a major expansion in job opportunities for women, but it also meant the dramatic shedding of huge numbers of male, industrial jobs.

The terms and conditions in which the transition to what appears to be an 'adult worker family model' is undertaken are crucial for children's well-being. What happens to adults is critical for the well-being of children. The increasing fluidity of family forms, with more divorce, unmarried motherhood and lone mother families, and the

increase in female economic autonomy has made it impossible for governments to assume the existence of the male breadwinner family model. But how are children to be supported when family forms are increasingly fluid? And how is their care to be arranged when women, who have traditionally taken the main responsibility for care, are increasingly in the labour market? How are the responsibilities for the support and care of children to be divided between mothers, fathers and the state? (Lewis and Maclean, 2005).

One of the important problems that the universal adult breadwinner model leaves unresolved is care work; in fact, nowhere is there a fully-fledged adult worker model family (Lewis, 2002; Lewis, 2006). In all advanced countries most men show a definite reluctance to be in charge of care work, and this means that it is up to women to do it. The extent to which care work is carried out in or outside the household, is paid or unpaid, and is formal or informal in character, depends on various factors ranging from household strategies to the state regulation of the labour market.

However, it makes a big difference whether the model is supported by social policies rather than being developed solely by the operation of the market. In the case of lone parents this difference can be critical. Insofar as lone mothers are single earners and carers of their children, feminist scholars have considered single parenthood as a touchstone for the kind of treatment that various welfare states give to families (Lewis with Hobson, 1997).

#### **4. Child poverty and other adverse outcomes for children**

In a market economy such as the European Union's, economic well-being is fundamental to all other forms of well-being. In fact, child poverty levels are among the best indicators of the state of childhood in a particular country. In order to try to improve the general condition of children in any country it is absolutely necessary to envisage the eradication or reduction of child poverty, especially in its most severe and persistent forms.

In recent years child poverty rates have increased in most advanced nations. The proportion of children living in poverty in the developed world has risen in 17 of the 24 OECD nations for which data are available. No matter which of the commonly-used

poverty measures is applied, the situation faced by children is seen to have deteriorated over the last decade (Unicef, 2005).

Although causes underlying child poverty are related to a number of complex factors, its recrudescence in recent years is basically connected to two kinds of transition processes, i.e., the shift from industrial societies to service and knowledge-based economies, on the one hand, and the shift from the male breadwinner family model to the adult worker family model, on the other. In fact, the move from resource extraction and manufacturing to service economies relying on human capital has not only placed a premium on education and skills, but it has also led to an outright decline in the earnings of the less skilled (Corak, 2004). On the other hand, the slow adaptation of social policy to changes in family organisation and the emergence of new family forms is also responsible for the intensification of child poverty (Flaquer, 2007). The rhythm of these two transitions, as well as the diversity of responses from governments in the face of strains generated by societal transformations, contribute to understanding the great variety of child poverty regimes in various European countries (Nollmann, 2006).

The co-existence of single-earner and dual-earner households creates higher poverty risks for the former, especially when they are low-income ones. When the average standard of living takes for granted a double income, households with a single breadwinner are obviously facing higher poverty risks. Although this factor affects both two-parent families with a single breadwinner and single-parent households, it is the latter that face higher poverty risks. Deprivation is probably more severe in single-parent households not only because no other potential adults can get income from the labour market, but because maintenance payments after separation, if they exist at all, hardly compensate for the loss of economic support derived from income sharing during partnership (Andreß *et al.*, 2006).

The event of separation is associated with financial changes for most of the people involved. However, it is especially women, and primarily mothers, who are more affected by economic losses, while men's financial situation either does not change or changes only slightly. Thus, the costs of separation are not equally distributed between men and women (Andreß *et al.*, 2006).

If our basic concern is with economic hardship, lone mothers are the group at greatest risk (Ellwood and Jencks, 2004; Flaquer *et al.*, 2006). However, one must not forget that in the European Union, in terms of the volume of population concerned,

most poor children live in two-parent households. On the other hand, the growth of child poverty cannot be simply explained by the increase of single-parent families, although in certain countries (such as the USA and the UK) their contribution to it can indeed be very significant.

Although activation measures for (female) paid work and enforcement of maintenance payments can make an important contribution to the fight against child poverty, the rise in the levels of social transfers, in particular of child benefits, is one of the measures that can produce better outcomes. In this sense, a good system of economic support to families, with adequate levels of universal child benefits, is an indispensable means of combating child poverty. It is difficult to confront child deprivation without increasing levels of social expenditure for families and children. In fact the countries that devote most public resources to the family and children -the Nordic countries- are those in which we find lowest levels of child poverty.

Child benefits for all children are paid in most European countries. This means that payments are universal and not means-tested. The general trend is to extend the cut-off for child benefits from 16 to 18-19 years. Income supplements for the number of children are paid in Sweden and Norway. In the UK and Germany the amount paid per child increases with the number of children, whereas in Denmark and the Netherlands the amount paid per child increases with the age of the child (Björnberg, 2006).

However, the rationales for the establishment of child benefits in different countries vary widely. Also differing is the extent to which children are entitled to get benefits as a social right of citizenship and therefore have in principle the right to make claims on the state or, alternatively, the extent to which the payment of benefits only represents a recognition that the costs of children should be shared between parents and the society.

Nevertheless, material deprivation is only one part of the story. We know that adults and children from divorced families, as a group, score lower than their counterparts in married-couple families on a variety of well-being indicators. On average, children growing up with just one parent do lose out relative to other children. Only about half the disadvantage associated with growing up in a single-parent family is explained by economic factors. Single-parent families tend to have lower incomes and, as a result, tend to live in poorer neighbourhoods with poorer schools. They are also penalised by time constraints: children in single-parent families have, by definition, only one parent available to them. A single parent has to take on both the role of breadwinner and caregiver. Therefore, family structure seems to matter for reasons that go beyond



income and are likely to be related to the role-model that parents provide, to the attitudes they pass on to their children, but also to the different allocation of time and money between family members (Amato, 2000; Ellwood and Jencks, 2004; Waldfogel, 2006; Addio, 2007).

## **5. Family law and the regulation of divorce**

A large body of research has shown that there are as many types of divorces as there are marriages, and that post-divorce family life can be just as varied as pre-divorce family life. In this context, the focus is shifting away from the presumption that divorce is a form of deviant behaviour which generates pathological outcomes for children towards the study of the quality of relationships that children experience before, during and after their parents' divorce, as well as of the complex transitions involved. Coping with a divorce is undeniably painful for most children, just it is for most adults, yet it may not be divorce per se that is problematic but the way in which it is handled by adults in their interactions with children. If we take a life course perspective rather than a snapshot impression of the effects of divorce, it can be seen as part of a series of 'interconnected transitions' in life rather than a one-off event. While destructive in the short-term, divorce can also be positive, creating new opportunities for long-term personal growth. Taken over a longer time span, problems can iron out so that the vast majority of the children of divorced parents can thrive and finally succeed (Hetherington and Kelly, 2002; Smart, 2003).

Research demonstrates that conflict between parents is associated with increased risk for psychological problems among children in all families, whether the parents are married, separated, or divorced. Parental conflict often precedes a separation or divorce, and various studies show that children fare better psychologically if they live in a harmonious divorce family than in a conflict-ridden two-parent family. In most studies of children from divorced families, the quality of the relationship between a child and his or her primary residential parent is the strongest predictor of that child's psychological well-being (Emery, Otto and O'Donohue, 2005).

International research tends to show that it is the nature and the quality of parenting by the contact parent that is crucial, not contact in itself. It is not the arrangements in themselves which matter most to children but how their relationships are managed. The care provided by the resident parent and the financial position of the household are also major influences on the welfare of the child. However, where there is abuse or neglect, exposure to domestic violence or severe parental conflict, contact can be extremely damaging to children (Hunt and Roberts, 2004).

A common trend in European countries is the liberalisation of conditions for divorce while introducing at the same time more regulation of the parental relationship in separated families, especially in respect of conditions for paying maintenance. Maintenance agreements are increasingly supervised by public authorities and standardised. Regulations include the establishment of minimum amounts of maintenance, the advancement of payments to the custodial parent by public agencies in charge of recovering the money from the liable parent (usually the father), and the introduction of joint legal custody as the norm after divorce (Björnberg, 2006). A notable exception to this trend is Spain, where the reform in 2005 relaxed the conditions for divorce to a great extent without tightening the enforcement of maintenance payments.

Money is a central issue before, during and after divorce. Monetary issues frequently lie behind various conflicts, thus becoming the battleground for bitterness, fierce quarrels and warlike situations between the ex-spouses (Haugen, 2005). Much research indicates that, for parents, financial support and contact are intertwined. Where there is contact, support is more likely. In most countries, paying for children is in principle not separated from contact with the non-resident parent. Sanction for refusing access is only enacted against the parent who denies it, not against the parent who refuses to visit the child. This focus underlines the fact that the main caring responsibility still rests with the mother (Hunt and Roberts, 2004; Björnberg, 2006).

When money becomes a symbol of care and love, the utilitarian model fails to explain the multiple effects of money. Therefore, more attention should be given to the multiple meanings of money, and in particular these should be considered from the children's perspective. When money is viewed in the context of intimate transactions, child support may become a currency representing love and care, and absence of money may mean lack of affection. Monetary transactions affect how children in post-divorce families act towards their parents and other kin, and monetary arrangements between

the parents may affect how children evaluate the situation. At any rate, a distinction should be made between the parents' financial well-being and the economic resources available for their sons and daughters (Haugen, 2005; 2006).

A large amount of social science and child development research carried out during the past three decades has identified factors associated with risk and resiliency of children after divorce. It appears that, for the majority of children, traditional visiting patterns and guidelines are outdated, unnecessarily rigid, and restrictive, and fail in both the short and long term to address their best interests. On the other hand, research-based parenting plan models offering multiple options for living arrangements following separation and divorce more appropriately serve children's diverse developmental and psychological needs. Parenting plans are detailed descriptions on the manner in which parents intend to continue caring for their children after divorce (Kisthardt, 2005; Kelly, 2007).

At present many EU governments are actively encouraging parties involved in divorce proceedings to use mediation services or other forms of dispute resolution. Mediation can involve children, as well as parents and other carers. In reality, however, consulting the child in mediation remains a relatively undeveloped area of practice (Mantle *et al.*, 2006).

The notion of listening to children so that they can participate in decision-making about their everyday lives has become an established principle of child law and policy in most European countries. According to Article 12.2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "...the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law". However, there remains a great deal of professional uncertainty over what it means to ascertain the children's wishes and feelings. Discussions about the child's voice have typically revolved around whether adult professionals are willing to listen to children, and how listening can be done successfully. They have drawn on complex debates having to do with children's competencies, age and maturity, and the credibility of their statements; in effect assessing whether children's voices can be taken seriously, and at what age this might be possible. It is not necessarily in children's best interests to be dragged into decision-making, or to voice their views in a way that sets them apart from or even in opposition to their parents by placing undue burdens of responsibility and guilt on them at too

young an age and compromising their loyalties. An approach founded on social citizenship would require the development of a responsive mode of provision, one that allows for open and independent access for children who need help but respects the privacy and integrity of those who do not (Neale, 2002; Komulainen, 2007).

## **6. Long-term effects for the well-being of children: Intergenerational transmission of inequalities and divorce**

Short spells of child poverty may be bearable; but if poverty is intense, persistent, and it chiefly affects children in critical stages of their lives, it can have long-term consequences in the form of low intergenerational social mobility. Undoubtedly long periods of deprivation affecting children are specially damaging for their expected life chances. In the second place, growing up in a divorced family greatly increases the chances of ending one's own marriage: a phenomenon called the divorce cycle, or the intergenerational transmission of divorce (Wolfinger, 2005).

Growing up in low-income households seems to affect children's future life-chances heavily. Deprivation during childhood, even for relatively short spells, can have major long-term, irreversible consequences, resulting in life-course or inter-generational (i.e. chronic) poverty transmission. In fact, parental poverty is related to lower levels of good health, nutrition and housing, all of which affect child development and future incomes. Furthermore, the home and social environment is where beliefs, attitudes and values are shaped. Reducing poverty, and especially childhood poverty, might therefore contribute to reduce intergenerational inequality (Waddington, 2004; Addio, 2007).

One of the main objectives of social policy is to break the cycle of disadvantage across generations and prevent the development of a self-replicating underclass. In order to break the cycle of poverty and deprivation, preventive strategies are undoubtedly much more effective than remedial interventions, insofar as the latter are operating on often irreversible situations. Long-term public investment in children, in particular if it is based on early intervention, constitutes a good guarantee, allowing the securing of adequate levels of child well-being. In particular, the reduction of child poverty is a prerequisite for children with certain deficits to be able to take advantage of opportunities that are offered to them by the school system.

It appears that a strategy based exclusively on income redistribution may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. There is increasing evidence that educational reform has not seriously diminished the importance of social origins for life chances. These are powerfully determined by what happens in children's life prior to their first encounter with the school system. A really effective strategy must attack inequalities in parents' cultural transmission. The most effective way to tackle children's social exclusion in the long run is to combat social inheritance (Esping-Andersen, 2005).

The level of wealth and education of parents are two crucial determinants of children's future life-chances. The evidence suggests that parental characteristics are reflected in educational outcomes, and that greater public intervention in the accumulation of human capital might reduce intergenerational transmission of advantage and disadvantage (Addio, 2007).

Some evidence suggests that those countries with low intergenerational (earnings) mobility are the same as those who have the highest level of income inequality measured at a particular moment in time. The same is true in reverse. The opportunity structure appears far more egalitarian in countries with more equal income distributions. Accordingly, social inheritance appears stronger in less egalitarian societies. Additionally, government distribution tends to be far stronger in countries that are more egalitarian (Addio, 2007; Esping-Andersen, 2005).

Parental investment in their children matters. Parents who are facing tighter liquidity constraints cannot invest as much as rich parents in education. Similarly, children raised in larger families are more likely to have inferior earnings outcomes than their counterparts in smaller families. There are huge asymmetries in intergenerational income mobility. By far the largest parent-child correlations are found among the very rich and the very poorest quintiles. The more unequal are the resources, the more unequal the investment, although this can be partially undone by government distribution (Esping-Andersen, 2005; Corak, 2004).

The single most important phase of cognitive development occurs before school age. The Scandinavian countries, where the impact of father's education on his child's secondary school attainment has disappeared altogether in the youngest cohort, have now provided for decades near-universal day care for pre-school children (Esping-Andersen, 2005).

Finally, each divorce can affect many future marriages. The transmission of divorce between generations can be thought of as a cascade. Growing up in a family affected by

divorce increases to a great extent the chances that one's own marriage will also end in divorce. For example, in the USA, experiencing parental divorce increases the chances of ending one's own marriage by at least 50 percent. The divorce cycle operates largely irrespective of a number of demographic influences. Family structure of origin is a stronger predictor of offspring marital stability than are religion, race, or socioeconomic background. Moreover, parental divorce affects every important aspect of offspring behaviour in intimate relationships: marriage timing, partner selection; the stability of first and subsequent marriages; and behaviour in non-marital cohabiting relationships.

Increases in the divorce rate have diminished the negative consequences of coming from a divorced family. The weakening of the divorce cycle implies that, all else being equal, a lower rate of divorce transmission in this generation means fewer divorces in the next. Divorce can be viewed as a necessary evil and is often bad for children, but eliminating no-fault divorce would be even worse (Wolfinger, 2005; Addio, 2007).

## **7. Work and family arrangements**

It appears that the concept of "reconciliation" is not an adequate academic concept for analysing the relationship between family and the employment system, and the tensions and contradictions that might develop. There are cultural differences with regards to the ideal model of family, care work and paid work of parents, and accordingly also different ideas of what a satisfactory form of reconciliation of care responsibility and paid work is in different societies. Instead, the suggestion here is to use a broader approach to the "arrangement of work and family", one which tries to conceptualise the differing ways in which the family can be linked to paid work, the role of care work, and the gendered nature of this relationship, and likewise the ways in which the situation of mothers, fathers and children develops in the context of the specific institutional constellation and cultural context of family, employment system and social policies in a society. This approach considers the societal context of the relationship between work and family, in that it is argued that variations in the ways in which family and work are connected in time and space can be explained by the mutual (and sometimes contradictory and contested) interrelations between culture, institutions,

structures, and constellations of actors. This offers a theoretical framework for cross-national comparative analyses (Pfau-Effinger, 2007).

As a result of the interaction of cultural values, legal and political institutions, social and economic structures, and constellations of actors, work family arrangements show considerable variation in European countries. Not only do female employment patterns differ to a great extent, but also parents tend to make more use of private/public strategies of reconciliation in some countries than in others. During the second half of the 20th century, changes to the population's family values, on the one hand, and welfare state policies related to the family on the other, have interacted. Welfare state policies have reacted to the change in family values and family structures and in part contributed to shaping it. However, change was frequently marked by considerable contradictions and a lack of synchronicity, and changes to the welfare state often followed substantially later than cultural change and changes in family structures, particularly in conservative welfare state contexts. The change was particularly related to social care (Pfau-Effinger, 2004; 2007).

At any rate, in recent years all European governments, whether as pioneers or latecomers, with differing degrees of commitment and intensity and using various rationales, have been offering services to families in order to facilitate the reconciliation between work and family. As a result of the Lisbon agenda, one major drive in this development has often been the need to increase women's employment as a response to declining birth rates and a rapidly ageing population (Mahon, 2006).

Most Western European countries are seeing a shift from the so-called 'breadwinner-model family' to an 'adult worker model' in which all adults are expected to do paid work. Children's living conditions depend on how employment opportunities are changing and the extent to which policies are responding to the needs of children in the context of the new emerging family model. The policy developments in most EU countries are contradictory, and institutional regulations reflect ambivalent approaches regarding economic concerns, equal opportunities for women and social citizenship of children (Klammer, 2006; Björnberg, 2006).

The shift from the male breadwinner family towards a new adult worker model requires a fundamental reorganisation of welfare states. Different European societies find themselves at various points in this transition and also the policy responses given by governments in the EU are quite diverse. Most of these policy responses are heavily gendered because the emerging model leaves the problem of care unresolved. Only

promoting men's participation in unpaid work at a similar level as women's and in particular fathers' contribution to childcare would really address the problem and would improve gender equality. In this sense, a body of research on the new role of fathers as carers is interesting and highly stimulating (Pfau-Effinger and Eichler, 2006; Hobson *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, some measures implemented in certain countries such as 'daddy leaves' de-commodification schemes and standard provisions for joint custody in case of divorce or dissolution of partnership, are an important contribution to the promotion of men's family responsibilities.

In this context, the promotion of an adequate work life balance is essential. Children experience a need for stability and regular rhythms, which is in opposition to the labour market ideal of the flexible worker. Whereas parents' work life balance has been broadly discussed, the children's perspective on their parents' work life balance and on their own time use and preferences has remained a neglected issue so far. Parents' time input in the family should be regarded as a contribution to children's education and socialisation (Klammer, 2006).

Standard concepts of reconciliation do not provide enough options for integrating the situation of children and the way in which different types of childcare provision contribute to the well-being of children as well as to the quality of life of their parents. It is argued here that the differences concerning the situation of children between countries can be explained in the context of different arrangements of work and family. It is true that to a certain extent there are strong contradictions in people's leaning towards gender equality on the one hand and the dominant values related to a 'good childhood' on the other (Pfau-Effinger, 2007).

The public provision of childcare does not meet the needs of parents in many countries outside of the 'social democratic' welfare system. Implementing a number of public measures for the care of children aged 0-3, including schemes of paid parental leave and a system of accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare facilities can produce benefits of various sorts. They cannot only enable the entry or the remaining in the labour market of mothers with young children, especially those with lower educational attainment and therefore lesser professional skills as well as reducing career breaks to a minimum, but can also expose infants earlier to stimuli that can contribute to their cognitive development, although this will only happen if the quality levels of childcare facilities are fully adequate. In the first year of life, extended parental leave policies, giving parents the choice to stay at home, could be paired with policies to



improve the quality, availability, and affordability of infant childcare (Waldfogel, 2006).

However, it is not obvious at all that children's interests are being necessarily considered or promoted when childcare facilities are created by governments. We do not only find important differences in the extent to which the provision of childcare is seen as a public good and is placed under collective responsibility but also to which children's rights and the importance of childhood in its own right is being emphasised in relation to labour market requirements and notions of social investment. Finally, the rationale for current changes does not in itself guarantee a shift from a childcare to a pedagogical discourse (Moss, 2006).

## **8. Conclusion**

Considering that in the WELLCHI NETWORK we have drawn on the paradigms of the social investment approach and the 'child as a fully-fledged citizen' with fruitful results, in coming to the concluding remarks I would like to return to the beginning of our report and ask whether it is possible to reconcile these two approaches.

In post-industrial societies the material well-being of children is essential to their progress and development as citizens, and in this sense one of the main virtues of the social investment strategy is that it posits the eradication of child poverty as a critical and radical issue and insists on combating social inheritance as a central axis.

Secondly, one of the advantages of the social investment strategy is that its discourse is policy-oriented and couched in economic terms, and therefore it is more appealing to policy-makers and social administrators.

Thirdly, one of the main merits of the social investment strategy has been to bring the welfare of children to the fore as a public issue and also to bring their care and support to the forefront of the policy agenda (Lewis and Maclean, 2005). For educational investment to be successful, it is increasingly important that children are able to take advantage of benefits offered to them by school institutions, and this can only happen if child poverty is reduced to a minimum.

Fourthly, the social investment approach insists on developing preventive strategies in order to deal with potential rather than merely current social risks affecting children.

Similarly, the need for early intervention is emphasised on the ground that the return on human capital is very high in the early years of life and diminishes rapidly thereafter. As happens in the field of health, prevention is much better than intervention carried out after the problem has manifested itself. Quite often late interventions are not only ineffective but expensive, since they can involve a permanent cost during adult life.

However, one of the shortcomings of this approach is that it is instrumental and therefore hardly child-friendly. The question remains as to how far the needs and well-being of the child, as opposed to the economy and the wider society, are the focus of attention (Lewis and Maclean, 2005). It is consubstantial to social investment strategy that children are seen as an investment for the future rather than a value per se. This raises the issue of their status of citizenship. Are they to be considered just as future citizens or simply as present citizens here and now? This dilemma compels us to go beyond the social investment approach and consider the merits of the new alternative, emerging approach.

Expressing concern about the material condition of children and trying to improve their welfare is not enough. It is well-known that not all rich children are happy. Their emotional well-being does not only depend on their economic situation but on providing them with stable and loving relationships and fulfilling all their needs, including their non-material dimension.

In the second place, children are not merely investment objects but subjects in their own right. The new sociology of childhood stresses agency and participation. The child is not seen as a tabula rasa on which educators can inscribe their teachings but as an active subject which interacts with his or her environment.

Similarly, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are considered as subjects with rights. It is increasingly acknowledged that children have rights as citizens (Björnberg, 2006). On the other hand, children are not simply tomorrow's citizens; they are today's citizens. Focusing on being rather than becoming requires a more child-centred approach (Martin, 2004; Lewis, 2006).

If we accept that children are fully-fledged citizens, then a number of consequences follow. This means in the first place that they should be entitled not only to protection but also to some kind of participation as they grow older. Here again the active over the passive dimension is emphasised.

Secondly, citizenship rights should be expanded to cover not only civil rights but also political and social rights. The problem with political participation is that children

are not given a real opportunity to have a say on social and political matters. There are still powerful political and social forces that see children as dependent subordinates, thus excluding them from political participation. It is most probable that if young people were given the chance to participate, they would take more responsibility and would also be more willing to take part in local and national political affairs. Until recently, in most countries, citizenship education has been seen as political interference and has been left to the discretion of parents, so that political apprenticeships, where they exist, tend to be privatised (Wyness *et al.*, 2004). Education about children's rights in schools is frequently neglected in many important ways. Unfortunately the dominant view of citizenship education is still adult-centred, and this means that all too often schools teach rights as adults' rights and not as children's rights. Few schools know about the significance of the UN 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. There is a need to reform schools to promote a culture of children's rights (Alderson, 2006; Howe and Covell, 2005)

However, from a life-world perspective and an understanding of citizenship as social involvement and participation, we can surely define children as actual citizens. This kind of child citizenship is based on a continuous learning process in which children and adults are interdependent. There is a clear need to design relevant interventions that support actual forms of child participation, and similarly other kinds of interventions that support actual forms of playful and ambivalent citizenship. In particular, the introduction of citizenship education in the school curricula of all EU countries specifically based on children's rights, with policy initiatives hinting at structures for the political and social inclusion of children, and their involvement in small-scale community level of politics, would be very helpful experiences (Jans, 2004; Wyness *et al.*, 2004).

We would however like to insist on the need to develop a full array of social rights for children, in keeping with the rights of adults. Even if the rights of children to health care and education are fully guaranteed in all European countries, the same is not true of their welfare rights. I am referring in particular to an important deficit that we find in some EU countries where there is no universal coverage of child benefits, the most typical children's welfare right. Here again we can detect some convergence between the two paradigms that we have discussed so far. One of the requirements for the eradication of child poverty is a certain amount of expenditure on family and children, and this basically means paying generous universal child benefits to families.

In my view, in today's Europe, both paradigms are still useful and necessary. Children have become an investment for the future as well as being intrinsically valued in and for themselves (Smart, 2003). Both perspectives convey a notion of children as a public good (Qvortrup, 2004), albeit with quite a different meaning; the former in a more instrumental sense and the latter in a more expressive one. On the other hand, the degree to which children are familialised also varies, with more privatisation in the case of the social investment strategy.

There is a second reason why the current coexistence of these two approaches is beneficial. One must not forget that the 'new sociology of childhood' has been in part developed as a response to and as a criticism of the adoption by some governments and supranational agencies of the child-centred social investment strategy. However, this approach, except as a rhetorical motto, is still absent in policy-making in a number of EU countries where more traditional, more family-based views still prevail. It is difficult for more progressive conceptions of childhood to be able to develop in these countries without a prior first-hand assessment of the shortcomings of the 'social investment approach'.

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