

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

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Abstract:	<p>The authors combine historical and sociological institutional analysis to investigate how family policies developed in four Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. They argue that despite the political and socioeconomic transformation in 1990s, the institutional development during and before the communist era provides the best explanation for current family policies in the region. Their article goes against the mainstream literature on path-dependency by arguing that decisions that send countries down important paths of policy making do not need to be decisions that appeared to be important at the time they were taken. They identify four critical junctures that were decisive in setting the four countries down their current paths of development, the relatively conservative paths in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the relatively liberal path in Poland, and the most generous path in Hungary. These critical junctures include the incorporation of the two-tier model of separate care for younger and older pre-school children in late 1800s, the decision in 1930s/1940s to place kindergartens for children 3-5 under the Ministry of Education, the decision in 1950s to place nurseries for children under three under the Ministry of Health, and the decision in 1960s to introduce extended maternity leaves.</p>



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3 **The Revenge of History: the Institutional Roots to Post-Communist Family**
4 **Policy in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia**
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10 In 1872 the Austro-Hungarian Empire passed a law codifying the division of
11 childcare facilities into nurseries for children under three and kindergartens for
12 children 3-5. In the early 1950s the communist regimes in Central Europe made
13 another decision: to move nurseries to the Ministry of Health. At the time that these
14 decisions were made, few would have expected them to have long-lasting influence
15 on family policies and gender relations in the region; yet this article shows that this
16 is exactly what happened. This article combines historical and sociological
17 institutionalism to analyze how family policies developed in four Central European
18 countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). It shows that two
19 decades after the collapse of communism, the main differences in policies today
20 already existed under communist rule. Furthermore, the policy decisions made under
21 communist rule did not occur in a vacuum, but rather were influenced by choices
22 made as far back as the previous century. Moreover, this article goes against the
23 mainstream literature on path-dependency by arguing that decisions that send
24 countries down important paths of policy making do not necessarily need to be
25 decisions that appeared to be important at the time they were taken.
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48 This article focuses on both, family policies and gender relations, because as
49 feminist scholars have pointed out, few policies influence gender relations as much
50 as family policies. Affordable access to childcare facilities makes it easier for
51 women to have careers, because they can return more quickly to the labor market
52 after giving birth. Paid parental leave benefits also make it easier for women to have
53 children, both because having a child becomes more affordable and because
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legislation on parental leaves almost always includes the right for women to return to their previous jobs.¹ Parental leaves can also increase gender equality by encouraging fathers to share in childcaring by offering paternity leave periods that are only reserved for the father and by having the leaves insurance based, so that families do not lose much money if the father stays at home (given the fact that in most families fathers have higher salaries than mothers). Generous parental leave policies and access to childcare facilities also make it easier for single mothers to survive without the support of their former partners. Consequently, an analysis of family policies goes far in examining how state policies influence gender relations (Lewis, 1993; Lewis 1997; Sainsbury, 1994).

This article proceeds by briefly comparing family policies in the four countries, then it gives reasons for rejecting alternative explanations of the development of such policies in the region, before developing an institutional analysis of the development that combines historical and sociological institutionalism.

Comparing Central European Family Policies

The post-communist countries provide particularly interesting cases for analyzing the development of family policies. On the one hand, the communist countries induced mothers to work by radically increasing access to childcare facilities (although they did less so in Poland) and introducing wages policies that made it nearly impossible for a family to survive on one wage. On the other hand, the communist regimes also introduced gendered leave policies that re-enforced the role of women as the sole carers. Thus, all countries combined insurance-based maternity leave with “extended maternity leaves.” The maternity leaves usually paid

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3 about 90-100% of the mother's previous salary and were about 6 months long except
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5 in more laissez-faire, liberal Poland, where they were only 4 months. The next period
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7 entailed a flat-rate "extended maternity leave" which was at such a low level that few
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9 fathers would agree to take it even if they were allowed to. Some important
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11 differences arose; however, as in Poland the extended leave was means-tested and in
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13 Hungary an extra two-year leave was introduced in the 1980s, based on the income-
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15 replacement principle, which gave mothers 75% of their previous income.²
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20 Hence, under communist rule the main differences in policies had already
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22 emerged that we can observe today among the four Central European countries.
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24 Poland followed a relatively more liberal, laissez-faire policy of less state-
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26 involvement in family policies by making maternity leaves shorter and introducing
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28 the extended leave first without any benefit at all and then means-tested, while
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30 giving much less support for childcare institutions (see table 1). Czechoslovakia
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32 followed a relatively more conservative policy that explicitly encouraged mothers to
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34 stay at home for longer periods than in Poland by making the maternity leave longer
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36 (6 months compared to 4) and by making the extended leave universal (paying a flat-
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38 rate rather than being means-tested as in Poland). Hungary's policies came relatively
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40 closer to the Scandinavian model in the sense that besides building out daycare, the
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42 regime also introduced an extended leave (GYED) based on the income replacement
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44 principle, although similar to Czechoslovakia, it also included an optional flat-rate
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46 leave (GYES). Mothers who did not qualify for GYED could choose GYES and
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48 mothers who went on the two-year income-replacement GYED could choose to stay
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50 at home for an extra year and receive the GYES for that third year. Of course, the
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52 term "relative" is important here, as Czechoslovakia and Poland gave more support
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54 to childcare than typical conservative and liberal countries in Western Europe at that
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3 time. Meanwhile Hungary still deviated from the Scandinavian countries in that its
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5 leaves were not open to fathers.
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11 TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE
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15 Since the collapse of communism, these policy differences have basically
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17 remained. However, one difference is that Hungary has been the only country to a
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19 large extent has continued support for its nurseries, while nurseries have sharply
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21 decreased in Poland and have nearly become extinct in both the Czech Republic and
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23 Slovakia. Parents in the Czech Republic and Slovakia often try to get around this by
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25 enlisting their two-years in kindergartens when spaces are free. Since the breakup of
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27 Czechoslovakia an additional difference arose in that the Czech Republic extended
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29 its leaves, so that mothers can stay at home for four years compared to three in
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31 Slovakia; and later, the flat rate system in the Czech Republic became more
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33 complicated as parents could choose three different types of leave periods, with the
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35 shorter leaves receiving higher monthly benefits than longer leaves. Another
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37 important change is that all four countries have opened up their extended leaves to
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39 fathers, although with the exception of Hungary, the benefit level is too low to
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41 encourage many fathers from actually utilizing their rights to the leaves, given the
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43 fact that fathers usually earn more than mothers within families.
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50 These examples show that despite the revolutionary change that took place in
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52 post-communist societies in 1989, this radical transformation did not cause radical
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54 changes in family policies; rather adjustments in family policies basically followed
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56 the institutional legacies of policies made under communist rule and before. Before
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3 developing our argument further, we briefly consider alternative explanations of the
4 development of post-communist family policies.
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10 *Alternative Explanations of Post-Communist Family Policies*

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12 During the first decade of the transition to democracy and a market economy,
13 feminist scholars argued that the Central European governments were trying to
14 encourage mothers to leave the labor market by making sharp cutbacks in support for
15 nurseries that served children under three, while at the same time extending the
16 length of extended maternity leaves. These authors usually blamed the anti-feminist
17 ideological legacy from the communist period as the main cause for these policies
18 (Ferge 1997b; Funk, 1993; Heitlinger, 1996; Renne, 1997; Robinson, 1995).
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29 Even though the anti-feminist legacy certainly influenced the attitudes of the
30 policy makers, this argument cannot explain why so many important differences still
31 remain among the post-communist countries. The most common of these
32 explanations has centered on the influence of international organizations (i.e. Ferge,
33 1997a; Deacon 2000). According to this hypothesis, countries with large foreign
34 debts (i.e. Hungary and Poland) open themselves to pressures from these
35 international credit givers, such as the IMF and World Bank to cut back on public
36 spending and to incorporate free-market reforms, while countries without large
37 foreign debts (i.e. Czech and Slovakia) do not face such pressures. It may be true
38 that pressures from international organizations in conjuncture with the Hungarian
39 debt crisis helped induce the Hungarian socialists in 1995 to remove the generous
40 two-year leave, while making the flat-rate leave means-tested. Yet, when a
41 conservative coalition government came to power in 1998, it promptly re-instated the
42 previous system and subsequent governments have not dared to touch the system.
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Not only has Hungary basically reverted to its communist era family policies, today the same general rule applies for all of the Central European countries. As already noted, the main differences among them today are precisely the main differences that existed under communist rule. Thus, even explanations based on differences on the mobilization of women (Glass and Fodor, 2007) cannot explain the fact that the main differences in policies existed even before women living under communist rule had the possibility of organizing around their interests and making policy demands on the state.

Since the greatest differences in policies among the four countries existed already under communist rule, to understand the development of today's policies we must at least go back to the communist period. In this sense, this article connects to a very recent trend that investigates the connection between communist family policies and post-communist family policies in Central Europe (Heinen and Wator, 2006; Bicksel, 2006; Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006; Saxonberg and Szelewa 2007). However, the question remains *why* the Central European countries enacted such policies in the Communist era. Perhaps the main pillars underlying these policies were already in place *before* the communist regimes came to power?

Historical and Sociological Institutional Explanations

In contrast to the theories on female mobilization or the influence of international organizations, which emphasize current conditions, historical institutionalists emphasize the importance of decisions that are made in previous periods, which set countries on difference trajectories (Mahoney, 2000; Peters, Pierre and King, 2005). They note that once countries follow a certain path, it becomes difficult to leave this path, hence the term "path dependency."

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It is most common to call a period a “critical juncture” (Collier and Collier, 1991), when a decision is made that sets a country down a new path. Even though theorists of path dependency originally claimed that a critical juncture arose when exogenous shocks caused crises (Pierson, 2000: 266), we argue that the critical choices made concerning family policy might not seem very important at the time; neither were the actors necessarily aware how seemingly small decisions might have great impact at a later date. Small choices about institutional arrangements can have great impact at a later date (Berman, 1998; Pierson, 2000). Thus, although some theorists (i.e. Rothstein 1992) point out that actors might not correctly predict the outcomes of their choices, we go one step further in arguing that they might not even be aware that they are making a critical decision that will have an important impact on further policy development. Moreover, as Kenny (2007: 95) notes, “seemingly neutral institutional processes and practices are in fact embedded in hidden norms and values, privileging certain groups over others.” Thus, for example, the decision to move nurseries to the Ministry of Health might seem to be neutral concerning gender relations, but this study shows, this decision turned out to have great impact for future gender relations in Central Europe.

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It is common to focus on *one* critical juncture, but we see institutional development as a continuous process in which several critical junctures might arise, although the decisions undertaken at a second critical juncture are greatly influenced by the path taken during the first critical juncture, etc. Our approach comes close to Haydu’s (1998) notion of “sequenced problem solving” in which policy makers make important decisions that influence the path of development, but these decisions are based on previous decisions. However, we disagree with Haydu’s argument that policy makers make these important decisions to solve problems that are directly

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3 related to the outcomes. On the contrary, important decisions were not necessarily
4 made to solve issues that policymakers perceived as grave problems at the time, but
5 rather were often the byproducts of other decisions.
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10 Our model can be illustrated by diagram 1. At point A policy makers must
11 choose between two possibilities, B_1 or B_2 . Once they choose one of these options,
12 they go down a different path, but at a later stage they once again will face important
13 choices at a new critical juncture. If they choose B_1 instead of B_2 , then at some point
14 they will have to choose between C_1 and C_2 but they will not consider C_3 and C_4 , to
15 be an option. However, if they choose B_2 instead of B_1 then at a later date they will
16 have to choose between C_3 and C_4 , but they will not consider C_1 or C_2 to be an
17 option. The same logic applies to critical juncture D, etc.
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36 However, despite the importance of earlier decisions setting a country down a
37 particular path, it is possible for countries that originally sailed down different paths
38 to eventually merge as they do at point D_4 . Thus, our model also shows how
39 countries that originally went down somewhat different paths still can converge at
40 later stages.
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DIAGRAM 1 TO BE PLACED ABOUT HERE

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52 Our approach also comes close to what Streeck and Thelen (2005: 9) consider
53 to be incremental by gradual transformation, rather than by abrupt change. Our
54 article comes close to the way Streeck and Thelen's modified usage of the term
55 "layering" to allow for the continuous adding of new layers of policies over old ones
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3 (which contrasts to Thelein's 2004 original limitation of layers as policies that
4 expanded to include new groups). They point out that political actors introduce
5 important changes that they initially sell as only corrections in order not to "provoke
6 countermobilization by defenders of the status quo" (Streeck and Thelen 2005: 23).
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8 Our study goes one step further in arguing that changes, which turn out to be
9 important might not even seem important at the time, which means that policy-
10 makers do not always even need to "sell" the changes.
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20 In contrast to purely historical approaches, we combine historical
21 institutionalism with sociological institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996: 948) that
22 emphasizes the manner in which institutions influence norms and attitudes. As
23 Pierson (2000) notes, institutions influence the manner in which we filter
24 information into "existing mental maps." While agreeing with Pierson on this point,
25 we disagree with his conception of countries constantly moving down one clear path
26 (because of the "increasing returns" of staying on path), but rather, we see that each
27 choice at a critical juncture pushes the country in a slightly different direction. We
28 should also note that even if we do not see a country following a straight line down a
29 clear path, we do agree with other theorists that a certain "logic of appropriateness"
30 arises, which induces policy makers to think that certain policies are more
31 "appropriate than others," even if they are not the most efficient. Moreover, we agree
32 with Chappell's (2006: 226) emphasis on the gendered biasness of what can be
33 considered appropriate.
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52 In other words, institutions and culture continuously interact with each other.
53 When policy makers make choices at critical junctures, they are influenced by
54 dominating cultural norms, as well as by norms within their own groups (such as the
55 Communist Party). However, once they make choices these institutional changes in
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3 turn influence culture by creating a certain logic of appropriateness. Because of
4 limits of space, we will concentrate on the manner in which institutions create logics
5 of appropriateness, rather than analyzing all of the factors that influence decisions at
6 each period. This has the advantages of emphasizing how institutional changes create
7 their own dynamics including influencing the “existing mental maps.”
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20 *Empirical Analysis*

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22 Our analysis focuses on four critical junctures and in all four cases, it is extremely
23 doubtful whether the policy makers could have imagined what kind of impact these
24 decisions would have on post-communist society:
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- 29 1) the incorporation of the two-tier model of separate care for younger
30 and older pre-school children in late nineteenth century,
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- 33 2) the decision in the first half of the twentieth century to make
34 kindergartens for pre-school children from the age of three a fixed part of the
35 national schooling system under the supervision of the Ministry of Education,
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- 41 3) the decision in 1950s to place nurseries for children under three
42 under the supervision of the Ministry of Health,
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- 45 4) the decision in 1960s to introduce a paid “extended maternity leave”.
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50 *The First Critical Juncture: the Adaptation of the Two-Tier Model*

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52 The roots of public childcare in the territory of contemporary Czech Republic,
53 Hungary and Slovakia date back to the nineteenth century when the area was part of
54 Austrian Empire. Poland was partitioned by three different countries: Austria,
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3 Germany and Russia. All four countries from the beginning established a two-tier
4 system of nurseries for children under three and kindergartens for older children.
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8 Nurseries originally came about in the 1850s so that poor mothers could work
9 both in the Austrian Empire (Fellner, 1884; Lederer, 2001) and in the Polish
10 territories (Pietrusiński, 1958). Kindergartens also emerged in this period, but
11 originally they were based on the model that Fröbel developed in Germany, which
12 had pedagogical goals rather than the goal of enabling women to work. Since
13 kindergartens charged fees and were only open 4-5 hours per day, they mainly
14 catered to the middle class (Mišurcová, 1980). However, in contrast to the pure
15 Fröbelian pedagogical model, a second type of kindergarten emerged in the Austrian
16 Empire, known as “Volkkindergartens.” They combined Fröbelian pedagogy with
17 the long open hours, so that poor mothers could work (Fellner, 1884; Helm, 1851;
18 Heckel, 1969). Another important difference is that the “Volkkindergartens” taught
19 in the national languages of the area, while the Kindergartens taught in German.
20 Consequently, the “Volkkindergartens” became much more popular and widespread
21 since they supported the increasing national aspirations of the Czechs, Hungarians,
22 Poles and Slovaks.
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43 Hungarian nationalism was more highly developed in the early 1800s than in
44 the Czech, Slovak and Polish territories and eventually achieved equal status in the
45 1860s as the empire renamed itself Austro-Hungarian. In contrast to the rest of the
46 Austro-Hungarian Empire, kindergartens in Hungary went under the Ministry of
47 Education, as the government saw promoting the Hungarian language as one of the
48 key purposes for these institutions. Nevertheless, this ministry shared its
49 responsibility with the Ministry of Interior (Bicksel, 2006: 156-158).
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3 In the Czech lands, the majority of kindergartens were German in the 1800s.
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6 Czech nationalists criticized this and established an association for promoting Czech
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8 “Volkkindergartens” to train children to enter Czech rather than German schools
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10 (Mišurcová, 1980).
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13 In the Polish case, “Volkkindergartens” were quite rare and instead a third
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15 type dominated, called “ochronki”. These “ochronki” often incorporated pedagogical
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17 tasks, making them in practice similar to the “Volkkindergarten.” In the Russian
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19 sector they became centers of social resistance against the tsarist Russification of
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21 Polish children and the youth (Lepalczyk, 1988: 74).
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25 This development can help explain why the communist governments met
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27 little resistance when they decided to sharply increase the number of kindergartens
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29 when coming to power. It can also help explain the fact that while post-communist
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31 governments with conservative views toward gender roles, drastically cut back
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33 support for nurseries (except Hungary), they did not decrease support much for
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35 kindergartens. Whereas they tended to see nurseries as a “communist” idea (since the
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37 communists radically expanded them during their rule), kindergartens still rang a
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39 positive tone among conservative nationalists.
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44 In 1872 the first critical juncture arose in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as it
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46 institutionalized the incorporation of the two-tier model of nurseries for children
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48 under three and kindergartens for children from the age of three with the Imperial
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50 School Act from that year. Kindergartens were supposed to care and educate
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52 children under control of School Offices (§17) while nurseries only had to follow
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54 basic sanitary guidelines (§27). This act thus codified the division of pre-school
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56 children into two groups and ingrained into society the notion that only children over
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58 three should be included into kindergartens, which also reinforced the notion that
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3 two-year old children were fundamentally different than three-year old children and
4 should be treated differently. In contrast, for example, in both the United States and
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6 Sweden nurseries have been open for pre-school children of all ages.³ Consequently,
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8 in these countries no such discourse has emerged that separates pre-school children
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10 into two age groups, even though Sweden actually did have kindergartens for 3-6
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12 year olds until the late 1970s-early 1980s.
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18 In Poland, the situation was a little more complicated, as only the Austrian
19 controlled sector was directly influenced by the Imperial School Act, but the other
20 sectors had the same division and this division was codified when the country gained
21 independence in 1918 (Kurcz, 2005: 24). It would have been difficult to imagine this
22 at that time, but this institutional division was to have great impact on gender roles a
23 century later.
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35 *The Second Critical Juncture: The Definition of Kindergartens as Educational*
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37 *Facilities and their further Separation from Nurseries*
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40 As already noted, the kindergartens, “Volkkindergartens” and the “ochronki” all had
41 pedagogical goals. Nevertheless, with the exception of Hungary, both kindergartens
42 and nurseries were under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Care.
43 Kindergarten teachers saw themselves, though, as pedagogues and fought to have
44 their institutions placed under the Ministry of Education (i.e. Mišurcová, 1980).
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52 In Poland, this move to the Ministry of Education took place already in 1932
53 when the Education System Act (Journal of Laws, no. 38, item 389) codified
54 kindergartens as part of the educational system, thus giving rise to the second critical
55 juncture. The Preschool Educational Department at the Ministry of Religious
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3 Persuasions/Denominations and Public Education now took responsibility for
4 running kindergartens (Graniewska, 1971: 15).
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8 In Czechoslovakia and Hungary this reform did not come about until the
9 communists came to power. In 1948 the second critical juncture arose in
10 Czechoslovakia as the communist regime introduced legislation to move
11 responsibility for kindergartens from the Ministry of Social Care to the Ministry of
12 Education (Act on Unified Education No. 95/1948 Coll.). This was part of a general
13 shift in all Stalinist countries as the official ideology proclaimed that under socialism
14 the economy would provide for everyone's needs, so no ministry of social affairs,
15 welfare or social caring was necessary. In Czechoslovakia, the government dissolved
16 the Ministry of Social Care in 1951 (Schiller 1971).
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29 In Hungary, kindergartens were under the joint supervision of the Ministries of
30 Education and Interior, but in 1945 the Ministry of Welfare took over the main
31 responsibility from the Ministry of Interior (Bicksel, 2006: 162). 1949 became a
32 critical juncture as the Ministry of Education took over the main responsibility from
33 the Ministry of Welfare which was about to be abolished by the new Stalinist
34 leadership (Bicksel, 2006: 163).
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44 *If* these governments would not have divided the responsibility for nurseries
45 and kindergartens to different ministries, the separation of the two age groups would
46 not necessarily have been permanent. Attempts at combining these facilities in the
47 1960s failed in Czechoslovakia because the carers of children under three still came
48 under the jurisdiction of a different ministry than the carers of children 3-5 and thus
49 had to still follow different legal requirements, which made it too complicated to run
50 joint facilities.⁴ Thus, for example, they could not follow the Swedish path for
51 quickly building out daycare. There both nurseries and kindergartens remained under
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3 one ministry, which prevented infighting between ministries over the jurisdiction of
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5 childcare facilities. This made it possible for the government to create a generous
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7 one-tier system by radically building out crèches (which were open for children 0-6)
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9 until they gradually almost completely replaced kindergartens (that were reserved for
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11 children 3-6) (Johansson and Åstedt, 1993) without angering a ministry that might
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13 have lost control over the disappearing kindergartens.
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18 Finally, we should note that even if all three governments followed Stalin's
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20 productionist policy of building out childcare facilities so that mothers could work,
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22 Poland still lagged behind Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Antoni Rajkiewicz, who
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24 was Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in 1981-82, claims that the main reason
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26 why the Polish regime did not decide to build out childcare facilities as much as in
27
28 the other communist countries, is that it faced opposition from the Catholic Church,
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30 which had much greater influence in Catholic Poland than in the more secular
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32 Czechoslovakia and Hungary even before 1989.⁵
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40 *The Third Critical Juncture: Nurseries and the Creation of the Health Problem*

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42 While kindergartens came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, in the
43
44 early 1950s, the Ministry of Health took over responsibility for running the
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46 nurseries. In Poland this third critical juncture arose in 1950 (Graniewska, 1971: 31;
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48 Przybylska, 1988: 103), while in Czechoslovakia it was in 1952.⁶ Whereas the
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50 previous system viewed care of children under three more in terms of being a social
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52 issue (so that poor mothers could work), a medical model emerged in 1950s (Tekla,
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54 2007: 33). Even though the nurses were specialized in care for small children, their
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56 education was primarily medical (Klíma, 1969: 80; Jančíková, 1979: 10).
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3 The Central European countries moved nurseries to the ministries of health
4 for several reasons. Communist dogma prescribed that the ministries of social
5 welfare close down, since “socialist economics” was supposed to solve all social
6 problems; thus, there would be no more need to have a ministry dealing with social
7 issues. The Soviet Union had already defined its nurseries as healthcare facilities, so
8 the new communist states were expected to follow suit. It was also part of a
9 communist healthcare reform aiming to decrease infant and child mortality and
10 illness rate as well as to ensure acute and preventive healthcare (Sinkulová 1950;
11 Janouch 1951).
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25 The Stalinist era also created a productionist view that the state should
26 radically built out nurseries to enable women to remain in the workforce, without
27 considering pedagogical-psychological issues for children. The state saw nurseries as
28 economic units, and as such they were more “efficient” if the ratio of children per
29 children’s nurse and nursery was rather high. Consequently, nurseries received rather
30 poor reputations for their supposedly low quality and for being overcrowded.
31 Because of the problem of overcrowdedness, children did not receive the attention
32 they needed and it became easier for illnesses to spread among the children
33 (Heitlinger 1996; Götting 1998: 228; Čermáková et al., 2000: 92). Thus, writing
34 already under communist rule, Przybylska (1988: 104) claimed in Poland that if
35 nurseries had adhered to the Ministry of Education, the quality of care would have
36 increased, as the nurseries would have been able to employ psychologists and
37 pedagogues instead of nurses.
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56 In Czechoslovakia discussions also arose about moving the nurseries to the
57 Ministry of Education in order to make it possible to introduce more child-centered
58 caring (Klíma 1969). The discourse on illnesses of children under the age of three
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3 (rooted in the 1950s institutional arrangement) successfully blocked such attempts at
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5
6 institutional reform. Again the link between historical and sociological
7
8 institutionalism becomes clear, as previous institutional change (moving nurseries to
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10 the Ministry of Health) also influences the norms and cultural values of the policy-
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12 makers, who continued to see nurseries as a health issue rather than a pedagogical or
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14 child psychology issue, which in turn prevented the development of more humanistic
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16 childcare for children under three.
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20 Despite the problems of communist nurseries becoming healthcare facilities, it
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22 appears that Hungary in the 1970s began reforming them and started to place more
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24 emphasis on non-medical issues, as the country under the rule of Janos Kádár went
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26 in a more reformist-liberalizing direction. In the more open Hungarian climate,
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28 researchers and policy-makers were able to come into contact with more humanistic,
29
30 international trends concerning childcare. This induced Hungarian policy makers and
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32 researchers, who were responsible for childcaring facilities, to take such steps as
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34 encouraging parents to attend the nurseries with their children during the first two
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36 weeks to allow their children to become accustomed to the atmosphere.⁷ Thus, in
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38 turn, cut down on frequent traumatic experience of infants crying as their parents
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40 dropped them off at the nurseries. In Czechoslovakia, by contrast, the Warsaw Pact
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42 invasion stopped the country's opening to the West, which also meant that those in
43
44 charge of nursery policies were more cut-off than their Hungarian neighbors from
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46 international trends toward a more child-centered childcare (while Polish policy-
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48 makers also become more cut-off than Hungarians in the aftermath of reprisals after
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50 protests in 1968, 1970, 1980-81). To this day, images of mothers leaving crying
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52 children comprise the common horror story about the supposed evils of nurseries in
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54 the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The official reason for not letting parents spend
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3 some time with their children so that they could become accustomed to their new
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5 settings was that it would be a health risk!
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11 *The Fourth Critical Juncture: Introduction of the “Extended Maternity Leave”*
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14 In the 1960s, demographers, psychologists and pediatricians began questioning
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16 the policy of promoting childcare services for children under three as fertility rates
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18 fell in a situation where women increasingly worked, while childcare places were not
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20 enough to meet demand, labor shortages had subsided, and nurseries came under
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22 increasing criticism. Kindergartens remained much more popular than nurseries, as
23
24 the population did not perceive them merely as places for storing children so that
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26 mothers could work; instead they saw kindergartens as having strong pedagogical
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28 roles, as teachers rather than nurses took care of the children there.
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34 The definition of young children under three as a health issue was a part of
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36 the Stalinist productionist view of the early 1950s that continued to dominate among
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38 the communist elite. This view contributed to arguments for introducing extended
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40 maternity leaves in the region: if the main goal of nurseries was to enable women to
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42 work and women were the sole childcarers at home, then if their children became
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44 sick, mothers must leave their jobs to stay at home and take care of their children.
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46 Moreover, if children got sick, the capacity of nurseries was not fully utilized. A
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48 logic of appropriateness arose that encouraged the communist rulers to introduce
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50 extended maternity leaves, as from the productionist viewpoint, it was more efficient
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52 if women stayed at home for the whole period of three years than to subsidize
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54 nurseries, that were partially empty due to sickness.
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Of course, theoretically, it would have been possible to fight declining fertility rates by making it easier for women to balance work and family life by improving the standards of daycare and by encouraging fathers to share in the childraising chores. However, given the gendered logic of appropriateness, the policy makers never considered the policy of promoting equal gender roles at the home, as they still considered childcaring to be solely a female duty; consequently, they never gave fathers the right to take childcare leaves (Hašková, 2007; Saxonberg, 2003). And given the institutional obstacles to creating combined childcaring institutions for children 0-6 (such as the fact that responsibility for children over and below three belonged to two different ministries), rather than considering the introduction of father leaves or changing the healthcare character of the nurseries, the obvious gender-biased choice of the policy makers was to induce mothers to stay at home for longer periods, so that they would not have to build as many new nurseries.

Consequently, the leaders followed the advise of demographers and decided to encourage women to have children by making it easier for them to stay at home. Thus, in late 1960s a fourth critical juncture arose as the communist regime decided to introduce an extra “extended maternity leave.” In Czechoslovakia the leave was introduced in 1964 and was supposed to successively increase to three years to reduce reliance on nurseries (Klíma, 1969). Thus, this extended leave pushed Czechoslovakia down a more conservative path of development, by inducing mothers to stay at home for long periods. By the 1980s most mothers stayed at home at least two years, while in the 1960s the majority stayed at home less than two years and 42% for at most one year (Hašková and Uhde, 2009).

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Meanwhile, Poland began moving down a more liberal path, as it extended maternity leave benefits that were originally unpaid, then they became means-tested (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 1995: 55). The former Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Antoni Rajkiewicz, recalls the logic of appropriateness behind their decision to make the benefit means-tested rather than universal: given the fact that Poland had given less support for childcare facilities than the other communist countries, the demand of mothers to use a universal extended maternity leave would have been greater than in the other countries, as the childcare alternatives were not as available. Thus, a universal benefit would have been more expensive to implement than in the other countries, so for financial reasons they made the benefits means-tested.⁸

Hungary also introduced an extended leave in the 1960s. In 1967 the government introduced the GYES benefit that paid a flat rate for two years. In 1969 it was extended another half year, so that after the initial 6-month maternity leave, mothers received money for staying at home until the child reached the age of three (Haney, 2002: 104). Populist-nationalist intellectuals argued that the flat rate system rewarded the poorer, “undeserving elements” and cost the country “intellectual capital,” since the wealthier, better educated groups had less incentive to have children. The vice-minister in charge of family issues also seems to have played an important role personally in coming up with the suggestion for introducing an extended maternity leave based on the income replacement principle. She claims her main motivation was that birthrates had been falling and she wanted to encourage women with higher incomes to also have children.⁹ Based on her recommendation, in 1985 the government introduced the GYED alternative, which allowed mothers to receive 75% of their salary for two years after completing their maternity leave (which paid 100% for 6 months). This shows that decisions at critical junctures are

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3 not necessarily structurally predetermined: actors in decision-making positions can
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5 have great influence.
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9 Thus, already before the collapse of communism, important differences in
10 family policies emerged and these differences remain today. Although all the Central
11 European countries succumbed to EU pressure and opened up their parental leaves
12 for fathers, Hungary continues to have the most generous system with a parental
13 leave that now pays 70% of one's previous salary; Poland continues to have a
14 means-tested parental leave; while both the Czech Republic and Slovakia basically
15 have a flat-rate system. In addition, when it comes to childcare, kindergartens
16 continue to be much more popular than nurseries in all four countries than nurseries,
17 but Poland continues to stand out as giving much less support to kindergartens than
18 its neighbors. The big change is that while nurseries have almost completely
19 disappeared in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the percentage of children
20 under three attending nurseries in Hungary has only declined slightly, which could
21 be partially due to the fact that nurseries in that country had better reputations, since
22 they followed more the international trends toward developing more child-centered,
23 humanistic nurseries. Another possible reason is in Hungary nationalist politicians
24 wanted to keep some nurseries open in order to promote pronatalist policies and they
25 realized that whether they liked it or not, most Hungarian women work, so they
26 would not have as many children if nurseries were closed down.¹⁰ In
27 Czechoslovakia, by contrast, no discourse emerged that linked nurseries to fertility
28 rates.
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56 Even if the demand for childcaring places remains higher than the supply (so
57 that parents in the Czech and Slovak Republics, for example, often try to find places
58 in kindergartens for their two-year old children), because of the past policy
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developments, as sociological institutionalism would expect, attitudes toward nurseries became generally negative and the belief became widespread that mothers should stay at home with their children until they are three (Pavlík, 1985; Hašková, 2007). International public opinion surveys also reflect this as Central Europeans differ greatly from West Europeans on the question of whether pre-school children suffer if the mother works, since they are afraid of the effects of nurseries on the children (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006).

Thus we see how the artificial cut-off point of three years for kindergartens, coupled with the discussions on the poor manner of organizing nurseries and the introduction of “extended maternity leaves” all contributed to the creation of the dogma that the mother should stay at home until the child is three years old. This, in turn, made it much easier for the post-communist governments to cut-off support for nurseries and let them disappear everywhere except in Hungary, which once again shows how historical insitutional developments interact with sociological institutionalism to influence cultural norms.

Conclusion

This article shows that path dependency should be conceived of as a collection of choices at various critical junctures rather than one single change made at a critical juncture. One decision, such as the codification of nurseries for children 0-3 and kindergartens for children 3-5 can set countries down different paths (for example point B₂ instead of B₁ in Diagram 1), so that, it was easier in the countries with a two-tier system for the dogma to arise that pre-school children under three have much different needs than pre-school children above three and that it is best for children to stay at home with their mother under their first three years. It was more

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3 difficult for this dogma to arise, in contrast, in countries that historically did not
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5 divide pre-school children into these two age groups (i.e. the USA and Sweden).
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9 But even at this stage a discourse about it being “natural” for children to be at
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11 home during the first three years did not have to automatically emerge. It required
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13 further choices at later critical junctures, such as the decisions to move kindergartens
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15 to the ministries of education and nurseries to the ministries of health in the
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17 communist countries (for the sake of simplicity, we have combined both choices into
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19 one a point C4), which led to the introduction of various forms of extended maternity
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21 leaves that induced mothers to stay at home for three years after giving birth (points
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23 D5-7). In other countries, such as Denmark, where nurseries were not moved to
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25 ministries of health, nurseries never developed such poor reputations and thus gained
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27 more popular support, which in turn prevented a discourse from emerging about it
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29 being “proper” for children to stay at home during the first three years (point C3). As
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31 a result, the “logic of appropriateness” in Denmark did not induce it to introduce
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33 extended maternity leaves (points D5-D7); instead it introduced an insurance-based
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35 parental leave that was open for both parents and similar to the Norwegian and
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37 Swedish leaves (except for the absence of father quotas; point D4). Thus, the
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39 particular path of the post-communist countries, including the differences in their
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41 more recent paths of development did not come about because of one single decision
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43 at a particular critical juncture, but rather because of a combination of decisions at
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45 four critical junctures.
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54 This approach comes close to Streeck and Thelen’s (2005) usage of layering,
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56 as important decisions that set a country still further down one path or another are
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58 made upon previous choices. However, in contrast to the mainstream literature on
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60 historical institutionalism that stresses the notion of critical junctures coming at

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3 periods of exogenous shocks, no evidence exists, for example, that when policy-
4 makers decided to move nurseries to the Ministry of Health, anybody expected that
5 this decision would have any important influence on either gender relations or the
6 quality of childcare. So in contrast to Streeck and Thelen's discussion (2005, 23), the
7 communist officials did not need to modify their language to hide the importance of
8 the changes in order not to "provoke countermobilization by defenders of the status
9 quo." On the contrary, it seems that not even defenders of the status quo thought this
10 change would be of any importance.
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23 The importance of this decision did not become clear until the 1960s, when
24 the nurseries came under increasing criticism for offering low quality care and being
25 overcrowded, while the authorities worried about the high rate of sickness arising
26 from the facilities being overcrowded. Given the gendered logic of appropriateness,
27 in the 1960s the communist rulers decided to deal with the problems of the nurseries,
28 not by improving them and moving them to a different ministry and not by
29 encouraging fathers to stay at home with the children, but rather by introducing
30 extended maternity leaves on the grounds that as long as mothers had to stay at home
31 often with their sick children, they might as well stay at home for the whole three-
32 year period to take care of their children so the state could reduce expenses on
33 nurseries, as their full capacity was not used because of high sickness rates.
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49 Even though this approach combines historical institutionalism with
50 sociological institutionalism by emphasizing how these institutional developments
51 influenced attitudes and how attitudes influenced decisions at critical junctions, this
52 is not a deterministic model. For example, Hungary followed a relatively more
53 universalistic direction than either Czechoslovakia or Poland by first introducing a
54 lump sum benefit that was more generous than in the other countries and then by
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3 introducing an extended leaves that replaced 75% of the mother's income. The
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5 decision to introduce this more generous income-replacement leave was partly the
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7 result of pressure from intellectuals, which did not exist in Poland or
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9 Czechoslovakia, who criticized the flat-rate benefits for encouraging only poorer
10
11 families to have children and partly the creativity of the vice-minister, who wanted to
12
13 encourage wealthier mothers to have more children. The role of the vice-minister
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15 shows that at critical junctures, actors can have great influence on outcomes.
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20 Large exogenous shocks such as the collapse of communism turned out to be
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22 less important for family policies than decisions, which seemed unimportant at the
23
24 time, such as moving responsibility for nurseries to the ministries of health and the
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26 ensuing decisions that communist leaders made in dealing with the problems created
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28 by health-based nurseries that neglected the pedagogical and psychological needs of
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30 children.
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Table 1: Enrolment rates of children in public pre-school facilities

Age of children	1989		2002*		2008**	
	0-2	3-5	0-2	3-5	0-2	3-5
Czech Republic	20.3 (13.2 in nurseries)	78.9	10.3 (0.7 in nurseries)	94.7	6.2	79.1
Hungary	11.7 (11.2 in nurseries)	85.7	10.1 (9.6 in nurseries)	87.8	10.9	88.6
Poland	9.1 (8.7 in nurseries)	48.2	5.1 (4.2 in nurseries)	49.9	3.8	59.6
Slovakia	17.7 (15.0 in nurseries)	88.6	5.6 (0.0 in nurseries)	80.1	5.0	73.5
Germany			5.0	82.0	21.2	89.4
Sweden			37.0	77.0	44.0	85.5
EU-15			25.0	81.0	36.2	80.9

Source: Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006) for years 1989, 2000 and 2002. Year 2008 from the TransMONEE data base downloaded on 18 September 2009 at <http://www.transmonee.org>.

* Data on Germany, Sweden and EU-15 from 2000.

** Data on Germany, Sweden and EU-15 from 2006, from OECD Family Database downloaded on 1 July 2009 at <http://www.oecd.org/>.¹¹

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¹ However, in practice, employers often find ways around such rules (Riedman, 2006; Anxo et al., 2007).

² This discussion is mostly based on Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006) and Saxonberg and Szelewa (2007).

³ The US does have one year of mandatory kindergarten for all 5 year olds, where children attend classes in primary schools and Sweden now has also moved the last year of pre-school to the primary schools.

⁴ Governmental edict no. 72/1961 Coll. on establishing of nurseries and kindergarten in joint facilities, and Act no. 87/1980 Coll. on kindergartens, joint nursery and kindergarten facilities and children asylums.

⁵ Interview with Antoni Rajkiewicz, in Warsaw in May, 2007.

⁶ Act of the Ministry of Health on unified preventive and medical care no. 130/1951 Coll., and on organizing of preventive and medical care no. 24/1952 Coll.

⁷ Interview with people at the Hungarian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, especially Márta Korintus, researcher at the Research Institute of the Ministry of Social Affairs, in Budapest on January 24, 2008.

⁸ Interview with Antoni Rajkiewicz, in Warsaw in May, 2007.

⁹ Interview with Judit Csehák, former minister of social affairs in 1980s and 2000-2002, in Budapest on January 23, 2008.

¹⁰ We are basing this on around 20 interviews with Hungarian politicians, ministry officials, political advisors and NGOs in Hungary in 2008.

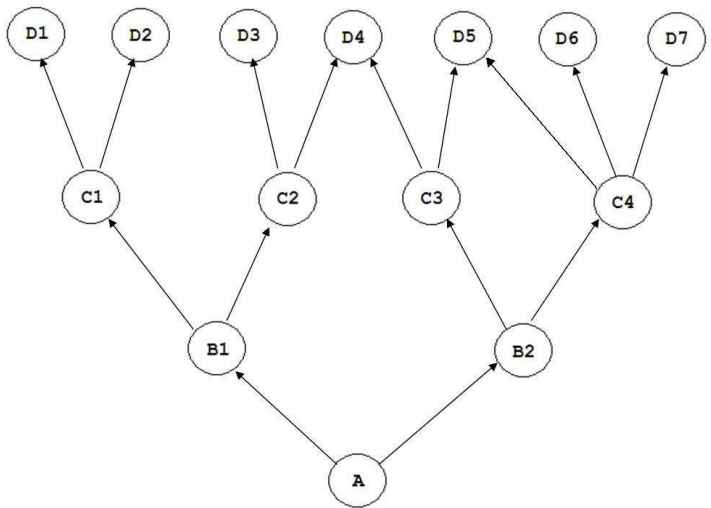
¹¹ We use the TransMONEE data base for the post-communist countries, because they get their data directly from the official statistical offices of all the post-communist countries. While the OECD data appears to be relatively reliable for the

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5 EU15 countries, its statistics deviate radically at times from both the TransMONEE
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7 data base and the official yearbooks of the individual countries.
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For Peer Review

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Diagram 1
Path Dependency



365x277mm (96 x 96 DPI)

Review