

Wellchi preliminary conclusions
How can we orientate the reform of childhood policies?
Challenges, dilemmas and proposals

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Introduction

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

One of the capital assets of the WELLCHI network is endeavouring to bring together different approaches to the study of the factors affecting the well-being of children. In the first place, it has confronted different ways of dealing with the problems concerning the 'children of divorce': through family law or through social policy. Academics and practitioners in both fields often find themselves addressing the same fundamental

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

In the second place, the WELLCHI network has strived to facilitate an encounter between two main theoretical paradigms that are currently dominating the sociology of childhood: the social investment approach and what can be termed the 'new studies of childhood' or the 'child as a fully-fledged citizen'. Our network has hosted with fruitful results contributions stemming from these two approaches and this has indeed provided considerable opportunities for cross-fertilisation.

The approach based on a child-centred social investment strategy derives from the pressing need for welfare state reconstruction. According to this view, the guideline for welfare restructuring should be investment in human capital rather than the direct provision of economic maintenance. The traditional welfare state should be replaced by a *social investment state*, operating in the context of a positive welfare society, insofar as positive welfare is functional for wealth creation (Giddens, 1998; Lister, 2006). In the new economy, life chances depend increasingly on the cultural, social and cognitive capital that citizens can accumulate. The mainsprings of people's life chances lie in the family conditions of their childhood and the crucial issue lies in the interplay between parental and societal investments in children's development (Esping-Andersen, 2002b). On the other hand, one of the assumptions of the 'new studies of childhood' is that it is not to be merely treated as a universal, biologically given phenomenon but that it must be necessarily placed in its social and cultural context. Childhood is to be examined as a social construction and children studied not as passive objects of socialisation but as social actors in their own right (Prout, 2005). Therefore, this approach is more reflexive and child-focused and tries to look at how the notion of childhood has been differentially constructed by welfare states as a way of questioning the status of children in the present (Smart, Leeds, 2004).

The child is a person, a citizen, and an individual in his or her own right, of equal value to any other individual. The difference is that children may not be able to express

themselves or represent their own interests at the time when they are vulnerable to the action or inactions of others, or to the effects of adverse social or physical environment (Rigby and Köhler, 2002). Children are then taken not merely as objects but rather as subjects of rights, having special needs and own interests that we can know through social research.

Therefore, in policy-oriented research not only the need for children's social protection is emphasised but also their capacity for agency and participation. Finally, this approach advocates for policy responses that are actually child-centred and driven by concerns about the well-being of children per se as against alternative views that can be described as instrumental, i.e. focused on the obtainment of other goals such encouraging fertility or facilitating women's employment (Lewis, 2006).

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

The concept of well-being has been mostly developed by economists and psychologists. Objective views of well-being are widely employed by economists. Economic literature argues that individuals derive well-being from the satisfaction of their wants according to their own preferences. Real income and other monetary measures are the most common proxies for the individuals' well-being. Although measures of GDP per capita and economic growth remain critical for any assessment of well-being, they need to be complemented with measures of other dimensions of well-being such as leisure time, the sharing of income within households, distributional concerns, and environmental quality (Boarini, Johanson and Mira d'Ercole, 2006). Additionally, considering that levels of GDP per capita across OECD countries are only weakly related to survey data on happiness and life-satisfaction some social analysts have come to express doubts about the validity of monetary measures as indicators of well-being.

Indeed, welfare is not in essence an economic concept, but a psychic one, concerning as it does well-being (Giddens, 1998). Subjective well-being is a concept that has mainly been used by psychologists (Kahneman, Diener and Schwartz eds., 1999; Diener, 2000;

Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002); Van Praag, Frijters and Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2002), but it is also gaining acceptance among sociologists and economists. Finally, a number of researchers have tried to identify linkages between socio-economic conditions and subjective well-being (Fahey and Smyth, 2004) or they have advocated for multi-dimensional, composite measures of well-being, including the subjective dimension (Bradshaw et al, 2006).

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

In order to integrate and reap profits from this variety of approaches, in this report an eclectic notion of well-being has been adopted. On the one hand, self-perceived states of life-satisfaction reported by children themselves are taken into consideration. On the other, well-being is defined as full potential for self-realisation not impaired by lack of opportunity and diminished outcomes as a result of certain deficits in the access to various forms of capital, including material, human, cultural, social, personal or emotional capital. In particular, levels of child poverty and inequities concerning school achievement are examined.

This takes us to the analysis of social risks affecting children that can negatively influence their well-being. In recent decades factors impinging on the well-being of children have become more complex so that nowadays the latter are not only affected by the –still persistent- (old) class inequalities but they also challenged by new social risks (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Jenson, 2006).

New risks tend to affect people at younger stages of their lives than did old social risks. They involve both labour market and family life and thus extend demand for state

intervention into areas of life that had been formerly seen as private. 'New social risks' are associated with access to employment and opportunities in work, and with managing the conflicting pressures of family life, social care, paid work and career. Fresh social needs and demands linked with new social risks include issues such as reconciling work and family life, lone parenthood, long-term unemployment, the working poor and insufficient social security coverage. These new risks tend to be concentrated among women, the young and the low skilled. Successfully managing new risks is increasingly important, particularly for the more vulnerable groups (Taylor-Gooby, 2004, Bonoli, 2005). Children is one of social groupings that are most affected by these risks insofar as they have a diminished mobilising capacity and more difficulties in representing their interests.

Overview of family change

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

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

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

species, and the powerful surge of women's struggles and of a multifaceted feminist movement, three trends that have developed since the late 1960s (Castells, 1997).

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

Whereas in pre-industrial society, the family was mainly a community of need held together by an obligation of solidarity, the logic of individually designed lives has come increasingly to the fore in the contemporary world. Thus, the family is becoming an elective relationship and an association of individual persons (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Increases in divorce, cohabitation and childbearing outside marriage have all contributed to the separation of marriage and parenthood (Lewis, 1999, 2001; Kiernan, 2004). Marriage is less an act of economic necessity and more a question of personal choice. There is evidence that the traditional family model and traditional patterns of family formation are gradually losing their hegemony in most Western countries. Most of the changes involved simply reflect the emergence of alternative living arrangements and more complex ways of organising the individual family life (González-López, 2002). However, one must take into account that the trend toward individualisation does not necessarily mean more individualism. In fact, couples try to strike a balance between autonomy and togetherness (Björnberg, and Kollind, 2005).

The de-institutionalisation of family life is associated with major shifts in value systems away from collective responsibility and duties towards a post-material conception of individual rights and personal autonomy (Hantrais, 2004: 37). In advanced modern societies each person is expected actively to engage on their own life project, setting personal goals and monitoring their performance. The trend toward individualisation boils down to prioritizing individuals' aspirations over those of the social groups to which they belong, the associated emphasis on achievement rather than status, and the belief that both are by-products of modernisation. However, individual progress is

shaped by the interaction of individuals with new secondary institutions that create risk and opportunity in unequal measure (Walker, 2005).

In the context of development of a new 'active citizenship', the social rights of family members have been increasingly individualised, whereas derived social rights lose importance. Claiming responsibility for one's own life and well-being is, in this regard, not merely an option; to an increasing degree, it also represents an obligation. However, the 'active citizen', in a similar vein as the 'homo economicus', is but a construct without family and care responsibility, as the concept of the 'active citizen' that is based on full engagement of the citizen for his or her working life and career contradicts in part the idea of family life, which rests on the assumption that parents spend time with their children and take on care responsibility within the family (Pfau-Effinger, Hamburg, 2006).

The 'second demographic transition, which began in the 1960s and is still under way, involved a marked rise in unmarried cohabitation, divorce and partnership dissolution, births outside marriage and lone parenthood and sets the stage for a progress of family diversification (Cliquet, 1991; Hantrais, 2004: 37).

The demographics of divorce in most Western nations over the decades until the 1960s were relative stable with respect to age structure, ages of children and so on (Goode, 1993). Divorce and births outside marriage were relatively rare until the last 30 years of the 20th century, and cohabitation was at its nadir in the 1950s and 1960s when marriage was almost universal (Lewis, 2001). The 1960s and the early 1970s was a golden age of marriage in Western European nations. Never had marriage been as popular or occurred at such young ages. This tide of youthful marriage receded during the 1970s and continues to do so unabated into the new millennium. It is a new type of cohabitation that is strongly implicated in the decline in marriage (Kiernan, 2004). The dynamics of marriage and divorce have undergone major changes in the last two decades. The declining frequency of marriages, the increasing incidence of divorce, the increase of births out of wedlock and the rise of new forms of union such as premarital and consensual unions and LAT couples are the main characteristics of the new scenario (Bégeot and Fernández-Cordón, 1997).

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

arrangements very dissimilar to the monolithic traditional patterns. In this way, individual life courses have become increasingly diversified. Taking into account that many divorced people later remarry or cohabit with a new partner who was also married before and may also have children of their own, more and more children thus grow up with a non-biological parent (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The most dramatic change in children's lives of the past one hundred years has been the growth in the number of children spending at least some portion of the childhood in a single-parent family. Although most single parents are women, a growing number are men (Waldfoegel, 2006: 22-23; Lewis, 2006).

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

In contemporary societies the dominance of the male breadwinner families is losing ground in practice and in terms of cultural legitimacy (Björnberg, 2006: 101). The decline of this family model and the transition towards an emerging universal adult breadwinner model in which it is assumed that the majority of the child population lives in dual-earner households is the backdrop against which we have to understand most of children's issues we are dealing with here. The universal adult breadwinner model corresponds with a postindustrial, informational economy leading to a knowledge-based society. The shift to tertiarisation created a big expansion in job opportunities for women, but it also meant the dramatic shedding of huge numbers of male, industrial employment.

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

female economic autonomy has made it impossible for governments to assume the existence of the male breadwinner family model. But how are children to be supported when family forms are increasingly fluid? And how is their care to be arranged when women, who have traditionally taken the main responsibility for care, are increasingly in the labour market? How are the responsibilities for the support and care of children to be divided between mothers, fathers and the state? (Lewis and Maclean, Oxford, 2005). One of the important problems that the universal adult breadwinner model leaves unresolved is care work (Lewis, 2002b). In fact, nowhere is there a fully fledged adult worker model family' (Lewis, 2006: 7). In all advanced countries most men show a definite reluctance to be in charge of care work and this means that it is up to women to do it. The extent to which care work is carried out in or outside the household, is paid or unpaid and is formal or informal in character depends on various factors ranging from household strategies to the state regulation of the labour market.

However, there makes a big difference whether or not the model is supported by social policies rather than being only developed by the operation of the market. In the case of lone parents this difference can be critical. Insofar as lone mothers are single earners and carers of their children, feminist scholars have considered single parenthood as a touchstone for the kind of treatment that various welfare states give to families (Lewis with Hobson, 1997).

Child poverty and other adverse outcomes for children

In a market economy such as the European Union's, economic well-being is fundamental to all other forms of well-being (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994: 19). In fact, child poverty levels are among the best indicators of the state of childhood in a particular country. In order to try to improve the general condition of children in any country it is absolutely necessary to envisage the eradication or reduction of child poverty, especially its most severe and persistent forms.

Deprivation during childhood, even over relatively short spells, can have major long-term, irreversible consequences, resulting in life-course or inter-generational (i.e. chronic) poverty transmission (Waddington, 2004).

In recent years child poverty rates have increased in most advanced nations. The proportion of children living in poverty in the developed world has risen in 17 of the 24 OECD nations for which data are available. No matter which of the commonly-used poverty measures is applied, the situation faced by children is seen to have deteriorated over the last decade (Unicef, 2005).

Although causes underlying child poverty are related to a number of complex factors, its recrudescence in recent years is basically connected with two kinds of transition processes, i.e., the shift from industrial societies to service and knowledge-based economies, on the one hand, and the shift from the male breadwinner family model to adult worker family model, on the other. The rhythm of these two transitions as well as the diversity of responses from governments in the face of strains generated by societal transformations contribute to understanding the great variety of child poverty regimes in various European countries.

In order to break the cycle of poverty and deprivation, preventive strategies are undoubtedly much more effective than remedial interventions, insofar as the latter are operating on often irreversible situations. Long-term public investment in children, in particular if it is based on early intervention, constitutes a good warrant allowing to secure adequate levels of child well-being. I am not only referring to investment in schools and education: the reduction of child poverty is a prerequisite for children with certain deficits to take advantage of opportunities that are offered to them by the school system.

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

The event of separation is linked with financial changes for most of involved persons. However, it is especially women and first of all mothers who are more affected by economic losses, while the financial situation of men either does not or does just

slightly change. Thus, the costs of separation are not equally distributed between men and women (Andreß et al, 2006: 19).

If our basic concern is with economic hardship, lone mothers are the group at greatest risk (Ellwood and Jencks, 2004: 27). However, one must not forget that in the European Union, in terms of the volume of population concerned, most poor children live in two-parent households. On the other hand, the growth of child poverty cannot be simply explained by the increase of single-parent families, although in certain countries (such as the USA and the UK) their contribution to it can indeed be very significant.

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

Child benefits for all children are paid in most European countries. This means that payments are universal and not means-tested. The general trend is to extend the cut-off for child benefits from 16 to 18-19 years. Income supplements for the number of children are paid in Sweden and Norway. In the UK and Germany the amount paid per child increases with the number of children, whereas in Denmark and the Netherlands the amount paid per child increases with the age of the child (Björnberg, 2006: 94).

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

Nevertheless, material deprivation is only one part of the story. We know that adults and children from divorced families, as a group, score lower than their counterparts in married-couple families on a variety of indicators of well-being (Amato, 2000: 1282). Half the disadvantage associated with growing up in a single-parent family is explained by economic factors (Ellwood and Jencks, 2004: 28). On average, children growing up

with just one parent do lose out relative to other children. As said, part of the penalty to single parenthood is financial: single-parent families tend to have lower incomes and, as a result, tend to live in poorer neighbourhoods with poorer schools. Another portion of the penalty has to do with time: children in single-parent families have, by definition, only one parent available to them. A single parent has to take on both the role of breadwinner and caregiver (Waldfogel, 2006: 23).

A common trend in European countries is the liberalisation of conditions for divorce while introducing at the same time more regulation of the parental relationship in separated families, especially in respect of conditions for paying maintenance. Maintenance agreements are increasingly supervised by public authorities and standardised. Regulations include the establishment of minimum amounts of maintenance, the advancement of payments to the custodial parent by public agencies in charge of recovering the money from the liable parent, usually the father, and the introduction of joint legal custody as the norm after divorce (Björnberg, 2006: 95, 102). An exception to this trend is Spain where the reform in 2005 relaxed to a great extent the conditions for divorce without tightening the enforcement of maintenance payments. Much research indicates that, for parents, financial support and contact are intertwined. Where there is contact support is more likely (Hunt and Roberts, 2004). In most countries, paying for children is in principle not separated from contact with the non-resident parent. Sanction for refusing access is only enacted against the parent who denies it, not against the parent who refuses to visit the child. This focus underlines that the main caring responsibility rests with the mother (Björnberg, 2006: 102).

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

Work and family arrangements

Most Western European countries are seeing a shift from the so-called 'breadwinner-model family' to an 'adult worker model' in which all adults are expected to do paid work (Klammer, 2006: 238). Children's living conditions depend on how employment opportunities are changing and the extent to which policies are responding to the needs of children in the context of the emerging new family model. The policy developments in most EU countries are contradictory and institutional regulations reflect ambivalent approaches regarding economic concerns, equal opportunities for women and social citizenship of children (Björnberg, 2006: 101).

The shift from the male breadwinner family towards a new adult worker model requires a fundamental reorganisation of welfare states. Different European societies find themselves at various points in this transition and also the policy responses given by governments in the EU are quite diverse. Most of these policy responses are heavily gendered because the emerging model leaves the problem of care unresolved. Only promoting men's participation in unpaid work at a similar level as women's and in particular fathers' participation in childcare would really address the problem and would improve gender equality. In this sense, an interesting body of research on the new role of fathers as carers is highly stimulating (Pfau-Effinger and Eichler, Hamburg, 2006; Hobson et al, 2006: 279). In this respect, some measures implemented in certain countries such as de-commodification schemes of daddy leaves and standard provisions for joint custody in case of divorce or dissolution of partnership are an important contribution to the promotion of men's family responsibilities.

In this context, the promotion of an adequate work life balance is essential. Children experience a need for stability and regular rhythms, which is in opposition to the labour market ideal of the flexible worker. Whereas mothers' (parents) work life balance has been broadly discussed, the children's perspective (on their parents's) work life balance, on their own time use and preferences has remained a neglected issue so far. Parents' time input in the family should be regarded as a contribution to children's education and socialisation (Klammer, 2006: 220, 238).

Work family arrangements show considerable variation in European countries because (1) female employment patterns differ to a great extent and accordingly (2) parents tend to make more use of private/public strategies of reconciliation in some countries than in others. At any rate, in recent years all European governments, whether as pioneers or latecomers, with differing degrees of commitment and intensity and using various rationales, have been offering services to families in order to facilitate the reconciliation

between work and family. One major drive in this development has often been the need to increase women's employment resulting from declining fertility and rapid ageing as a result of Lisbon agenda (Mahon, 2006: 1992).

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

Implementing a number of public measures for the care of children aged 0-3, including schemes of paid parental leave of and a system of accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare facilities can produce benefits of various sorts. They not only can enable the entry or the permanence in the labour market of mothers with young children, especially those with lower educational attainment and therefore lesser professional skills as well as reduce to the minimum career breaks, but also earlier expose infants to stimuli that can contribute to their cognitive development, although this will only happen if the quality levels of childcare facilities are fully adequate. In the first year of life extended parental leave policies, giving parents the choice to stay home, could be paired with policies to improve the quality, availability, and affordability of infant childcare (Waldfogel, 2006: 5).

Conclusion

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

In postindustrial societies the material well-being of children is essential to their progress and development as citizens and, in this sense, one of the main virtues of the

social investment strategy is that it posits the eradication of child poverty as a critical and radical issue and insists on combating social inheritance as a central axes.

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

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

Fourthly, the social investment approach insists on developing preventive strategies in order to deal with potential rather than merely current social risks affecting children. Similarly, the need for early intervention is emphasised on the ground that the return on human capital is very high in the early years of life and diminishes rapidly thereafter. As it happens in the field of health, prevention is much better than intervention after the manifestation of the problem. Quite often late interventions are not only ineffective but expensive, since they can be a permanent cost during adult life.

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

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

In the second place, children are not merely investment objects but subjects in their own right. The new sociology of childhood stresses agency and participation. The child is

not seen as a blank tabula rasa on which educators inscribe their teachings but as an active subject which interacts with his/her environment.

Similarly, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are considered as subjects of rights. It is increasingly acknowledged that children have rights as citizens (Björnberg, 2006: 90). On the other hand, children are not simply tomorrow's citizens; they are today's citizens. Focusing on being rather than becoming requires a more child-centred approach (Lewis, 2006: 18)(Martin, Leeds, 2004).

If we accept that children are fully-fledged citizens, then a number of consequences follow. This means in the first place that they should be entitled not only to protection but also to some kind of participation as they are growing older. Here again the active over the passive dimension is emphasised. Secondly, citizenship rights should be expanded to cover not only the civil rights but also the political and social rights. I am not going to deal now with children's political participation, a very controversial issue. But I would like to insist on the need to develop a full array of social rights for children in keeping with the rights of adults. Even if in all European countries the rights of children to health care and education are fully guaranteed, the same is not true with their welfare rights. I am referring in particular to an important deficit that we find in some EU countries where there is no universal coverage of child benefits, the most typical children's welfare rights. Here again we can detect some convergence between the two paradigms that we have discussed so far. One of the requirements for the eradication of child poverty is a certain amount of expenditure on family and children and this basically boils down to pay generous universal child benefits to families.

In my view, in today's Europe both paradigms are still useful and necessary. They are both conveying a notion of children as a public good (Qvortrup, Leeds, 2004), albeit with quite a different meaning, the former in a more instrumental sense and the latter in a more expressive one. On the other hand, the degree to which children are familialised also varies with more privatisation in the case of the social investment strategy.

There is a second reason why the current coexistence of these two approaches is beneficial. One must not forget that the 'new sociology of childhood' has been in part developed as a response and as a criticism to the adoption by some governments and supranational agencies of the child-centred social investment strategy. However, this approach, if not as a rhetoric motto, is still absent in policy-making in a number of EU countries where more traditional, more familialistic views are still prevailing. It is

difficult that in these countries more progressive conceptions of childhood can develop without a prior first-hand assessment of the ‘social investment approach’ shortcomings. This is a brief summary of our general conclusions. I have just selected a few themes that could have been discussed in this session. These conclusions will be placed in our website and they will be expanded as a result of contributions made by anyone who wishes to do so. A discussion forum will be launched after the end of the conference with the aim of producing more country-specific and policy-oriented conclusions. Participants are invited to send suggestions and proposals in order to enrich the present conclusions.

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