

Investing in Children, Monitoring Parents: Parenting Support in the Changing German Welfare State

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The long tradition of parent education and support in German social welfare provision has recently acquired a new importance. As in the recent expansion of public early childhood education and care, the current emphasis on supporting parents highlights altered definitions of childhood, shifting boundaries between ‘public’ and ‘private’ in parent–child relations, and new local welfare mixes in service delivery. The article uses a literature review and qualitative interviews with experts, decision makers and service providers: first, to explicate older policy ideas in the new turn to parenting and the strong role being given to model projects for policy reform in the German institutional setting; second, to present recurrent themes in the interviews with professionals working on the ground, such as the new role of childcare centres in accessing parents, ongoing problems of coordination and cooperation in parenting support and issues of evidence and evaluation.

Keywords: Childhood, parenting support, local social services, implementation, Germany.

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, there has been a remarkable and also surprising change in Germany’s public policies for parents and children: a shift towards fostering maternal employment and early childhood education. The federal government has introduced ‘Swedish-style’ parental leave, and has steadily extended full-time childcare with a special focus on children below the age of three. As a consequence, German family policy has become quite employment-friendly and also more service intensive than hitherto.

The change fits closely with expert recommendations. The authors of the influential *Comprehensive Evaluation of German Families Policies* (Bonin *et al.*, 2013), commissioned by the Federal Ministries of Finance and of Family Affairs, advocated investments in public childcare and related early education services. Cash transfers for families such as child benefit, they argued, succeed in reducing families’ risk of poverty but hinder maternal employment. In contrast, childcare and educational services for children simultaneously tackle a whole range of contemporary policy objectives, such as helping parents to enter and stay in employment, and thereby securing their family’s economic well-being, fostering children’s early years and their ‘sure start’, and perhaps even encouraging young adults to have the number of children they desire. In passing only, the experts also suggested new measures to improve parenting skills.

Germany's adoption of comprehensive employment policies for parents has attracted wide public attention, both at home and abroad. In contrast, the proliferation of new child-centred legislation, running parallel to the employment-friendly family policy reforms, has attracted little attention from social policy analysts and the general public alike. Largely ignored, since 2005 an impressive series of new rules and procedures have been inserted into Private (Family) and Public (Social) Law in the best interests of children. These new rules have definitively strengthened both children's legal status *vis-à-vis* their parents and their societal status more generally. They aim at better protection for children, securing their healthy upbringing and early education and are also serving as a mandate for new measures to meet these objectives, mainly in the form of newly designed and better coordinated personal services.

As a corollary to the new child-centred legislation, parents and their parenting practices have come under public scrutiny in Germany (BMFSFJ, 2005). Parents, mostly mothers, are said to be overburdened by their role, under permanent pressure to 'do the right thing' and therefore in urgent need of support (Lutz, 2012). Expert attention is targeted especially at the parents of newborn and small children (below the age of twelve months, who are too young to enter crèches); it often also focuses on young pregnant mothers in apparent need of support and advice.

Professionals have experimented with parenting courses, often imported from abroad and modified to fit their target groups. Some professionals have succeeded in persuading top bureaucrats at the federal and Länder levels to promote and also temporarily subsidise the innovative measures in parenting support they have proposed (see, for overviews, Lösel *et al.*, 2006; DJI, 2011; Correll and Lepperhoff, 2013). These measures have increasingly led groups of experts, as well as decision makers, to emphasise the need for evidence on what works in parent training and education.

As a result of the successful lobbying by policy-related experts and professionals in the field, the federal government has been providing initial funding for the Action Programme *Frühe Hilfen* (Early Support) since 2007. This programme is tasked with the coordination of already existing measures of early parenting support and the *Familienhebamme* (a service along the lines of a family–nurse partnership). From 2015 onwards, the latter programme will be made permanent and financed on a regular basis through the federal budget. Municipalities, formally and legally responsible for social service provision, and local welfare associations (which are the main social service providers according to German federalist rule) have, albeit rather selectively, added a wide variety of parenting support to their standard service portfolio, for instance, short-term Triple P parenting programmes. These local activities have augmented, again largely unnoticed, the service profile of the German welfare state. As a by-product, the state's leeway to act as an 'educator' of parents has also grown. Legal studies scholars argue that the German welfare state has recently become more 'educative' towards its citizens and their lifestyles and behaviour, and also more successful in both monitoring them and persuading them to act appropriately (Schumann, 2014).

We maintain that policy ideas that can be summarised under the heading of 'pedagogical interventions' (that is, interventions with an 'educative' goal) have gained new importance in German social policies and the German welfare state. Kaufmann's (1982) fourfold distinction of social policy interventions helps to provide the broad framework for our analysis of parenting support in Germany. He distinguished between legal, economic, infrastructural and pedagogical interventions. In his view, each form

of intervention intends to improve social inclusion and the equality of citizens' status in society. Recent child legislation (i.e. legal intervention) has advanced children's legal status by extending their entitlements to protection and non-family care and education, and it has simultaneously mandated pedagogical interventions designed to improve parental competencies. The expansion of childcare provision (infrastructural intervention) has helped to establish children's rights to early public education and care, thereby increasing children's opportunities to thrive and parents' opportunities to enter employment. Cash transfers for families (economic intervention) help compensate for the costs of having children and therefore equalise inequalities in economic status between those households with and those without children.

Kaufmann also stressed the ambiguity of pedagogical interventions that inevitably intertwine service provision with the possibility of at least some control. And he pointed to idiosyncrasies in personal pedagogical services that set them apart from social policy measures such as cash transfers or infrastructural inputs. Such services, he maintains, are hard to generalise – they cannot be designed in a 'top-down' way to follow a standard pattern, but depend on the contingencies of personal face-to-face interactions. For these reasons, their enactment and subsequent effectiveness in terms of goal attainment cannot be monitored or measured properly (ibid.: 104). Kaufmann and colleagues pointed to additional problems of implementation (Domscheit *et al.*, 1980). They argued that implementing personal services in the specific German context of federalism and subsidiarity increases contingency of output. Policy implementation in Germany inescapably prompts unforeseen or unintended, yet often quite innovative, solutions rarely planned or anticipated by policy designers and promoters.

In the following sections, we offer some insight into recent legislation and new service provisions in the field of parenting support, drawing on both Kaufmann's ideas and older literature on implementation of new policies as process and evolution (Majone and Wildavsky, 1978). We expect a lot of experimentation in implementing and practising newer forms of parenting support alongside 'business as usual', especially when we take the German institutional context of federalism and subsidiarity into account. Our considerations are based on a literature review, document analyses and, for illustrative reasons only, qualitative interviews conducted with experts, decision makers and service providers in the field of parenting support in 2013 and 2014. This article draws upon research on the German case carried out as part of the comparative project 'Governing New Social Risks – The Case of Recent Child Policies in European Welfare States (PolChi)'.¹

Older traditions of parenting support and the constant need for reform

Neither parent education nor measures for supporting and monitoring how parents rear their children and youth are new in Germany. Institutions such as mothers' centres and family-education sites have been around for decades. Historically, parenting services were predominantly support measures for poor mothers and babies, and were oriented to issues of public health and order. As such, they gradually developed and continuously changed their nature under the umbrella of 'welfare services' (Sachße, 1996; Rudloff, 2011). Rules and procedures for helping and advising parents (in effect, mostly mothers) on how to raise and teach their children properly had been a part of 'public order' legislation and

informed service provision. The public order and related 'policing' logic was to persist throughout most of the twentieth century.

The first comprehensive Youth Welfare Legislation was passed in 1924 in the Weimar Republic and provided the basis for subsequent laws. On the face of it, parenting support became a social right, yet it still followed the older 'policing' logic. Youth welfare and support policies in NAZI Germany and the (socialist) GDR deviated partly from paths devised by the 1924 legislation; however, both regimes kept and even strengthened the policing orientation of their interventions (Rudloff, 1998). The overall approach endured, regardless of political regime (be it dictatorship or democracy), and, although in a somewhat mitigated form, in West Germany (the FRG) as well. As a social welfare service, parenting support inextricably merged the logic of a provision (*Leistung*) with logics of (controlling) intervention (*Eingriff*) (Schneider, 1964). These ambiguities have had a long life and have accompanied local welfare policies and practices in Germany since the introduction of the Youth Support Legislation in 1924, and have influenced the welfare knowledge and daily practice of the various professionals involved in parenting support along with the efforts to contain the control element as far as possible via new legislation.

The 1991 Children and Youth Support legislation (*Social Code VIII, SGB VIII*, still in place) broke radically with the dominant 'policing' and 'social order' tradition and, for the first time, stipulated a universal (formal and material) right of children and youths to an upbringing and education from the state alongside that provided by the family. In the best interests of children and youths, it included the right to related educational and pedagogical public services especially for parents. More concretely, it guaranteed three tiers of parenting support (see, for an overview, BMJFFG, 1986; Jordan, 2005): universal measures for promoting families and their parenting efforts, including parenting education, typically provided by welfare associations (§§ 16–21 SGB VIII: *Förderung der Erziehung in der Familie*); the promotion of universal non-family public childcare as the children's (but not the parents') right (§§ 22–26 SGB VIII: *Förderung von Kindern in Tageseinrichtungen und in Kindertagespflege*); and targeted measures for families in evident need of professional help, mostly in the form of home visiting by social workers and their home-based advice (§§ 27–25, SGB VIII: *Hilfen zur Erziehung*). The third tier still carried the older policing logic, albeit more implicitly. In connection with the first and second tiers, and based on the idea of *Lebensweltorientierung* (i.e. of professional practices that should give serious consideration to parental context, as well as parents' resources and beliefs), such targeted support was intended to reduce and even avoid cases of children being taken from their parents (according to §§ 42–34, SGB VIII: *Inobhutnahme von Kindern und Jugendlichen*).

The 1991 legislation constituted a paradigm shift in three ways. First, it tried to rein in the control element of the guaranteed pedagogical services, addressing their sense of 'intrusive intervention' (*Eingriff*) as far as possible by setting out rules and procedures around the idea of rights to distinct sets of provisions (*Leistung*)² based on the three tiers. What might be called 'soft force' comes into play only in the third tier, for example, when parents who reject advice are confronted with the possibility of losing custody rights over their children. And in contrast to the past, parents and children were given entitlement to jointly decide on measures proposed by professionals. In the second paradigmatic shift, the 1991 reform implied a more radical change of policy ideas in which parents and their children were placed centre stage and made the focus of support; the gestalt of the

'disruptive' and 'deviant' child or youth who might upset the public order had finally disappeared (BMfJFFG, 1986: 29). Instead, children were seen as bearers of individual rights to services. The third paradigmatic shift was the emphasis on the importance of broadly defined prevention and related preventive parenting support measures in the reform. The social pedagogical (family-home-based) family support (*Sozialpädagogische Familienhilfe*, SPFH, § 31, SGB VIII), in practice typically a social worker, was introduced as an innovative measure for the third tier of targeted support for parents in need of help. This revived older, but ideally less controlling, ideas and practices of casework and friendly home visiting for parents with children older than three. As already mentioned, the main objective of the SPFH was to extend and intensify home-based family support and thereby to avoid, or at least delay, any ending of parents' custody over their children. In principle, the 1991 child and youth legislation allowed for the provision of a large range of preventive, open, non-stigmatising and ambulant support measures.

Shortcomings of the 1991 legislation (SGB VIII) were debated from the very beginning of the policy process and continued after implementation. A perceived serious weakness was that the new rules and procedures did not do away with the middle-class bias of many parenting support measures. The new provisions did not reach larger numbers of those assumed to be in need of help, mostly members of the lower socio-economic groups (BMfJFFG, 1986: 34). Child and youth lawyers complained that the legislation still prioritised parental upbringing and parental rights over those of their children (Jordan, 2005: 68). Changing family forms, increasing incidence of young lone mothers, sometimes with multiple children, and the frequency of separation and divorce created new needs and groups in (assumed) need of parenting support. Another critique of Social Code VIII therefore pointed to gaps in parenting support provision for groups that did not qualify for the (more controlling) SPFH. Easy access and non-stigmatising forms of parenting support for parents of children below the age of three and for young pregnant women in need of parenting advice were still lacking. Professionals thus called for a larger variety of lower threshold and more preventive forms of parenting support including early intervention. As a consequence of gaps in services, municipalities and local welfare organisations had in the 1980s already begun to experiment with new measures that added new forms of support to the existing ones in the first tier. Such activity explains the steady proliferation and large number of parenting support services and programmes found by Lösel *et al.* (2006) in their scoping of the field in the early 2000s.

During the last ten years, reforms have tried to tackle some of the weaknesses of Social Code VIII. Widely publicised (although few) cases of child maltreatment and subsequent child death seem to have precipitated such reforms. However, a closer look reveals that the core policy ideas behind the reforms were already in existence for at least two decades and had become slowly familiar and 'normal'. The various child protection cases served as catalysts for the amendments to the SGB VIII in particular and for a broader interpretation of child protection in general. In 2005, a new article (§ 8a, SGB VIII) was inserted into the Social Code under the heading of 'Child Protection Mandate in Cases of Children at Risk' (*Schutzauftrag bei Kindeswohlgefährdung*). It detailed the rules and procedures that must be followed when such risk seems probable along with the range of services to be offered. The 2012 Child Protection legislation (BuKiSchG; KKG) further elaborated the rules outlined in § 8a, SGB VIII. Both reforms intended primarily to improve both the coordination of the many child protection or parent support services and the cooperation between the local service providers involved. The 2012 Child Protection

legislation explicitly named the *Familienhebamme* as a (preferred) new parenting support instrument for parents of newborn children up to the age of one year (Mattern and Lange, 2012). The *Familienhebamme* can therefore be classified as an 'early intervention' (*Frühe Hilfe*), launched in 2006 by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs to help develop and augment early parenting support provisions and related networks. The National Centre for Early Intervention (*Nationales Zentrum Frühe Hilfen*) was founded in 2007 as part of the *Frühe Hilfen* programme of action. The main objectives of the Centre have been to promote and coordinate model projects that develop or test innovative forms of early parenting support (Renner and Sann, 2010). In addition to these activities in the field of parenting support, mandatory invitations and/or mandatory participation in health check-ups for children from birth up to the age of six (the normal school enrolment age in Germany) were established in 2007. The main aim of the check-ups was a quicker and easier identification of child neglect and abuse.

Today, parenting support in Germany includes a wide variety of measures to improve parental skills and achieve better outcomes for children. Newer measures, such as those coordinated and monitored by the National Centre for Early Intervention, along with more standardised measures are provided 'on top' of, or as supplements to, regular provisions proposed by Social Code VIII (support of parental or family upbringing). Support services are offered by municipalities, traditional local welfare organisations and other non-profit associations. Parenting support constitutes a mostly professionalised field for people in regular (standard) employment. However, it also relies on people who engage in the field on a freelance or voluntary basis.

Implementing and practising parenting support in Germany

As mentioned, municipalities (the local level) are formally obliged to provide and finance measures stipulated by Social Code VIII, and these include the steadily expanding public childcare. Amendments to the Code in general, and child protection legislation in particular, have put additional pressure on municipal budgets. This explains, on the one hand, why the federal level and also the *Länder* have increasingly intervened and helped to finance what they perceive to be desirable model projects in the field of early intervention and parenting support. On the other hand, German federalism and subsidiarity explain why both levels have largely abstained from legislating further measures in the field. The programme *Frühe Hilfen*, which from now on will be funded permanently at the federal level, is an exception to this rule.

Taking an overview of the field of parenting support, we witness a mushrooming of local model projects during the last fifteen years. The federal level and *Länder* have usually spent money to encourage the development of 'innovative' forms of helping parents to improve their parenting skills. Examples are Baden-Württemberg, which offers vouchers with which parents can attend a *PEKiP* course (*Prager Eltern Kind Programm*), a typical parenting programme for parents with babies (Landhäusser *et al.*, 2014). In another example, North-Rhine Westphalia has steadily transformed public childcare facilities into easy access family centres that offer, *inter alia*, parenting support. And still another Land, Lower Saxony, subsidises 'family service offices' (*Familienservicebüro*) open to all families and not just to those with children in day care.

From an implementation perspective, such activities in the form of models constitute an interesting variant of welfare state activity, a sort of 'welfare state laboratory' at

the local level for the development of new social services. Domscheit *et al.* (1980) and also Kuller (2004) have studied such local-level model projects in the field of statutory public childcare. Such projects gained momentum during the 1970s and eventually led some thirty years later to a universal and comprehensive right of all children to public day care and, concomitantly, to the rapid expansion of facilities. We assume a similar process will happen in the long term in the field of *Frühe Hilfen*, and that this will also be rather like the 1991 institutionalisation of the *SPFH* (*Social Pedagogical Family Support*) as a statutory provision and, as such, part of the Social Code VIII.

How can we explain the prevalence of model projects in the governance of social service reforms, including reforms in parenting support, in Germany? We should first point out the peculiarity of social services related to pedagogical interventions that, in principle, defy governance from above. In this context, local service providers and professionals working on the ground have traditionally enjoyed significant leeway in implementing and practising parenting support. Second, in the German institutional setting, such leeway in social service provision is also granted by the Basic Law that still privileges welfare associations as social service providers of first resort (in line with the principle of subsidiarity). Federalism and subsidiarity imply that both the federal level and the *Länder* can only introduce measures by law if they subsequently also finance them. Therefore, both levels only provide legal frameworks for social service provision (*Rahmengesetzgebung*) along with initial funding. Subsidiarity and related multi-level and multi-centred governance in the field constitute a welfare state dilemma, because it is still the welfare state that must guarantee the provision of social services. Against this backdrop, one may wonder why reforms and innovations such as the (however slow and weak) institutionalisation of *Frühe Hilfen*, and as one of the pillars, the *Familienhebamme*, could have happened at all. There is still a lack of research on this puzzle. One preliminary answer (among others) could draw on the finding by Domscheit *et al.* (1980: 191–2), to the effect that the multi-level actors involved in the field of parenting support interact on the basis of a degree of consensus, because they depend on their complementary resources, including money. In our own empirical research, we have noticed how federal or *Länder*-level budgets for model projects have sparked off continuous activities by local service providers and, above all, repeated applications for such funding. As a consequence of successful applications, service portfolios have been extended and competition among providers has increased.

The remainder of this section summarises selective insights from the problem-centred qualitative interviews we conducted with experts, decision makers, service providers and practitioners in the field of parenting support. We selected two contrasting *Länder* for our interviews with providers and decision makers, one in East and one in West Germany, and two municipalities, one in each Land. The choice of the two *Länder* was informed by knowledge of contrasting traditions of public health (strong in the formerly socialist East but weak in the West) and social service governance (homogenised and strongly centralised in the East; strictly decentralised and multi-centred in the West). Our sample included providers of old and new parenting support in the two municipalities.

We identified five recurring themes in the interviews: a focus on improving parental competence; a new emphasis on prevention; a new monitoring role for childcare centres; cooperation and coordination as a never-ending task; and the issue of evaluation. We will discuss each of these briefly in turn.

All respondents were of the view that parenting practices should be sensitive to the best interests of the child, and that parenting support therefore must help improve child outcomes such as good health and skill development. The ‘stressed’ or ‘overburdened parent’ was a recurrent theme. A few decision makers and experts viewed parents as ‘second choice’ or ‘second best’ for a child’s good upbringing. This can be interpreted in terms of critiques of the ‘parent-centredness’ of the Social Code VIII that have become more explicit during the last fifteen years. In contrast to the experts we interviewed, professionals working on the ground more frequently emphasised parents’ strengths rather than their weaknesses.

A second very interesting finding was how some respondents subsumed existing forms of parenting services under the heading of ‘child protection’, whereas others extended the notion of protection to also include early childhood education in crèches and childcare centres. Those who favoured such an extended notion of protection also spoke of the need for policies and practices that ‘make childhood, hence parenting, visible’. A few respondents (decision makers and service providers alike) also shared the idea of a ‘prevention chain’ that starts in pregnancy and ends when young people come of age. Respondents’ visions reiterated ideas conveyed by recent public policies that children and parenting should be visible from the outset and monitored continuously via an institutionalised chain of preventive measures. Publicly funded parental support and full-time childcare from early stages on were seen as integral links in this chain. The majority of services for parents delivered by the providers we interviewed were voluntary. However, if the family court (family judge) or youth care services expect parents to seek advice on the basis of the child’s needs, these parents have to comply, and their compliance will be monitored. According to our interviewees, working with parents requires trust and reciprocal recognition; thus, positive outcomes cannot be attained by means of compulsory participation and control.³

A third core finding highlighted how childcare centres have increasingly adopted the role of a ‘door opener’ for improving access to, and targeting of, hitherto ‘invisible’ children (typically those of lower socio-economic and/or migrant status). Interviewees spoke about migrant families which still expect mothers to take care of infants at home. Incentivised by public subsidies, mostly provided by the Länder, many providers have tailored their services to attract migrant mothers (if possible also their partners) and foster intercultural understanding (SVR, 2013). Among the measures mentioned were employing staff with migrant backgrounds, bilingual parent training or offering the highly popular (ethnically mixed) cooking courses. Instruments and ‘low-threshold’ locations such as childcare and family centres or schools for ‘hard-to-reach’ parents have multiplied (see also Pauschardt *et al.*, 2010).

Fourthly, parenting support is apparently a field of ongoing contestation. Due to the heterogeneity of the field in Germany, persons who provide support to parents have rather diverse backgrounds. Parenting courses, especially the standardised programmes, can be run by people with little training, who have different occupational backgrounds and often do not earn a sufficient wage, even working on a freelance basis. Respondents’ accounts also drew attention to how differences in occupational status, hierarchies among professions, and distinct professional philosophies hinder coordination and cooperation in the field of child protection and parenting support. Our respondents clearly saw the need for further efforts to coordinate existing activities better and to overcome ‘professional closure’. Medical doctors were said to habitually act as strong barriers to improved

coordination and cooperation. Such well-known problems formed the backdrop to federal and Länder initiatives that subsidise and thus encourage network building and related cooperation in parenting support, especially in early intervention (*Frühe Hilfen*).

Finally, Kaufmann (1982) repeatedly insisted that personal services are hard to standardise and their outcomes difficult to measure. Majone and Wildavsky (1978: 112) were convinced that ‘the implementation of innovative educational policies is much more difficult because of a widespread lack of confidence in the underlying cognitive theories’. Correspondingly, any evaluation of outcomes is bound to be tricky. Nowadays, however, most providers and practitioners, including those interviewed, make use of some form of evaluation. Typically, such evaluation is based on feedback from parents and rarely on a controlled study. This might reflect Kaufmann’s scepticism and the problems he foresaw for any attempt to measure the service outcome exactly, or, as one respondent put it: ‘it isn’t about participant numbers, when we judge the success of a measure, what really helps us is the personal feedback of participants’. Public funding for systematic evaluation rarely exists, and, if it does, the criteria for measuring success vary. The SPFHs or the *Familienhebammen*, for instance, draft individual agreements about targets in cooperation with the supported parents. As one respondent put it, evidence-based practice ‘is in its infancy’ at the current time. Progress in this regard might be fuelled by public funders’ demands for more evidence-based practice, especially when health concerns are involved, given that health is a field with a strong history of measuring effectiveness.

Conclusion and further thoughts

This article has presented evidence for the emergence of new forms of parenting support in Germany: how these have been implemented and also interpreted by professionals on the ground. Up to now, new measures have mostly supplemented older ones. However, as the recent proliferation of legal and pedagogical interventions, as well as efforts to coordinate these better suggest, new policy ideas, even when implemented only weakly, may in the longer run significantly change not only the toolkit of service provision but also service logics and the everyday practices of service delivery. The new emphasis on early prevention, as in the programme *Frühe Hilfen*, has already narrowed the cleavage between the historically separated pillars of public health, on the one side, and parenting support services, on the other. It may strengthen hitherto weak public health in Germany in the future, and provide new opportunities for more robust top-down planning of local social services (see, for instance, Niedersächsisches Ministerium, 2015: 61). These trends indicate a weakening of the (contested) principle of subsidiarity in Germany and thus a deviation from a long-trodden (West) German path.

Our interviewees pointed to a change in the meaning of being a parent and of parents’ status both in society at large and *vis-à-vis* their children. In turn, children’s societal status has been transformed. From a sociological point of view, this transformation can be heuristically captured by looking at core elements of ‘modern childhood’ such as ‘protection’, ‘scholarisation’ or ‘familialisation’ (Mierendorff and Ostner, 2014). New parenting support now focuses on early childhood (on toddlers up to the age of three), and, thus, aims at extended protection (see §8a SGB VIII, the KKG, or §1666, Civil Code). At the same time, ‘scholarisation’ has been expanded and education now starts in early childhood (§ 24, SGB VIII). ‘Familialisation’ has also significantly changed in nature:

policies have rendered modern 'family childhood' and parenting visible by, among other things, increasing the 'responsibilisation' of parents (Oelkers, 2012). 'Preventive chains' and related services have contributed to this change, and, more generally, to newly blurred boundaries between public and private. This blurring is well captured by the public (policy) discourse of 'growing up in public and private responsibility' (*Aufwachsen in öffentlicher und privater Verantwortung*) (note the sequence!) under the auspices of an 'attentive state' (*achtsamer Staat*) (BMFSFJ, 2013: 37).

The long historical root of parenting support as a control on parents seems to have been rejuvenated. Our interviewees pointed to tragic child protection cases driving this change. Other drivers matter, too, including, for instance, functional concerns that emphasise 'resource management', related issues of public health and social investments in an increasingly competitive economy. Here, we suggest that even after the comprehensive reform of Child and Youth legislation in 1991, the provisions constituted a field of continuous contestation. The fiercest critics of the 'parent-centredness' of the 1991 legislation have been advocates of children's individual rights. They found new opportunities to push their interests when awareness of child maltreatment was on the increase. Hence, the turn to parenting is an apposite example with which to study how older ideas find new windows of opportunity to influence policy design and implementation.

Notes

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2 See Schneider (1964) for a detailed discussion of 'Eingriff' (intervention) versus 'Leistung' (provision) in German legislation and public policy.

3 See Eisentraut and Turba (2013) for a discussion of dilemmas of support and control for the newly established Familienhebammen.

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