

A Taxonomy of Child Policies: Conceptualizing the Missing Step in Defamilization of Social Policy

Joakim Palme* and Maria Heimer

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has created momentum for the notion of child policy to be advanced. The article elaborates a taxonomy of child policies for analyzing policy instruments aimed at promoting various aspects of children's welfare, and four different types of child policies are identified. The article explores the feasibility of this conceptual framework with a case study of Sweden. We frame the move toward child-centered policies in terms of defamilization: such policies may enhance "freedom as non-domination" and could be seen as the second round of the defamilization of social policy.

Introduction

Since the historical developments of social policy to a large extent are reflections of how social problems have been perceived and how it has been possible to politically mobilize different interests around social problems, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) can, with its focus on children and their agency, be seen as a potential game changer of social policies oriented toward families. While family policy is by and large a postwar phenomenon, declining birth rates in the interwar period put the situation of families with children in the forefront of social policy discussions in many European countries (Myrdal and Myrdal 1934). A common theme was the social dilemma associated with the cost of raising children in modern societies. Even if the social and economic situation of children was part of the story, it appears to have been the situation of families that was most important.

The postwar period saw the expansion of family policies in Europe, and elsewhere as well. The living conditions of children have also received increased attention. The agency of children was regarded as of less importance but then gained new ground when many countries became signatories of the

Department of Government, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden
*Joakim.Palme@statsvet.uu.se

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CRC in 1990 and beyond. The CRC has generated momentum for the notion of *child policy* to be advanced by the promotion of the “three P’s”: provision, protection, and participation. Further, the CRC not only takes a multidimensional approach to the living conditions of children but also sees children as competent actors. Here, the relationship between child policy and family policy and the potential goal conflicts between the two have not been thoroughly researched yet. We have found very few studies that focus on children’s rights or child politics more broadly, whereas there is a large body of research on family policies where children are analyzed indirectly as part of the family. [Bartley’s \(1998\)](#) comparative study is a unique first contribution to the research on child policy, but to pave the way for systematic exploration of the content, driving forces, and outcomes of child policies, we need a conceptual framework that is an adequate representation of the variation to be found in terms of policy program design.

Purpose and Delimitations

The purpose of the article is two fold. First, we aim to elaborate a theoretically informed conceptual framework for classifying child policies—a taxonomy of child policies for analyzing policy instruments aimed at promoting various aspects of children’s welfare. Second, we aim to explore the feasibility of this framework with a study of the Swedish case but also with examples from other European countries.

In brief, our main argument is as follows: the focus on *child welfare* demands an elaboration of policy variables that can help explain changes in child welfare. We use [Johansson’s \(1970, 25\)](#) definition of welfare as the individual’s command over resources with which he or she can govern his/her own living conditions. This resource perspective accommodates an agency perspective similar to [Sen’s \(1985\)](#) “capability” approach both when it comes to the multidimensionality of welfare and the emphasis on agency. The CRC also embodies a view of children as competent actors who are carriers of their own rights. Taking child welfare seriously warrants us not only to take all the three P’s into account but also to link various policies to individual welfare among children. This has guided us to the theoretical starting point concerning child welfare: children’s participatory rights make up a constitutive part of child welfare, also in the sense that traditional dimensions of welfare are partially conditioned on the right to voice. The constitutive nature of participation for children’s rights is valid for both protection and provision in the process of welfare delivery ([Heimer, Näsman, and Palme 2018; Heimer and Palme 2016](#)).

There are hence good theoretical and normative arguments for viewing children as subjects and actors, yet children are not adults, and this implies that it is reasonable to limit the rights and responsibilities given to them.

By formulating children's agency in terms of participation, the CRC provides good guidance about how to proceed: following Article 12, children have an absolute right to be heard in matters that concern them, but how the child's view is used in decision-making is in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. We do not propose a mechanical transfer of decision-making to children but rather advocate that children's capacity to participate should be allowed to mature and evolve, with age but not least with experience (Alderson, Sutcliffe, and Curtis 2006; Lansdown 2005). We argue that it is fruitful to see this as a process where children's participation is a tool for dissolving the distinction between children as "becomings" and "beings" (cf. Lister 2006) and, eventually, making their transition into adulthood as seamless as possible.

Sweden provides an interesting case for the study of child policy from the perspective embodied in the CRC. The country is often acclaimed for its successful family policy, while it also has been regarded as a forerunner in children's rights (Durrant and Olsen 1997). This makes it a theoretically interesting case to analyze with regard to how child policies have fared in relation to family policies. In many ways, child policy had been an integrated part of family policy in Sweden, which is apparent in the following quotation where the government is introducing child policy: "the extensive assistance to families with children is part of this policy which has existed for many years but without being called child policy" (Government Communication 1999/2000, 10). Parental leave, universal child care, and child allowances have been given to families, but here also children are indirect beneficiaries. From 1999 and onwards, the government declared that child policy is officially no longer to be part of family policy but is to create a policy area of its own. However, child policy has a prehistory that is important to trace and categorize.

Welfare State Regimes, Family Policy Regimes, and Beyond

The regime approach has been very helpful in terms of simplifying complex patterns of similarities and differences in the way that countries have organized their welfare states and family policies. It has also been powerful in terms of theorizing about the causes and consequences of different policy configurations. Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare state regime concept was an important innovation as it not only added a qualitative dimension to the earlier predominant focus on social expenditure in most comparative welfare state research but also identified the different ideological intentions that underpinned the different regimes.

Similarly, a gendered perspective on the welfare state, and particularly family policy, has contributed with new insights about the divergent intentions and outcomes of different orientations of social and family policies (Lewis

1992, 1997; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1996). The feminist critique of the conceptualization of welfare state regimes was that women were not analyzed as autonomous individuals and that the analysis of women needed to be defamilized (Lewis 1992; Lister 1997; Orloff 1993; O'Connor 1996; Sainsbury 1994). The gender perspective took the power resource perspective one step further by bringing in women's experience as needs-bearing clients and rights-bearing receivers of welfare services, which required a rethinking of Esping-Andersen's notion of decommodification. By incorporating the importance of care work and the interrelationships between paid and unpaid work in the analysis, the gender perspective could demonstrate a more complex and gendered pattern of dependencies. For example, women's access to paid work (commodification) is critical for women's agency in terms of forming an independent household (defamilization) (Orloff 1993) but presupposes access to care services for those with caring responsibilities (defamilization).

However, existing models of welfare states or family policy regimes are not able to tell us much about how children are affected by different welfare states simply because they have not considered children as a separate unit of analysis or taken children's agency into account. The result is that children are made invisible in the family unit under analysis. We contend that feminist scholars' critique of welfare state research is only taken halfway and misses the opportunity to consider the category of children in the defamilization process. Alanen (1992, 31) has pointed out that the gendering of welfare state regime research has continued to present children as objects with needs, translated into demands of care, and hence as problems for their mothers, not as subjects and rights-bearers. Children have mainly been seen as an instrument by which patriarchal society reproduces prevailing gender arrangements that feminists seek to transform. Others have argued that we should go beyond that and analyze children as a separate category (Alanen 2007; Bartley 1998; Olk and Wintersberger 2007), which is advice that we will follow.

We anchor such a perspective in what has emerged as the "social investment" approach (Hemerijck 2017; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012), where children are brought into the center of the welfare state discourse. The social investment approach can be seen as a response to the challenges of aging populations demanding more redistributions due to heavier old-age dependency ratios, but instead of focusing on pension and health care, it has focused on securing the future tax base of aging societies, hence the centrality of children. Adopting a life course perspective where early childhood is viewed as the crucial life phase, Esping-Andersen et al. (2002, 51) stress the importance of investing in the well-being and resources of children to diminish welfare problems among future adults. This gives good reasons to recast family policy, and in particular, one that is powerfully child oriented must be the centerpiece of any policy for social inclusion (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002, 9). Social policies should therefore be directed to the family to prevent a sizable minority from becoming trapped in inferior life chances. A child-oriented family policy

without defamilization of all members of the family may, however, still not acknowledge children as separate units or children as rights-bearers.

One aspect of the underlying conflicts of interest within the family is brought into the open by Jenson's (2009) criticism of the social investment approach. Jenson sees that this approach typically addresses the needs of children but not the situation of women today, and while this is true for some interpretations of the social investment concept, it is certainly not a necessary feature of the social investment approach. In reality, this critique mirrors a broader concern in the way that the social citizenship rights that underpin the social investment approach have been harnessed to an economic agenda (Michel 2015; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012, 16) and points to the importance of formulating the normative goals in capability terms for both women and children (Morel and Palme 2017). Children are made objects when they are viewed as citizen-workers of the future rather than as citizen-children of the present, that is, as "becomings" rather than as "beings" with social rights in their own right (Lister 2006). It is obvious to us that even a child-focused investment perspective remains problematic as long as children's participatory rights are not considered. To be clear, we do neither argue that children should be institutionalized nor proclaim the end of family; rather, we argue that the most important potential of giving children the right to voice is to change their standing within the families, as well as in relation to the social services, and thus give them better protection and provision. We should be aware of the potential conflicts between the three pillars. It may be necessary to go against the voice of children to protect them from their families, and it may for protection reasons also be necessary to go against the wishes of the parents and remove the child from the family.

The field of childhood research has long been critical of the view of children as "becomings" rather than "beings" in the here and now (James and Prout 1997; Krekula, N rvi nen, and N sman 2005; Qvortrup 1994). Children's rights scholars (Littlechild 2000; Sinclair 2004) place agency at the center. Welfare state research has traditionally not given agency sufficient attention, but the gendering of welfare regimes has been helpful. Women's agency is obviously there when Orloff (1993) added the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household as a goal for gendered social policy. Korpi (2000) and Hobson (2011) argue that welfare state institutions should secure not only material living conditions but also agency (cf. Sen 1985). Women's agency is important to consider in relation to both policy measures, which are all likely to have gender-related agency effects (Korpi 2000, 144) and as determinants for policy reforms via women's political representation (Ferrarini 2006).

In their conceptualization of women's agency, scholars thus come close to what must be defined as provisions for agency, that is, a variety of resources that strengthen women's room for maneuver. We argue that an operationalization of agency, including children's agency, must measure agency directly

and not only indirectly through provisions for agency. In our conceptualization of child welfare, welfare provisions and participatory rights are analytically separated. Moreover, child policies should contain policy instruments that seek to promote provisions for welfare and children's agency as well as children's agency in their welfare provision. Existing gendered typologies, such as the male breadwinner and the individual model (Sainsbury 1994), do not take defamilization to the full, which would be to view all members of the family as individual units and right-bearers.

To sum up, children are still being familized by mainstream scholars. Lessons that have already been learned by deconstructing the family from a gendered point of view suggest that defamilization can be extended to an age-sensitive analysis as well. In the same way as the gendering of welfare state regimes required the construction of new dimensions and alternative typologies, a defamilization of welfare states that also includes children calls for a new conceptual apparatus. As O'Connor (1996, 66) noted earlier for women, we similarly note today with regard to children that a children's rights perspective implies making children the subjects, not just the objects, of social policy, and where also the realization of participatory citizenship rights should become an objective of social policy (Heimer and Palme 2016). This is of course not to argue that women and children are the same. With our emphasis on the *participation* of children, we clarify that it is not about handing over the formal decision-making. However, the voices and perspectives of children are unique and cannot be replaced (Charles and Haines 2014), and this is why the CRC urges us to listen to children and let them have an influence in matters that directly concern them. Policy instruments address children's participation in matters that directly concern them as well as activities relevant for their age group, for example, preschool children's participation in the planning of preschool activities. (It is not about preschool children appointing the principal.)

There is also a more methodological reason why we want to go beyond the regime approach when we formulate our conceptual apparatus. While the regime approach may be a good way of summarizing policy packages, one problem is that single countries may actually have different types of policy programs up and running, making it more difficult and even misleading to classify the country as belonging to one regime. Instead, we follow a program-specific approach, which is about analyzing and classifying individual programs. This is not only more precise but also opens up for the study of institutional change. A program-specific approach does not preclude an analysis of regimes but provides the tools to do such an analysis with greater precision.

A Taxonomy of Child Policies

On the basis of our critique of mainstream welfare research, we identify two dimensions of variations that have often been overlooked but that are

crucial to determine to what extent policies are defamilized. In developing a taxonomy of child policies, a defamilization of child welfare should be undertaken in two steps. First, children are viewed as separate individuals instead of as part of the family and merely as appendices to their parents. Second, children are conceived as competent actors and carriers of their own rights, that is, social rights as well as participatory rights. Child policy is here defined as policies that protect children, strengthen their room for maneuver, and provide them with a variety of resources. Reiterating our normative position: the aim of child welfare policies is to promote children's protection and provisions (resources), on the one hand, and participatory rights, on the other. These two dimensions are crucial, we argue, when operationalizing child welfare and measuring whether policies have promoted child welfare. We are interested in to what extent policy instruments consider these two dimensions of child policy.

In our taxonomy, provisions to children can be *indirect* or *direct* in that welfare provisions can either be directed to the family as a unit, which may indirectly benefit the child, or they can be directly channeled to the child as the principal beneficiary. In the process of welfare delivery, children may be treated as an *object* in decision-making or as a *subject* with the right to participate in the process. When combining the two dimensions, four different types of child policies can be distinguished as illustrated by [table 1](#): *family-oriented* policies are characterized by policies targeting the family as a unit where children are at best indirect beneficiaries and where children are objects of decision-making; in *child investment* policies, children are the principal beneficiaries but are treated as “becomings” rather than as “beings” in that they become objects for investing in the future of the welfare state; *child-oriented* policies are characterized by viewing children as actors and acknowledging their participatory rights but where welfare provisions are directed to their parents or the family as a whole; and in *child-centered* policies, children are likewise viewed as competent actors with participatory rights and where children are the direct beneficiaries of welfare provisions.

While the same policy intervention may serve different goals, for example, of promoting the welfare of both children and parents, our taxonomy is aimed at classifying child policy instruments and does so in a mutually exclusive fashion. We distinguish between whether policies are indirect or direct and whether they treat children as objects or subjects. We argue that these are important distinctions if we want to take children's agency and participation seriously. However, as our case study of Sweden will show, countries combine different types of policy instruments in their efforts to support children and families.

Our approach is theoretically driven by the focus on child welfare and the three P's of the CRC. This is different from Esping-Andersen's regime approach, which was an empirical generalization based on the clustering of the existing social policy systems among Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. It is also different from

Table 1. A child policy taxonomy

		Provisions to children	
		Indirect	Direct
Actors	Child-oriented	Child-oriented	Child-centered
	Provision is provided to parents or the family as a whole	Provision is provided to parents or the family as a whole	Provision is provided directly to children
Children as	Children participate by influencing the process of welfare delivery	Children participate by influencing the process of welfare delivery	Children participate by influencing the process of welfare delivery
	Objects	Family-oriented	Child investment
	Provision is provided to parents or the family as a whole in the name of children	Provision is provided to parents or the family as a whole in the name of children	Provision is provided directly to children
	Children do not participate in the process of welfare delivery	Children do not participate in the process of welfare delivery	Children do not participate in the process of welfare delivery

Frasers' (1994) typology, which is distilling features of two existing and competing models of gendered social policy (the universal breadwinner and the caregiver parity models) without formulating a model that would promote all of the desirable (utopian) gender egalitarian goals that she identified. In contrast, our policy taxonomy is utopian and gives direction to how policies could be designed to maximize child welfare via the recognition of all three P's. It is also evolutionary in the sense that the categories in [table 1](#) represent potential stages in policy development, suggesting that as we move up, policies are progressing in their potential to promote child welfare by including agency. "Provision" and "protection" are basic building blocks for securing the welfare of children, with "participation" being important as such but also having potential positive feedbacks on the two basic P's ([Heimer and Palme 2016](#)). Hence, policy instruments that we label "family-oriented" or "social investment" are important *per se* but can also be upgraded by recognizing children's right to participate in the formation of services aimed at their protection and provision.

Identifying Policy Instruments of Different Types of Child Policy—The Swedish Case

In this section, we will try out the feasibility of our taxonomy by looking closer at developments in Sweden in three policy areas without the ambition

of performing an exhaustive monitoring. It is important, however, to recognize that Sweden is part of a broader pattern of policy development in Europe and elsewhere. The postwar period in the Western hemisphere has not only seen the introduction of family policy but also its diversification and modernization. When it comes to cash benefits, our first policy area, child and maternity benefits, have been complemented by different forms of parental leave benefits (Ferrarini 2006; Wennemo 1994). The second policy area is benefits in-kind. While the public education systems are of much older date, the implementation of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is more recent and largely a postwar phenomenon, and this is particularly true of the expansion of these institutions. Child care is a policy area where it is apparent that there have been different interests and motives behind its introduction and expansion. Pedagogical activities to stimulate child development have not been the only concern, but parents' gainful employment has also been a political driving force (Lewis 2006). Access to child care is seen as enabling mothers' possibility to participate in the labor market (Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006). Social services, the third policy area, are typically oriented toward child protection but do this in different ways in different countries. In all three areas, an evolution has occurred by the addition of policy instruments providing resources in cash and in-kind as well as promoting participation. It appears warranted to capture this development not only in expenditure terms but also in terms of the orientation of various policy instruments.

Cash Benefits

In the 1930s, new forms of support for families with children emerged, including allowances for single mothers and various benefits for orphans, fatherless children and children of invalids (Wennemo 2014). After World War II, universal child benefits were introduced and given to the mothers. Housing allowances have typically been part of the family support system, being administered by the municipalities for long periods of time. When parental leave insurance was introduced in 1974, it was a radical reform in the sense that it identified fathers as carers. This is not irrelevant from a children's perspective; it can be a valuable resource for the children to have both parents as carers and providers. Since it is an indirect policy effect, we classify it as family-oriented. This is also true for the more recent introduction of "daddy months", where part of the paid parental leave is reserved for fathers. In addition, we can identify various benefits for single parents such as the "advance maintenance allowance" (paid to single mothers (typically) when their divorced husbands/fathers fail to pay maintenance). Until the 1990s, the tax system included tax benefits for families with sole providers. Hence, common to these cash benefits is that they can be classified as child policy instruments that are *family-oriented*. All benefits are provided to parents or the family as a whole, even if they in some cases have "child labels". It is furthermore evident that

the child does not have a say or participate in the process of benefit delivery. Even if children only indirectly benefit from these policy programs, such programs are likely to be critical for the resource distribution among families with children and thus a precondition for the promotion of child welfare.

One exception to the family orientation of general cash benefits is the recently introduced “leisure activity allowance”, which is designed as a *child-centered* provision on the assumption that it is a leisure activity that is the choice of the child. Introduced in 2014, it was a flat-rate allowance for all children in grades 4–9 whose families receive means-tested social assistance for the purpose of aiding children’s leisure activities ([National Board of Health and Welfare 2015](#)). In 2016, it was replaced by a general increase in the child scale rate (what is paid for the children) in the social assistance system, as well as by indirect subsidies to (cost-free) organize outside school activities for children ([Government Bill 2015/16](#)). Here, legislative provisions also provide room for economic assistance to families above the fixed norm by considering extra costs for the needs of their children ([Social Services Act, 2001](#), chapter 4, § 2), provisions we classify as a *child investment*. The needs of very young children may be included in the fixed norm or else parents can formulate their needs. The Swedish lawmaker has made the case that “also the children’s situation shall be considered when adults turn to the social services with an application for economic or other assistance to the family” ([Government Bill 1996/97](#), 100). Children’s participation and their provision are interlinked in that the children can put forward specific needs in talks with the social services to receive economic assistance above the fixed norm ([Commission of Inquiry 2005](#), 59). However, there is no legislative stipulation that children should be heard when families apply for economic assistance, and it is commonly acknowledged that the social services do not meet with children and that their perspective is virtually absent in the administration of economic assistance ([Ministry of Social Affairs Report 2004](#)). In the area of cash benefits, policy instruments from three different models are identified ([table 2](#)).

In-kind Benefits—Child Care and Education

The opportunity to facilitate both work and care through child care and parental leave is one of the pillars of the Swedish family policy model. In its early beginning, child care was part of the child protection system. [Lindgren and Söderlind \(2018\)](#) find that participation in the first forms of child care (the crèche) was offered to poor children whose mothers were forced to work, and it was a means-tested service, which is very similar to what [Michel \(1999\)](#) has observed in the U.S. case, that child care was only for vulnerable children at risk. Alongside the crèches provided for poor children, pedagogical activities in kindergarten were introduced for well-off families. Proponents of kindergarten argued that it should be a benefit for all children, regardless of whether they had a family or parents who worked ([Hatje 1999](#); [Martin Korpi](#)

Table 2. Classification of child policy instruments in Sweden

		Provisions to children	
		Indirect	Direct
Actors	Children as	Child-oriented	Child-centered
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Social assistance above the scale rate (norm) based on the child's voice) • (Assistance to parents based on the child's voice in child and family welfare) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • /Activity allowance in social assistance/ • Pupil's right to participation in decision making in their schools • A legal right to voice in social services for children who have reached the age of fifteen • Assistance to children who have reached the age of fifteen and above in child and family welfare, based on the child's voice • (Right to full-time preschool for children in need of special support based on the child's own expressed wish) • (Children's right to participation in their own care in the social services)
Objects		Family-oriented	Child investment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal child benefits • Housing allowances • Maternity/parental leave benefits • Advance maintenance allowance • /Tax benefits to single providers/ • Social assistance benefit • Child care when child attendance is dependent on parents' employment • Voluntary services for parents in child and family welfare • Assistance to the family dependent on parental consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social assistance above the scale rate (norm) based on the child's individual need • Children's right to preschool regardless of parents' employment • Right to full-time preschool for children in need of special support regardless of parents' employment • Children's right to education • Opportunity (not right) for the child to be heard in the social services

Notes. Hypothetical programs in parentheses. Discontinued programs in slashes. Programs listed in the order they appear in the text.

2015). Child care thus resembles other poverty relief measures provided in cash benefits but took the form of a service aimed foremost at children of single mothers.

The Government Commission for Child Care (*Barnstugeutredningen*), appointed in 1968 and publishing its reports in 1972 and 1975, laid the groundwork for the modern child care system that is still in place today. In the reports ([Commission of Inquiry 1972a](#); [Commission of Inquiry 1972b](#); [Commission of Inquiry 1975](#)), the commission focused on the child's development, arguing that child care was to provide pedagogical activities by educated professionals to support and stimulate the child's development and learning. Here, the child's right to high-quality child care is emphasized. Another purpose of child care, which gained in prominence over time, was to facilitate mothers' participation in the labor market. Swedish child care in modern times is characterized by the dual function of child development and care of children, and was viewed by the 1968 commission as an integrated whole, which could not be separated. There has been ongoing debate on whom child care is for. Part-time child care led by educated professionals, with a focus on child development, has been argued to be for the benefit of children. Full-time child care, where there is no requirement of training for the carer or pedagogic content of the care, has been viewed to be for the benefit of facilitating parents' employment ([Folke-Fichtelius 2008](#)). It has also been debated whether the state should finance part-time quality child care and the local authorities, or the parents themselves, the remaining part adding up to full-time child care.

In the following section, we first present reform proposals in chronological order and then our classification of the principal policy instruments in child care. The recommendations of the 1968 Commission for Child Care led to legislation, and the first step toward universal child care was taken. Children whose parents work or study were from the age of six provided a place in public preschool starting in 1975 ([Government Bill 1973](#)). Children in need of special support were also guaranteed a place in child care although they had not reached the age of six and regardless of their parents' occupational status ([Government Bill 1973](#)). (Special needs is a term referring to a range of different needs, from physical handicaps to social problems in the family ([Folke-Fichtelius 2008](#)).) In the years that followed, expansion of the child care system grew thanks to extensive state subsidies. The principal goal of universal preschool for all children from the age of eighteen months (when parental leave ends) was expressed in 1985 ([Government Bill 1984/85](#)) but without being accompanied by effective policy instruments that would ensure its rapid implementation. From 1995, it became the responsibility of local authorities to provide a place in child care without unreasonable delay for children from the age of one (until the age of twelve as it includes after-school centers for pupils), when the parents worked or studied ([Government Bill 1993/94](#)). A minimum age was specified in 2003 when children whose parents worked or

studied are to be provided a place in preschool from the age of four, the stipulated 525 hours per year free of charge (Government Bill 1999/2000). A piece of legislation was also introduced that for the first time gave *all* children from the age of four the right to attend preschool for fifteen hours per week, even if their parents are unemployed (from 2001) or on parental leave with another child (from 2002) (Government Bill 1999/2000). The age limit was further lowered to three years in 2010 (Government Bill 2008/09).

In our classification, if children cannot attend child care or preschool when parents are unemployed or on parental leave with another child, child care is apparently a service for parents and a *family-oriented* policy. Swedish legislation today stipulates that children, whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave caring for another child, shall be offered a place in preschool at least three hours per day or fifteen hours per week (Education Act 2010, chapter 8, § 6). The child's right to pedagogical activities to stimulate development and learning for up to fifteen hours per week is in our analysis a *child investment* policy. Beyond that, Sweden does not fully live up to its stated aim of universal child care for all children regardless of their parents' occupational status. The legal provision to grant exceptions to children in need of special support, regardless of parents' occupational status, is also a *child investment* policy (Education Act, 2010, chapter 8, §§ 5 and 7). In the area of child care, policy instruments from two different types thus can be identified (table 2).

In policy terms, there are good reasons to see public education as a social right (and responsibility) as well as a form of policy, which we have classified as *child investment*. Since Sweden made nine-year schooling compulsory in 1962, the influence of pupils on their education has been an increasingly important element of educational policy. Pupils' influence in school is seen as being education in democracy and as equipping future citizens with democratic values. It is also established that it can promote the learning process (Quennerstedt 2010). A sequence of reforms aimed at strengthening pupils' influence through central regulation was initiated in the 1970s and 1980s (Rönnlund 2013): the Commission of Inquiry (1974) and the following democratization reform (Government Bill 1975/76) laid the basis for pupils' influence over their education in their classrooms. The lawmakers have in consecutive government bills underlined the principle that pupils' influence is of decisive importance for effective learning (Government Bill 1988/89, 37). One important form of influence, whereby pupils' representatives from grade one and upwards are empowered to participate in workplace conferences, is established in a 1988 Government Bill (1988/89, 36). In 1991, the right of pupils to influence the shaping of their education was also made part of new legislation (Government Bill 1990/91:115). Thus, educational policy has become *child-centered* in important respects. Nevertheless, in 1991, a government proposition that was passed by the parliament withdrew government regulation of the forms for pupils' influence—with the exception of class councils—which from here onwards are to be locally decided (Government

Bill 1990/91:115, 55). Moreover, the policy focus on a future-oriented education in democracy (becomings) has been seen as a hindrance for the realization of pupils' influence in their education here and now (beings) (Brumark 2010). Thus, depending on the strength of the participation of pupils, educational policy can be classified as either *child investment* or *child-centered* (table 2).

Child and Family Welfare in the Social Services

Child protection developed out of the poor laws and was first primarily concerned with social control. In 1924, the Child Welfare Act introduced the possibility of taking children who were suffering from abuse and neglect into care. Child protection under the old system involved measures of compulsion that were tightened if the situation did not improve, a system that originally developed out of temperance legislation and the treatment of adult alcoholism. It was criticized for being repressive by targeting families from the lower classes, a critique that was even more pervasive for other social care areas (Holgerson 1996).

In the democratization of social services in the 1980s, social care was to function in accordance with the same democratic principles as other social policy areas such as the sickness and unemployment insurance systems, and the reform of child protection was part of the reform wave embracing the entire social care system. The lawmakers' intention was to replace the old poor laws with a law in-line with a universal approach to welfare policy (Pettersson 2011). One of the political driving forces behind reform was to remedy the undue targeting of poor and vulnerable *adults*. This shift seemingly occurred without attention to the fact that child protection is different from other social care areas in that children are at risk due to their home situations and their parents. Potential conflicts of interest between parents and children were toned down, and children were familized, not seen as separate entities. The democratization process stopped short of encompassing children, since it focused on parents and the family as a whole.

A children's rights commission (*Utredningen om barnens rätt*) was appointed by the government in 1977 to consider how children's legal rights could be strengthened. Its first report (Commission of Inquiry 1978) led to the widely acclaimed corporal punishment ban in 1979. In subsequent reports (Commission of Inquiry 1979, 1987), the commission drew attention to the lack of children's rights in the field of family law as regulated by the Parental Code and proposed that the legal right to voice should be introduced for all children at age twelve and above, since it can be assumed that children and parents as separate entities may have conflicting interests in family disputes as well as in child protection. At this critical juncture, there was a possibility of a path-breaking shift, but the recommendation of the children's rights

commission was rejected by Swedish lawmakers on the basis that it would not facilitate voluntary agreement of the parents ([Government Bill 1994/1995](#)).

Influence from the CRC

In 1990, Sweden signed the CRC. Despite earlier missed opportunities, there has been some progress in the strengthening of children's rights, and the CRC has made, as we will see further, a small imprint on policy instruments in recent years. In 2016, a commission inquiry report ([Commission of Inquiry 2016](#)) found that the CRC has not had a sufficient impact on the implementation of children's rights in Sweden, and the current government has declared its intention to incorporate the CRC into Swedish legislation in 2020, which might create momentum for path shifting.

In the new Social Services Act promulgated in 1982, the legal right to be heard for children who have reached the age of fifteen and above was transferred from the old legislation. The article in the Social Services Act corresponding to Article 12 in the CRC, giving children below the age of fifteen the informal opportunity to be heard, was first introduced in 1998 ([Government Bill 1996/97](#)) and has been the object of many attempts to strengthen children's right to voice since then. Voluntary services are placed at the center in the Social Services Act to the effect that parents in practice hold veto rights over their children's participation and welfare provision (up until when the Care of Young Persons Act becomes applicable). One instance of progress in strengthening children's rights is that since 2010, a social worker can hold talks with the child even when parents do not consent to this ([Government Bill 2009/10](#)). The first instance where a child (who has reached the age of fifteen and above) can be provided with assistance without parents' consent is in the appointment of a contact person ([Government Bill 1990/91:8](#)). Another instance of progress in strengthening children's rights was realized in 2012 when social assistance in the so-called open services can be granted to children who have reached the age of fifteen and above without parents' consent, as long as the youth himself or herself has consented to it ([Government Bill 2012/13](#)).

Voluntary participation and partnership with parents where interventions target the family as an entity stand out as the basic pillar of the Swedish family service system. In our classification, voluntary services for parents, where social assistance to the child is seen as synonymous with assistance to the parents, are apparently a service for parents and thus a *family-oriented* policy. Provisions to children are dependent on parental consent, and when social assistance cannot be offered to the child under the age of fifteen because parents in effect maintain a veto right, protection and provision for children are also classified as *family-oriented*. The informal opportunity for the child to put forward his or her opinion ([Social Services Act 2001](#), chapter 11, § 10), also when parents do not consent, is a provision for the child and classified by us

as *child investment*, since it does not ensure the right to voice an opinion on matters of direct concern. The legal right of children who have reached the age of 15 and above to have a voice is, in our analysis, a *child-centered* policy, since the policy ensures the right for children to voice an opinion on their own care ([Social Services Act 2001](#), chapter 11, § 10). The legal provision offering social assistance (referring to open services such as treatment, contact person assignment and contact family assignment, but not placement outside the home) to children who have reached the age of 15 and above, and where the child himself or herself has to consent ([Social Services Act 2001](#), chapter 3, § 6) is also classified as a *child-centered* policy ([table 2](#)).

Summary and Extensions

Our identification and classification of Swedish policy instruments in three policy areas are summarized in [table 2](#). First, we want to highlight how the prevailing policy instruments are expressions of a surprisingly wide set of policy choices that serve different types of orientations. Interestingly, we find that very similar policy instruments may be classified differently depending on their specific design. As noted above, policy instruments of different orientations can be combined. The different orientations all hold the potential to increase child welfare and to be of indirect or direct benefit to children, with variable emphasis on children's different rights. The typology opens up for *child-centered* policies to be more instrumental in promoting child welfare. The expectation here is that when the child is not only the receiver but also participates in the process, welfare provisions will be better designed to directly benefit the child ([Heimer, Näsman, and Palme 2018](#)). [Table 2](#) therefore also includes a set of hypothetical examples (some that have been officially discussed) aimed at illustrating how policies may be reformed in a more *child-centered* direction, examples that warrant some further comments.

While we have used examples from Sweden to try out the feasibility of our taxonomy, similar policy instruments found in other European countries demonstrate the broader relevance of the typology: in the area of cash benefits, available policy instruments today are all *family-oriented*, except for the possibility in the social assistance program to raise benefits in response to the special needs of children in the family (*child investment*). There has also been a sort of *child-centered* policy in the past, and *child-oriented* policies have at least been up for discussion: such (hypothetical) examples would be to expand provisions within the social assistance systems to include payments above the scale rate (norm) provided either indirectly (*child-oriented*) or directly (*child-centered*) to support the child, based on the individual child's expressed needs. This illustrates the potential of cash benefit programs to arise in different forms and respond not only to the needs but also to the agency of children. In Norway, a national grant scheme against child poverty established "banks" with equipment for

sports and leisure activities (Skevik Grødem 2017), a policy instrument with a child investment orientation. In the Netherlands, swimming lessons, contributions to sport clubs, and music or dance lessons were offered to children of low-income parents to combat poverty (Kruis and van Waveren 2017). Like a similarly designed policy instrument in Sweden, it is an example of a child-centered policy that enables the child to influence which activity to exercise. That these examples concern targeted and not universal programs might imply that children in well-to-do families in practice are denied access to activities just because they are not listened to by their families, which adds an important dimension for the analysis of child welfare.

We can also observe that child care can be both *family-oriented* and *child investment*. A hypothetical example of a *child-centered* policy would be if children had not only the right to attend and/or get increased time in preschool due to their difficult home situation or special needs of the child but where decisions also were taken in a context where children could express their views and be listened to. As of now, such a right is not clarified in any legal provision. Another example of child-centered policy in the area of child care is to promote the child's own initiative and to emphasize the significance of the child's initiative as the foundation for all activities in preschool in Finland (Kangas and Kalliomaa-Puha 2017). Additionally, in Norway, the Act on Kindergarten states that children shall be given the opportunity to participate actively in the planning of activities, which is an indication of child-centeredness (Bae 2010).

While the social services/child and family welfare system as a whole is *family-oriented*, children are provided with the informal opportunity to be heard (*child investment*), and there are also policy instruments whereby children are actors and participate in their own welfare provision. This is the case for provisions whereby children (fifteen years of age and above) hold the legal right to voice and can receive social assistance even when their parents do not consent. A hypothetical example of a *child-oriented* policy would here be the offering of treatment to parents based on what wishes the vulnerable child has expressed. A hypothetical *child-centered* example, which has been considered by Swedish lawmakers, is a legal provision that specifies the right to voice in the formulation of social assistance and care plans. In Estonia, in comparison, such legal provision has been enacted in the Child Protection Act 2014, which stipulates the obligation to include children in the planning of measures targeted at children (Anniste, Biin, and Masso 2017). Another example of child-centered policy in Norway is the legal stipulation that children at seven years of age have the right to express themselves in matters concerning them (Skivenes and Strandbu 2006).

Conclusions

The CRC challenges policymakers around the world to pursue policies that matter for the welfare of children along all three dimensions identified in the

convention, namely, protection, provision and participation, and likewise the policy-engaged research community to think more deeply about how to best design good policies. Our conceptual framework is a policy-relevant contribution with a potential to guide the design of policy instruments for the promotion of child welfare along all three dimensions. This connects to interesting changes in both research and policymaking circles. [Daly \(2011\)](#) highlights the recognition of the rights of children as part of the individualization process in social policy, and thus is parallel to gendered defamilization. In the activities of the European Commission, an increased emphasis on social investment policies such as ECEC more recently has been accompanied by an increased emphasis on children's rights and voice in the monitoring of social policy-making and performance in the Member States ([Fraser and Marlier 2017](#)).

The taxonomy can furthermore be used as a starting point for thinking more seriously about the meaning of child policy. This includes the recognition that what appear to be policies for children may in fact be policies for parents in the name of the child. It is useful to sort out which policies are for parents or families as a whole, only indirectly supporting children, and which policies directly promote various dimensions of child welfare (including their agency). As our feasibility study illustrated, conflicts of interests between parents and children can exist. What our feasibility study of Sweden also revealed was that very similar types of policy interventions can vary in their acknowledgment of children as actors. This suggests that policy instruments can be transformed and hence evolve to more fully respond to the CRC.

Theoretically, we argue that there are important take-home messages from our analysis. The first one is that it is fruitful to think about a move toward *child-centered* policies in terms of defamilization. This is not to argue for the end of family: it is to a very large extent about the position of children within the families. We argue that this, in turn, has consequences for how we should understand the concepts of decommodification in class terms and defamilization in gender terms. Decommodification was not the end of the market economy, quite the contrary, many of these types of policies make markets work better because they address market failures, or otherwise support markets ([Iversen and Soskice 2015](#)). However, social policy programs do change power relations between labor and capital, and with Philip Pettit, we can argue that such policies may enhance "freedom as non-domination": "free persons can walk tall, and look others in the eye. They do not depend on anyone's grace or favor for being able to choose their mode of life" ([Pettit 2012](#), 82). Decommodification should therefore be seen as a vehicle for changing the power relations between capital and labor, a new equilibrium between the classes—not the end of markets. This also applies to the first (gendered) defamilization revolution (albeit unfinished), where social and labor market policies can be seen as promoting "freedom as non-domination" in gender terms. [Esping-Andersen \(2016\)](#) has observed that countries where gender relations had been most affected by defamilizing social policies actually had seen a

revival of the family as an institution, suggesting that a new equilibrium had been established between men and women. We could see the second round of defamilization as a way of shifting the power balance and potentially creating a new equilibrium where also the shortest family members can walk tall. This is not to argue that de commodification and the various forms of defamilization processes are the same, only to point to the similarity in terms of promoting relations of non-domination.

For future research, it appears warranted to study the effects of different types of policy instruments/interventions and how resource distribution may interact with agency, analyze why countries differ in the child-relatedness of social policy, and identify underlying child policy regimes. However, it would be a mistake to exclusively focus on existing policy instruments and hence miss the opportunity to be utopian and also innovate policies that can contribute to the promotion of child welfare.

Notes

Joakim Palme (born 1958) is a professor of political science at the Department of Government, Uppsala University, since 2009, and Chairman of the Migrations Studies Delegation (Delmi). He holds a Ph.D. in sociology from 1990, Stockholm University. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, he contributed to the Social Citizenship Indicator Program (SCIP) at the Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI). In 1999–2001, he chaired the Swedish “Welfare Commission”. From 2002 to 2011, he was the director of the Institute for Futures Studies in Stockholm. He has published extensively on the welfare state as a strategy of equality and the politics of the welfare state.

Maria Heimer (born 1968) is a researcher at the Department of Government, Uppsala University. She holds a Ph.D. in political science. Her earlier areas of research include the politics of the developmental state and vulnerable groups’ right to voice in their own welfare, in a global perspective. In recent years, she has led a project on children’s participation in child and family welfare in Sweden. On the topic of children’s right to voice in their own welfare, she has published in journals such as *Social Policy & Administration* and *Journal of Social Policy*.

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