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Collective Protection for New Social Risks: Childcare and the Dutch Welfare State

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Abstract

Issues such as caring and family policy have received increased attention within the sociological literature on the welfare state during the past decades. At the same time, there has been much debate about the protection of social risks. In particular, scholars have questioned the ability of welfare states to respond to so-called new social risks, such as reconciling work and care. The literature on new social risks assumes welfare states will have difficulty addressing these risks due to pressures for reform and assumed individual responsibility for new social risks. In contrast, the Dutch welfare state has been successful in re-orienting existing institutions to develop a semi-collectivised yet market-driven form of childcare policy. Using qualitative interview data and document analysis, this article analyses the development of Dutch childcare policy from 1995 to 2009. The development of childcare policy is attributed to three social mechanisms: a common perception among actors viewing childcare as a solution to improve women's employment; a party politics mechanism, which creates a distinct Dutch approach to childcare; and a corporatist mechanism, referring to the interaction between the state and industrial relations, which failed in the area of childcare policy. The development of childcare policy has not been wholly unproblematic, however, and therefore a critical discussion of these developments is offered. Also, an update of policy developments through to 2013 is provided.

Introduction

As socio-cultural and economic changes have taken place, in particular the spectacular rise in women's labour market participation, welfare state approaches to care responsibilities have become an important focus of research (see, for example, Knijn and Kremer, 1997). From a welfare regime perspective, variation in childcare policies across countries has been explained in relation to variation in social rights and protection across regime types or the extent to which welfare states take up familial care responsibilities (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999; Lister, 1997; Saraceno and Keck, 2010). More detailed comparative analyses of care policies have also emerged (see, for example, Crompton, 2006; Gornick *et al.*, 1996; Knijn and Saraceno, 2010; Plantenga and Remery, 2005).

At the same time, within the sociological literature on the welfare state, there has been much debate about the ability of contemporary welfare states

to respond to social risks, in particular the need to reconcile work and care. Most welfare states were developed to deal with ‘old’ social risks, or so-called ‘external’ risks (Giddens, 1998). These are risks associated with the industrial society, which led to policy responses aimed at protecting the income of a male breadwinner against sickness, disability and old age. These risks were often perceived as beyond the responsibility of the individual, hence the term ‘external’ risks. Many welfare states are therefore ill-equipped to respond to ‘new’ or ‘manufactured’ social risks (Bonoli, 2005; Giddens, 1998; Taylor-Gooby, 2004), such as care risks and insufficient education or training, which have become more prominent in post-industrial societies (Kemp, 2010). These risks are often referred to as ‘new’¹ social risks or ‘manufactured’ risks, given a greater emphasis on individual responsibility. In many western countries, the increased need for care, in particular childcare, is framed as arising from women’s increased labour market participation and the need to make time, money or services available in order to provide care previously provided for by non-working mothers. The framing of childcare needs in this way has been criticised for over-emphasising women’s employment and under-emphasising the quality of childcare or the organisation of work more broadly (Lewis, 2006; Morgan, 2012; Saraceno, 2011).

However it is framed, the ability of many welfare states to respond to emerging social risks such as those associated with reconciling work and care has been constrained (Bonoli, 2006). Nordic welfare states are clearly the exception, as they have historically provided high levels of support for working parents (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). But in many conservative and Southern European welfare states, for example, extensive work–family policies remain absent. Fiscal and monetary pressures limit the ability of many welfare states to respond to new social risks (Bonoli, 2007), pressures that have often increased in the context of the financial and economic crisis. It has been argued that conservative corporatist welfare states will have particular difficulty responding to risks related to reconciling work and care because ‘the established compromises between social partners and government privilege the interests of core workers, and assumptions about gender roles delay the development of collective provision’ (Taylor-Gooby, 2004: 23). Given these difficulties, it is assumed that publicly collective solutions to new social risks will remain absent, particularly in corporatist welfare states with underdeveloped policies facilitating the combination of work and care. But recent scholarship shows that welfare states such as the UK and Germany have surprisingly developed extensive family policies, albeit along different pathways (Clasen, 2011; Fleckenstein and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). This article adds to this literature, offering an analysis of a path-breaking shift in Dutch childcare policy.

Attention for the Dutch case is well-deserved. The Netherlands is a corporatist welfare state; centrally organised trade unions and employers’ organisations, collectively known as the social partners, play an important role in socio-economic policy-making. This corporatist setting should privilege ‘core’

workers, delaying any development of childcare policy. The Netherlands is also historically characterised by a strong male breadwinner legacy (Lewis, 1992), with low levels of childcare provision. But in recent decades, childcare policy has shifted dramatically in the Netherlands to a demand-financed childcare market where parents are childcare consumers, supported by public and private collective contributions, showing evidence of a 'semi-collectivisation' of childcare policy in the Dutch welfare state.

From a social risk perspective, such a shift may be considered remarkable given the discussion above (Yerkes, 2011) and the slow or fragmented response in most other European countries (Morgan, 2012). From a comparative childcare policy perspective, this development is primarily intriguing because of the direction in which childcare policy developed. This article explores this notable development of childcare policy in the Netherlands, examining how childcare is perceived by welfare state actors and how these perceptions have changed across time, giving shape to a new form of social risk protection. The analysis centres on a qualitative 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of childcare policy, outlining theoretically relevant developments in terms of social mechanisms (Hedström and Swedberg, 1996) that can explain how and why these developments have occurred. This in-depth description is undertaken using an actor-centred institutionalist framework (Scharpf, 1997), allowing for the importance of actors, institutions and the process of their interaction.

The data used include fifty-three in-depth interviews carried out in 2009 with government officials, politicians, trade unionists, employer organisation representatives and policy-makers and an extensive database of policy documents (+/- 120) collected by the author, detailing government and social partner agendas from the mid-1990s through to 2009. All material has been coded and analysed using Atlas.Ti qualitative software by taking a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) approach. This promotes an analytical approach that is both inductive (building up from the data through coding and categorising) and deductive (applying theoretically relevant codes and constructs), relying on a variety of data sources. For more information on the data collected here, see (Yerkes, 2011).

The historical development of Dutch childcare policy

Family policy developed late in the Netherlands, and, until the 1990s, Dutch childcare policy could best be described as underdeveloped (Tijdens and Lieon, 1993). In this regard, the Netherlands was similar to other European welfare states with strong male breadwinner histories (Lewis, 1992). Built on a framework of Christian Democratic ideals, welfare states such as Germany, the Netherlands and Austria protected the family wage, earned by men, and assumed care would take place within the home (Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, 2008). This male breadwinner

approach to childcare is not a unique Christian Democratic approach, however. Typically, liberal welfare regimes such as the UK (Lewis, 1992) and Australia (Campbell *et al.*, 2009) produced similar outcomes based on a *laissez faire*, minimalist welfare state approach.

The male breadwinner approach to childcare policy in the Netherlands is evident in at least three areas. First, the limited development of childcare policy was driven by a legal and policy framework supporting the male breadwinner model (Knijn and Saraceno, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, 2008). State involvement in childcare was limited to subsidised playgroups and childcare centres organised by municipal governments. Second, Christian Democratic ideals remained at the forefront, with an emphasis on supporting families by means of transfer payments to male breadwinners, and by the norms supporting traditional gender divisions of labour. Until the mid-1990s, other political parties such as the Social Democrats or Conservatives had been less successful in promoting their political ideals on childcare policy – equality through the public provision of childcare services (Social Democrats) or a market-based approach (Conservatives).² Third, the Dutch approach to childcare reflected dominant care preferences, with informal care preferred over formal childcare (Portegijs, Cloin *et al.*, 2006; Portegijs, Hermans *et al.*, 2006). The dominance of the male breadwinner approach resulted in a fragmented policy approach, leading to low childcare supply, significant variation in the quality, availability and affordability of care, a lack of transparency in financing structures and the absence of a clear division of responsibility for the purchase and provision of childcare services (Plantenga, 2012). And while childcare supply increased dramatically in the years ahead (CBS, 2010), taken in the context of an initially very low level in 1995, this growth seems less impressive.

The development of Dutch childcare policy from such a starting point in the mid-1990s to its current form is intriguing theoretically and empirically. First, given the legal, social and political context at the time, the increased attention given to childcare policy by welfare state actors and the social partners is surprising. Second, throughout the 1990s and through the mid-2000s, employer-based childcare subsidies developed substantially in collective bargaining, an approach advocated by welfare state and industrial relations actors (Yerkes, 2010). Third, Dutch childcare policy shifted from the industrial relations arena to the welfare state. This shift was gradual but the overall effect has been ground breaking (Morgan, 2012). Due to space considerations, this article focuses on this latter and most surprising development.

Explaining the shift to semi-public collective protection

In the mid- to late-1990s, Dutch childcare policy was clearly problematic for a number of reasons, not least in terms of the variation in the quality, affordability and availability of care services. At the time, state involvement in childcare policy

was fragmented. The state subsidised a number of childcare centres managed by municipalities, but these subsidies had been steadily declining during the 1990s (Knijn and Saraceno, 2010). The shift to a semi-public collective form of childcare policy by the late 2000s, while gradual, was punctuated by two important legislative changes. In 2005, new legislation was introduced, the Childcare Act (*Wet kinderopvang*), which effectively condensed the previously three-tiered system of childcare purchasing – government-subsidised (municipal), employer-subsidised and private childcare places – into one scheme. Parents now purchase childcare directly and are responsible for paying childcare costs upfront. Parents are then compensated for one-third of the purchasing costs by the state (via income tax returns) and for one-third by employers. The compensation from the state is income-based (see Plantenga, 2012 for a detailed discussion), whereby low-income families receive considerably higher compensation than middle- and high-income families. Employer subsidies, at the time, were voluntary and arranged in collective agreements. While a significant proportion of employers provided subsidies through these collectively negotiated agreements (Yerkes, 2010), employer contributions were not uniform as some employers refused to negotiate childcare subsidies. The state, wanting more uniformity to avoid the issue of free-riding behaviour, threatened to mandate employer subsidies if the social partners could not effectuate childcare subsidies in 90 per cent of collective agreements by 2006. When the social partners subsequently failed to meet this target, the state legislated employer subsidies for childcare with the passage of a new tax law in 2007. This mandate effectively removed childcare from industrial relations and shifted it to the welfare state.

Dutch childcare policy has now taken on a semi-public collective form, with a unique public–private financing mix. *Private* contributions from parents are supplemented by welfare state financing (*public, collective*) and state-legislated employer contributions. This development is surprising given the expectation that welfare states are generally unable to create collective solutions to risks associated with reconciling work and care. The direction of Dutch policy change, with a shift away from supply financing to demand financing for the purchase of childcare services (Plantenga, 2012), in essence the marketisation of childcare, also deserves explanation. While the absence of earlier childcare policy solutions, and a focus on increasing women's labour market participation in a broader context of improving work–care reconciliation, provided an opportunity for innovative responses to the need for childcare (Knijn and Saraceno, 2010), it is unclear why the Dutch welfare state would shift childcare policy away from industrial relations and take on increased responsibility in this way. And why did the social partners accept this shift? Three social mechanisms explain these developments: (1) a common perception among actors that inadequate childcare was a barrier to female employment and that demand-driven childcare purchasing was the solution; (2) an 'old politics' mechanism, whereby political cleavages shaped

this development; and (3) a corporatist mechanism, whereby a politically strong government removed previously granted regulatory capacity from collectively organised actors, is integral to understanding the development of Dutch childcare policy. I now turn to each of these mechanisms in more detail.

Perceiving childcare as a labour market instrument

It is clear that childcare was primarily absent from the social and political agenda in the Netherlands until the 1990s. At that time, in a broader context of discussing work and care combinations, childcare became viewed as a possible labour market instrument to increase women's employment, both in terms of participation as well as working hours. Yet the welfare state approach to childcare remained fragmented. For example, until 2002, childcare policy fell under the domain of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (MinHWS). The exceptions to this were childcare arrangements considered to be related to policy areas maintained by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (MinSAE), such as childcare for social assistance recipients. Childcare policy was divided among the ministries, and separate policies were created for distinct groups of parents and children, such as lone mothers, social assistance recipients or children in specific age groups. This shifted in the late 1990s, as a *common perspective* among actors developed, that market-driven childcare would improve women's employment. Two events, an initial push for marketisation and a shift in ministerial focus, are crucial for understanding how this mechanism shaped childcare policy.

First, a report from the Ministry of Economic Affairs entitled 'Marketization, Deregulation and Legislative Qualities' (*Marktwerking, Dereguleren en Wetgevingskwaliteiten; MDW*), was released in the spring of 1998, just prior to the national elections. The MDW project, carried out during the 'purple' political coalitions of Social Democrats and Conservatives between 1994 and 2002, marked a trend towards increased marketisation in various policy fields, including childcare.

So the idea was: we'll make a whole new system, all at once, which will create more marketisation, more choice and where possible, a system which will better meet the needs and wishes of parents and employers, insofar as they're involved. (I17, Governmental policy-maker)

Earlier attempts at creating more market-driven childcare were not successful. One governmental policy-maker, who later became involved with childcare policy at the MinHWS,³ explained that during the mid-1990s, a move towards market-driven childcare was discussed but not accepted.

Then came the story: MinHWS is going to make a law, a new childcare law, and they don't want it to be in the hands of the municipalities anymore, but they want . . . even the temporary subsidy we were creating [for lone parents] was going to be set up so that parents would directly receive the subsidy. Demand financing. That was one step too far at that point in time. (I45a, Former governmental policy-maker)

Legislation to achieve market-driven childcare was developed during the late 1990s, although the legislation was not implemented until 2005. To develop this legislation, the state requested an advisory report from the Social and Economic Council (SER), the primary consultative body for the government, with representatives from employers' organisations and trade union confederations, and independent political advisors. Part of a larger advisory report on work and care, the report confirmed the desire for a move towards more market-driven childcare (SER, 1998). The SER report also confirmed a unilateral agreement to manage childcare within the existing institutional structure of the Dutch welfare state, based on shared responsibility among the welfare state, employers and parents (employees). Applying this institutional approach to social risks related to reconciling work and care 'created a breakthrough' in childcare policy (I4, Representative in consultative organisation). Following the SER's advisory report, policy-makers developed new legislation detailing marketisation efforts intended to stimulate childcare demand and increase childcare supply. While the childcare law was outlined in 2001, parliament did not pass the legislation into law because, despite some agreement that marketisation was a sound approach, sufficient support was lacking. Support for this approach grew as insufficient childcare provision was increasingly perceived to be a barrier to women's employment. The dominance focus on women's employment and barriers to employment allowed a *common perspective* to develop.

This common perspective was an important factor causing a change in childcare governance. Following the elections in 2002, in which a new centre-right coalition was elected, childcare was moved from the MinHWS to the MinSAE. 'This dossier needed an enormous impulse – to improve labour market participation – and that's why it went from MinHWS to MinSAE' (I45, Governmental policy-maker). The change in childcare governance structures is indicative of two things: it demonstrates the focus of relating childcare to *employment*, rather than children's health and welfare/wellbeing and it also emphasises the central role of the social partners in creating and regulating childcare policy. The MinSAE is tasked with developing and regulating policy related to, among other things, industrial relations. In this sense, the MinSAE regulates the social partners' 'self-regulation' of social policy areas covered by collective bargaining. If a social policy issue was dealt with in collective bargaining, it would be relevant to the MinSAE from an employment standpoint.

I remember when I took over the childcare dossier ... At that point in time, some very initial discussions were taking place regarding a mandatory employers' subsidy and in a conversation about my transition into the job [my predecessor said]: 'if you administer a mandatory employers' subsidy, then the question is what you're even doing [with this issue] at MinSAE.' And that's true. And that was felt politically as well. (I45b, Governmental policy-maker)

By bringing childcare under the auspices of the MinSAE, the state could maintain an open dialogue with the social partners on this topic. Childcare could now be discussed within the *Regiegroep*, an institutionalised informal setting in which ministerial policy-makers, employers' organisations and trade union officials meet to discuss current and long-term policy strategies. Moreover, moving the childcare dossier to this ministry signalled the state's intent to maintain an institutionalised industrial relations approach to childcare policy.

Considered in the light of similar social policy developments in other countries, the presence of this social mechanism, a common perception that marketised childcare would improve women's employment, is not entirely unique. Linking childcare to women's employment is a common motivation for social policy developments in the area of work–family reconciliation. Lewis and colleagues (2008) have termed this 'employment-led' social policy. Daguerre (2006: 225) finds similar developments in Britain and Switzerland, whereby 'the need for female labour in the context of a booming service economy opened a policy window for British and Swiss childcare advocates'. Attempts to activate women and mothers in particular are also visible in countries like Germany, where family policies have become increasingly oriented towards employment (Fleckenstein and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Australia, one of the latest OECD countries to develop a paid parental leave scheme, did so in an attempt to improve mothers' employment (Martin *et al.*, 2011). In contrast to other countries, however, the Dutch welfare state expanded its role in childcare policy through mandatory marketisation and placed the emphasis on parents as childcare consumers. Childcare policy was developed under two Social Democratic-led coalitions yet, rather than develop a system of publicly-funded childcare, similar to the Nordic approach, a marketised approach was taken. To understand why, it is necessary to look more closely at the role of another important mechanism, that of party politics, in the development of childcare policy.

The importance of party politics

The ideologies of political parties are argued to be driven by underlying class cleavages (Hicks and Misra, 1993; Huber *et al.*, 1993, 2000), leading political actors to pursue different policy responses to social risks. Traditionally, Social Democrats pursue policy solutions focused on public service provision and equality (Huber *et al.*, 1993; Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, 2008). Christian Democrats favour policy solutions focused on transfer payments to male breadwinners and the involvement of social partners (van Kersbergen, 1995). Conservative (secular) parties are likely to pursue policy solutions focused on private markets.⁴

The presence of multiple party coalitions and a desire for consensus means distinct elements of various party ideologies combined when developing childcare policy. From 1994 to 2002, two so-called 'purple' coalitions held the political majority, consisting of Social Democrats, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Social Democrats, despite being the leading party in the coalition and preferring public provision, needed the support of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to achieve further developments in childcare policy. Consensus-seeking led to the combination of two dominant political objectives: greater equality in childcare policy (Social Democrats) and market-driven childcare (Conservatives). To achieve greater equality, the Social Democrats emphasised the role of individual choice as a means of challenging male breadwinner norms. Prior to 1994, male breadwinner norms dominated under Christian Democratic rule, with a clear emphasis on the family (Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, 2008). The Social Democrats preferred greater state involvement in childcare (e.g., public provision) and were clear about this throughout the 1980s (Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, 2008). But once in power, they needed to achieve consensus within the ruling coalition. To achieve greater equality in childcare policy, they were willing to concede to a marketised approach despite their preference for childcare being a basic public provision.

That was the compromise of the ‘purple’ coalition: the ‘purple’ coalition, that meant marketization, that was the Conservative’s toy; and something social, childcare, that was the Labour party’s toy. All those lines came together at the same time. (I45b Governmental policy-maker)

The marketised approach to childcare, with its public–private mix of collective subsidies, was thus a result of the particular mix of political ideology at the time, ruling out a Nordic style of childcare policy based on the public provision of services.

While much of what is now contemporary childcare legislation was shaped during the second ‘purple’ cabinet from 1998 to 2002, it was not implemented until a Christian Democratic-led (CDA) coalition ruled Parliament from 2002 onwards. Christian Democrats had become increasingly supportive of childcare as a means of improving labour market participation, in essence converging towards Social Democrats on the issue (Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, 2008). Yet the party continued to emphasise the importance of the family. This ideology helped shape a more conservative, family-oriented approach to childcare policy, even as marketisation was accepted. Formal childcare was made available through market forces of demand and supply, rather than the public provision of childcare services. The latter was undesirable because it could be viewed as the state advocating full-time use of formal childcare.

You have children for a reason . . . If you don’t have kids it’s fine that women work five days [a week], then of course, that’s not an issue. But if you have care responsibilities for children then we think, it’s also in our election campaign that both parents are responsible for the care of their children and then the most ideal model would be that both parents work four days. The child can go to formal childcare three days a week and the rest can be arranged with one day of care for the child at home by each parent. (I23, CDA MP)

What we state is that we think parents should have the freedom to choose in this regard. They can choose if they want to raise their children themselves or that they want to bring them to the crèche or whichever option. What we've noticed recently, is that a lot of emphasis is being placed on working outside the home and that money is going towards that, while we believe that there is also an added social value if people stay at home to care for their children. (I42, Christian Union MP)

Conservative views of childcare, emphasising the importance of the family stem not only from Christian parties on the right in the Netherlands, but from parties on the left as well.

Childcare is a condition for being able to participate [in the labour market] but we always try and put the interest of the child first . . . We also think that you should still have the opportunity to choose to, in any case, be home temporarily for a little while when you have young children. That is not taboo in our party. (I30b, Socialist Party (SP) MP)

These quotes reveal an underlying political tension in the development of Dutch childcare policy: between viewing formal childcare as a means of improving mothers' employment versus viewing formal childcare as (negatively) affecting children's health and well-being. The marketised approach, by emphasising freedom of choice through demand-driven childcare, offered a solution for developing childcare policy without having to resolve this underlying tension.

The absence of a resolution to this tension means that, even today, consensus remains absent regarding the educational role of formal childcare in the Netherlands. Seeleib-Kaiser and colleagues (Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, 2008: 148) have argued that a 'fundamental disagreement' remained between Social and Christian Democrats on this issue. But this political tension is more encompassing than the Social and Christian Democrats. Conflicting views on whether childcare is solely a labour market instrument or whether childcare potentially plays an important role in childhood development and education spans the entire political spectrum. The absence of a resolution makes it difficult if not impossible to emphasise education/childhood development *and* childcare as a labour market instrument, which can lead to a lowering of childcare quality standards.

To sum this up, the influence of a political mechanism on the development of childcare policy in the Netherlands is clear. The Social Democratic party prefers public funding of childcare, which creates greater social equality. Christian Democrats are in favour of some public funding for childcare as a labour market instrument, but prefer to emphasise the role of the family. The secular right also favours some public funding for childcare if it serves as a labour market instrument, but only in combination with market-driven demand and supply. These political ideologies combined in a context of consensus-seeking in an attempt to improve women's employment. The result was a marketised approach to childcare that emphasises individual choice (parents as childcare consumers)

but remains silent on the issue of childcare as educational or influencing children's health and well-being. While the previous two mechanisms help to explain the direction in which childcare developed, they cannot explain what triggered the final change in childcare governance structures, shifting childcare away from industrial relations into the welfare state. This shift is best explained through a corporatist institutional mechanism and, more specifically, the failure of this mechanism.

Corporatism and childcare policy

The Netherlands is characterised by a strong corporatist institutional structure whereby the state shares its regulatory capacity with the social partners in many social policy areas. This structure allows policy to be developed and managed within existing corporatist institutions, such as agenda-setting through bi- and tri-partite bodies or through collective bargaining. The latter offers scope for 'self-regulation' by the social partners, meaning regulation by the social partners themselves in the absence of state involvement. While state regulation may be absent, there is generally a distinct interplay between 'self-regulation' in bargaining and welfare state policy, an interplay evident in policy areas like pensions and unemployment benefits in many corporatist countries (Ebbinghaus, 2011; Johnston *et al.*, 2011). While collective bargaining can be an effective means of compensating for cuts in, or lack of, welfare state policy (Trampusch, 2006; Yerkes and Tijdens, 2010), relying on industrial relations as the dominant approach to childcare policy was relatively unique to the Netherlands.

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, collective bargaining was the primary means of developing Dutch childcare policy, focused on increasing the availability of employer subsidies. But self-regulation in this field eventually failed. Employers and trade unions were responsible for negotiating employer subsidies for childcare. Amidst growing concern that an insufficient proportion of collective agreements contained such subsidies, the state threatened to mandate employer subsidies if a target of 90 per cent was not met by 2006, in essence a state *shadow of hierarchy* (Scharpf, 1997). This target was made explicit during the debates on impending childcare legislation in 2000.

The cabinet trusts the efforts by the social partners to increase the number of concrete childcare agreements in collective labour agreements and company agreements in accordance with recommendations from the Labour Foundation in 1999 . . . As a point of orientation, the cabinet strives to have concrete childcare agreements in 90 per cent of collective labour agreements and company agreements in the long term. (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, 2000).

Most interviewees believed this 90 per cent target was created by the social partners within the bipartite Labour Foundation. Yet while the Labour Foundation drafted childcare recommendations in 1999 and again in 2004, these texts focus on a general increase of childcare subsidies in collective agreements;

no explicit target is mentioned (StAr, 1999, 2004). Independent of the origin of this target, the state confronted the social partners in 2006 with statistics that showed the target was not being met (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, 2006).

In that sense, we confronted them with their own plan and we said: the recommendation that you've formulated, for yourself as social partners . . . if you can implement that, then it's ok. (I38, Former cabinet member)

Despite the strong development of childcare subsidies through industrial relations, the social partners were unable to achieve the 90 per cent target due to a free-rider problem. Even though an increasing number of employers offered childcare subsidies through collective agreements, employer subsidies were not universal, undermining the tripartite financing of childcare and signalling the failure of self-regulation.

Two solutions to the free-rider problem were discussed: a continued push for an increase in childcare subsidies in collective agreements or mandatory employer subsidies. The latter option was not favoured by employers; the three Dutch trade union confederations differed in their views. Prior to 2006, a solution to the free-rider problem was sought through improved efforts to increase the number of childcare subsidies in collective agreements, hence maintaining voluntary employer subsidies. When this proved insufficient, the Dutch government made good on its threat, thereby re-assuming its regulatory capacity in childcare policy.

The reason why the government has chosen to formally arrange the employer subsidy of childcare in legislation is because the current collective labour negotiations climate and the development thereof, is such that it is not realistic to expect that 90 per cent of employees will have access to a full contribution from the employer by 2008. (MinFin, 2007)

State intervention after the failure of self-regulation has occurred in other policy fields in the Netherlands as well, such as smoking regulations (Weyers, 2010) and pensions. In fact, the failed self-regulation of childcare policy followed by state intervention is exemplary of a broader government trend towards self-regulation in combination with the use of performance norms, demanded of organisations that serve the public interest (Mackor, 2010). By relating childcare to employment, the social partners were indirectly serving the public interest by providing childcare subsidies to employees. The social partners' failure to meet the performance norm, of 90 per cent of childcare subsidies in collective agreements, led to state intervention as a matter of public interest. The failure of a corporatist institutional mechanism explains why the state chose to take the route of self-regulation in childcare policy. Childcare was a relatively new policy area, with care previously taking place within the home and dominant social and political preferences favouring informal over formal care options. Choosing to develop childcare along the trusted route of industrial relations was an obvious choice – a matter of path dependent, increasing returns (Pierson, 2000).

Why the state then decided in 2006 to enforce the performance norm of 90 per cent in a very strict sense must be understood in the context of the various social mechanisms at play. Although the state had been concerned about childcare policy in relation to women's employment prior to 2006, in 2006 participation had become a dominant theme in political discourse. In that year, the newly appointed cabinet created a commission to investigate means of improving employment. The Commission's findings reiterated the need for improved childcare to increase women's labour market participation (Commissie Arbeidsparticipatie, 2006). The installation of this commission and the support for its findings reflects political acceptance of an adult worker family model (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). Therefore, the common perception that childcare is a barrier to women's employment led to the view that the self-regulation of childcare through industrial relations had failed to serve the public interest. To realise participation goals, state involvement was necessary. Simultaneously, the shaping of political forces remained. In theory, there is support for an adult worker family model in the Netherlands. In reality, this model is absent. Most Dutch political parties support the adult worker model, yet many prefer that it take the form of a combination model, whereby paid work and care is shared between men and women (e.g., each working four days a week). But even this preferred combination model is absent. As in most industrialised countries (Cooke and Baxter, 2010), Dutch women continue to be over-represented in household and care work (Merens *et al.*, 2010) and are much more likely to work part-time than men (Merens *et al.*, 2010; SCP, 2008; Yerkes, 2009). In this sense, the Dutch case is exemplary for the ambiguity between aspiring to an individualised adult worker model and the reality of having a 'dual-earner, gender-specialised, family arrangement' (Daly, 2011: 1–2).

Conclusions and discussion

This article has provided an in-depth analysis of how the Dutch welfare state surprisingly re-oriented existing institutional arrangements to address new social risks related to combining work and care. Particularly surprising is the marketised approach to Dutch childcare policy, an approach shaped by a combination of political ideologies seeking consensus on how best to improve women's labour market participation. With the further failure of self-regulation via the social partners, the new role of the state became legitimised. From a theoretical perspective, the Dutch case shows that governance structures can be changed within existing institutional structures, while maintaining the institutional uniqueness of a country's policy structures. While childcare policy was shifted from industrial relations (the status quo) to the welfare state, tripartite financing remained within the new public–private mix of childcare subsidies. The findings presented here confirm Morgan's (2012: 172) conclusion that ideational

developments are important in shaping the content of reform, but simultaneously challenge her conclusion that fundamental changes to electoral politics, such as the need to attract female voters, are more important than ideational shifts. In the Netherlands, it is the *combination* of factors that produced the shift in childcare policy governance and content. Political parties may have been willing to move away from a conservative, male breadwinner model paradigm in search of votes, but the shift in policy and the direction of this policy is the result of a shared perspective that improved childcare was needed for women's employment, combined political ideologies and the failure of corporatist self-regulation in collective bargaining.

A number of changes to childcare policy not discussed above should be noted. By 2007–08, there was some attention given to the link between childcare and education. From 2008 onwards, primary schools were required to offer out-of-school care for children between the ages of four and twelve (Knijn and Saraceno, 2010) and the childcare dossier was shifted from Social Affairs and Employment (MinSAE) to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This change was short-lived however, and childcare was brought back under MinSAE in 2010. In addition, there have been significant cuts to childcare subsidies in recent years, starting in 2011, in an attempt to curb rising childcare expenditures. As part of government plans to cut a further 310 million Euros in childcare costs in 2012 (Rijksoverheid, 2011), parental contributions increased 16.25 per cent and the hours of subsidised childcare are now tied to the working hours of the partner with the smallest working week. In the most recent government negotiations, however, coalition parties have agreed to increase the budget for childcare expenditures for 2014. These continued changes to Dutch childcare policy underscore the infancy of this policy area, and the continued tension between achieving employment goals and keeping social policy expenditures low.

Other European countries continue to struggle with childcare and work–family reconciliation policies as well, demonstrating similar developments and highlighting crucial issues. Despite evidence of ‘path-breaking shifts’ in family policies in countries such as the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, Morgan (2012) argues efforts at work–family reconciliation are primarily targeted at increasing women's employment and not at achieving greater gender equality or improved quality of care, although German family policy may prove to be the exception. Other countries, such as Spain, Italy and Austria, continue to struggle to develop work–family policies at all (Morgan, 2012), with countries like Italy seeking to improve women's employment but without public support or financing (Knijn and Saraceno, 2010).

Given this context, a critical discussion is warranted. First, the provision of childcare is in and of itself insufficient in addressing social risks associated with reconciling work and care (Saraceno, 2011). Affordable, high-quality childcare is important but, without attention to the organisation of work, formal childcare

is unlikely in and of itself to have the desired effect on women's employment. In addition, the singular focus on childcare policy as a labour market instrument means dominant care norms remain largely unchallenged. Moreover, a focus on childcare as the panacea for women's employment ignores issues of child well-being and child development (Engster and Stensöta, 2011; Esping-Andersen, 2009). Family policies, including public childcare, can have a significant, positive impact on child health and well-being (Engster and Stensöta, 2011). But, this type of 'employment-led' social policy (Lewis *et al.*, 2008) ignores issues of child well-being and development and can lead to a deterioration of childcare standards and/or quality (Morgan, 2012; Saraceno, 2011).

Lastly, the use of childcare as a labour market instrument raises issues of gender inequality in social risk protection, a consequence of focusing on paid employment and ignoring gendered divisions of care. Daly (2011) outlines the gender-specialised policies that are the result of attempts to create an adult worker model in contemporary welfare states. In the Dutch case, but in other countries as well, such as the UK and Australia, care is often disregarded in an attempt to focus on activation, a focus that despite its pretence is hardly gender neutral. Lewis and Giullari (2005) have critiqued similar approaches within the European Union. 'While thus implicitly acknowledging the problem of the unequal division of care work in the family that impacts on women's labour market position', the EU creates measures that 'promote female employment as part of the "engine of economic growth". In the hierarchy of policy goals, adult labour-market participation, primarily as a means of promoting economic growth and competitiveness, comes first' (Lewis and Giullari, 2005: 82). Hence, the Dutch approach to childcare, while surprising in relation to welfare state involvement and its marketised approach, creates considerable challenges and problems as a policy response to work and care risks.

Notes

- 1 The term 'new' social risk is problematic from a sociological perspective. The need to reconcile work and care is not new to post-industrial societies. This risk was previously absorbed by the family or to varying degrees by welfare states, through social protection for lone mothers or state-subsidised care facilities for the aged, for example.
- 2 Seeleib-Kaiser and colleagues (2008) argue the Conservative (liberal) approach to family policy would be an absence of policy; childcare was seen to be a private matter. But the *laissez faire* approach of the Dutch Conservative party strongly supports market ideals. For example, the lack of childcare supply until the late 1990s was seen to reflect a lack of demand.
- 3 Childcare policy got its start within the MinHWS primarily due to the organisation of playgroups (*peuterspeelzalen*), which was seen as part of child welfare policy. As discussed, targeted childcare policies were also created at the MinSAE but these policies were separate from childcare policy at the MinHWS.

- 4 These are necessarily simplified representations of political ideology in relation to social policies. For a more detailed discussion on these topics, see, for example, Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.*, (2008), van Kersbergen (1995).
- 5 An earlier version of parts of this text and the interview material used here appear in Yerkes (2011).

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