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# Politicising Finnish family policy reform 2007-2017





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Politicising Finnish family  
policy reform  
2007–2017

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*This thesis is dedicated to Erkki Pesonen and his colleagues*

*Without your expertise, nothing in my life*

*- including this achievement -*

*would be possible*



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## List of articles

### Article I

Nyby, J., Nygård, M. & Blum, S. (2018). Radical reform or piecemeal adjustments? The case of Finnish family policy reforms. *European Policy Analysis*, 4(2), 190—2013.

### Article II

Nyby, J., Nygård, M., Autto, J. & Kuisma, M. (2017). Freedom of choice, gender equality or employment promotion? Finnish party positions on childcare in the light of election manifestos 2015. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 39(3), 279—297.

### Article III

Nyby, J., Nygård, M., Autto, J., Kuisma, M. & Blum, S. (2018). The role of discourse in family policy reform: the case of Finland. *Critical Social Policy*, 38(3), 567—588.

### Article IV

Lundkvist, M., Nyby, J., Autto, J. & Nygård, M. (2017). From universalism to selectivity? The background, discourses and ideas of recent early childhood education and care reforms in Finland. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(10), 1543—1556.





## Abstract

Family policy is an extensive and highly politicised field in social policy. Throughout the history of family policy in general, the aims have been to relieve poverty among families with children, increase fertility rates and, more lately, to reconcile work and family life. These aims have been reached through a combination of cash transfers to families with children and different benefits in kind, such as public childcare and parental leaves. What the particular aims of family policy should be, however, has changed over time and been discussed, negotiated and decided on by politicians and social actors, such as women's groups and labour market organisations.

This doctoral thesis investigates how reforms in selected Finnish family policy areas were politicised 2007–2017, a period of economic turmoil and a varying political landscape. The overall aim of this thesis was to study how the Finnish family policy system was reformed during this ten-year-period, and how the reforms were politicised, in terms of what ideas were prominent in the political discourse.

In this doctoral thesis, an innovative way of studying reform was done, through studying reforms mainly from the input and the output perspectives, rather than focussing on the output and the outcome perspectives, which are typically the starting point in welfare state (reform) studies. The data consisted mainly of political documents, such as election manifestos, government programs, government bills and parliamentary minutiae. However, to get a more nuanced picture of the politicisation of family policy reform supplementary data, such as newspaper editorials and interviews (conducted in 2014) with family policy experts, were used for some of the articles. The data was analysed through qualitative content analysis.

The results show that, first, family policy was frequently reformed during this period. In the beginning of the period, the governments pursued expanding policy adjustments to cushion families from the economic crisis, and even a radical reforms to improve gender equality was pursued. Later governments, however, pursued contracting policy adjustments combined with a contracting radical reform to the ECEC-system. Second, the result show that two ideas – social investment and neoliberal austerity – fought for precedence. On the one hand, human capital was strengthened through reforming the public childcare system to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The emphasis was on the importance on investing in the future of all children. On the other hand, this principle was later weakened when access to fulltime ECEC was limited to those parents who were working or studying fulltime, as well as to entrepreneurs.

Thus, Finnish family policy remains highly politicised and based on

the results it has indeed taken a turn towards a leaner family policy model. Whether this period was the starting point of a persistent leaner family policy model, compared to the generous Nordic family policy model, or whether this period only was an anomaly in Finnish family policy history, remains to be seen.

## Abstrakt

Familjepolitik är ett brett och mycket politiserat socialpolitiskt område. Genom familjepolitikens utveckling har målen generellt varit att minska fattigdom bland barnfamiljer, öka fertiliteten och på senare tid har även målet varit att underlätta kombinationen familjeliv med arbetsliv. Dessa mål har nåtts genom inkomstöverföringar till barnfamiljer och dylika tjänster, såsom offentlig dagvård och familjeledighetsystem. Målen med familjepolitik har emellertid varierat, och är ett resultat av diskussioner och förhandlingar politiker och sociala aktörer, såsom kvinno- och fackförbund, emellan.

Denna doktorsavhandling studerar politiseringen av reformer inom utvalda områden av det finländska familjepolitiska systemet under perioden 2007-2017. Denna period bestod av ekonomisk orolighet kombinerat med varierande politiska målsättningar. Det övergripande målet med avhandlingen var dels att studera vilka reformer som gjordes under denna tioårsperiod, dels att studera hur dessa reformer politiserades i termer av vilka idéer var framträdande i den politiska diskursen.

Vanligtvis studeras reformer som förändringar i själva socialpolitiska systemet (output) eller vad dessa förändringar leder till för förmånstagaren (outcome). Denna doktorsavhandling visar dock på ett innovativt tillvägagångssätt när det kommer till att studera reformer av socialpolitiska system, eftersom fokus ligger på input-perspektivet. Detta perspektiv är ett av de första stegen i reformprocessen där en reform skapas genom politisk debatt och diskussioner. Främsta politiska dokument – såsom valprogram, riksdagsprogram och protokoll – användes som data, men för att få en mer nyanserad bild av politiseringen av dylika reformer användes kompletterande data – såsom intervjuer med familjepolitikexperter (från 2014) och ledare från Helsingin Sanomat. Datat analyserades genom kvalitativ innehållsanalys.

Resultatet visar att familjepolitiken reformerades ofta under denna tidsperiod. För det första, i början gjordes delar av det familjepolitiska systemet ännu mer generöst för att underlätta barnfamiljers ekonomiska situation och delar av familjeledighetsystemet ändrades radikalt för att förbättra jämställdheten. Senare under tidsperioden gjordes nedskärningar och det småbarnspedagogiska systemet ändrades radikalt. För det andra, resultatet visar på att två idéer – det sociala investeringparadigmet och nyliberal

åtstramningspolitik – tävlade om hur familjepolitiken skulle formas. Å ena sidan lyftes vikten av alla barns framtid fram i humankapitalinvesteringar, vilket blev synligt i och med reformeringen av det offentliga dagvårdssystemet till småbarnsfostran. Å andra sidan försvagades denna investering senare genom att begränsa den subjektiva rätten till småbarnsfostran på heltid till föräldrar som arbetar eller studerar heltid, samt till entreprenörer.

Den finska familjepolitiken förblir sålunda ett mycket politiserat område inom socialpolitiken och det är svårt att förutse vilken familjepolitisk linje Finland kommer gå i framtiden. Resultatet tyder dock på att Finland valt en stamare linje där generositetsnivån på bidrag riktade till barnfamiljer sänkts och tillgång till småbarnsfostran har knytits an till föräldrarnas sysselsättning. Om denna tioårsperiod visar sig vara startskottet för en snävare familjepolitisk linje, eller huruvida Finland följer den nordiska familjepolitiska utvecklingen eller ej, återstår att se.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Family policy is an extensive part of the welfare state. Its definitions, objectives and aims have varied over time and place but the core, the family, has remained. The definition and status of ‘family’ dictates who can and cannot benefit from state-enacted family policies (Zimmermann, 1995). Family policies “constitute a collection of separate but interrelated policy choices that aim to address problems that families are perceived as experiencing in society” (ibid., p. 3). How and why these problems or needs are to be met is to a large extent decided by the motives of politicians in power (and their voters), but it is also decided on by social actors, such as women’s and labour market organisations.

One of the goals of family policy has been to reconcile work and family life, and compared to other European welfare states, the Nordic welfare states have a long history of investments in such policies (e.g. Thévenon, 2011). In the Nordic countries, the emphasis has long been on supporting gender equality and encouraging women – and notably mothers – to participate in the labour market. This has mainly been done through family-friendly policies, such as public childcare arrangements and generous leave entitlement systems<sup>1</sup> (e.g. Haataja & Nyberg, 2006).

Needless to say, there are variations amongst the Nordic countries when it comes to how family policy is pursued, and one country in particular stands out: Finland. Here, Finland serves as an interesting case amongst the Nordic countries due to the long-lasting dualism<sup>2</sup> of childcare, granting parents a freedom to choose between different care options after the parental leave periods come to an end, when the child is circa 10 months old. Simply put, parents can choose to care for the child at home, while receiving the state-subsidised home care allowance, until the child is three, or to choose to use formal childcare (public or private) which allows both parents to participate in the labour market (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009). In Finland, the first care option is frequently used (mostly by mothers) for at least a period a time. This results in fewer children under the age of two participating in formal childcare

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1. Although the Nordic welfare states, compared to other countries, share similarities in their family policy system to make them a distinct family policy model (e.g. Ferrarini, 2006; Korpi, 2000), there are variations between the Nordic countries. One example is leave entitlement arrangements, but also the ‘effect’ of family policies, such as variations in child poverty rates or female employment rates (Eurostat, 2019).

2. It is important noticing that other Nordic countries have used similar dualisms. However, they have been downplayed in relation to the strong position of the dualism in Finland (see e.g. Eydal et al. 2018).

arrangements compared to children under the age of two in the other Nordic countries (see e.g. Datta Gupta, 2006).

This dualism of childcare and its consequences, has been highly politicised since its introduction in the 1980s, and it has been observed that ‘parties matter’ when it comes to shaping family policy in Finland (see e.g. Hiilamo, 2002; Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009; Nygård, 2007, 2010), as parties fight to represent their constituency. However, Häusermann and colleagues (2013) point out that the typical left- and right-voter has changed, in terms of for example the view of the redistribution of ‘passifying’ cash transfers, as focus has shifted more to activating services-in-kind policies, such as the combination of work and family life. This is an example of an idea that have gained more attention and implementation on national and supranational levels (e.g. EU, 2013).

At the same time, however, while ideas on social investment became even more emphasised, the financial crisis followed by the economic recession of 2008/2009 altered the economic and political landscapes in many countries, including Finland. A few years into the recession in Finland, stagnated growth, high unemployment rates and falling government revenue led to state commitments of social welfare being undermined, and Finnish governments pursued cutbacks and other reforms to the social security systems, including in family policy. On the one hand, cutbacks can be seen as essential in times of economic crisis, and it has been argued (e.g. Pierson, 2001) that the welfare states have long ago entered an ‘era of permanent austerity’, which makes cutbacks (in combination with some extensions) expected. On the other hand, a notable group of scholars (Blyth, 2013; Clarke & Newman, 2012; Crouch, 2011; Farnsworth & Irving, 2011, 2015) argue that cutbacks imposed on the welfare system since 2007 have not only been seen as mere economic necessities, but also motivated by ideas of neoliberal austerity policies. In this “new era of austerity” (Farnsworth & Irving, 2015, p. 1), the political elite seem willing to renegotiate many policy areas and to make politically risky moves, as well as to pursue unpopular reforms (see Vis, 2010).

## **1.2. Aim and research questions**

*The overall aim of this thesis is to study how the Finnish family policy system was reformed 2007—2017, and on how these reforms were politicised in terms of ideas. This period represents a period of economic turmoil and of competing normative ideas on how different social policy fields, including family policy, ought to be shaped. Thus, this period is interesting from at least two perspectives. First, it represents a time starting shortly before the international financial crisis 2008-2009, and ending a couple of years after the recession*

that followed the financial crisis. Compared to the other Nordic countries<sup>3</sup>, Finland was severely affected by the international financial crisis, and the economic recession lingered in Finland until 2016 (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Second, it represents a period where two differing ideas – social investment versus neoliberal austerity policies – fought for precedence, and these ideas became evident in the politicisation of such. In this thesis, politicisation refers to the process in which political actors create, preserve and (re)negotiate distribution guidelines of public resources, as well as to the political efforts to resolving social problems (Heywood, 2013), while also recognising the result or the reform process. Finally, not only is this ten-year period economically interesting, but also politically, as the political landscape varied greatly and this period was represented by five cabinets<sup>4</sup> politicising family policy differently.

Family policy is a vast field and in order to study it certain limits need to be made. In this thesis, family policy refers to main income transfers (such as child benefits and leave entitlement benefits) and services (notably public childcare arrangements) directed at families with children, but also to some extent last-resort benefits that are aimed at low-income households, including families. Thus, the focus of this thesis lies on reforms in the area of family policy in general, and on the role of political language as a tool for politicising family policy in a Finnish setting in particular. The following research questions are posed:

1. What reforms were pursued in Finnish family policy 2007–2017, a period that represents a decade of economic turmoil and competing ideas on family policy?
2. How were main family policy reforms, such as the child benefit cuts or childcare reforms, politicised in the public arena, and what role did influential ideas play in this process?

The concept of reform is rather complicated (see chapter 4) and one way of understanding it could be through making a distinction between different perspectives, or phases, of the reform process. Measuring reforms are typically done through using the output or outcome perspectives (Green-Pedersen, 2007). While these perspectives focus on what reforms actually are pursued or

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3. Except Iceland, which was most severely affected by the 2008-2009 financial crisis. Interestingly, however, similar cutbacks to the social security system done in Finland, were not pursued in Iceland (Stuckler & Basu, 2013).

4 PM Vanhanen's second cabinet (2007–2010), PM Kiviniemi's cabinet (2010–2011), Katainen's cabinet (2011–2014), PM Stubb's cabinet (2014-2015), PM Sipilä's cabinet (2015–2019). It is also worth noting that one of the parties of PM Sipilä's cabinet altered during its time in office, as the Finns Party split and Blue Reform became the new political party included in PM Sipilä's cabinet. Also, the Katainen and Stubb coalitions changed their composition while in office. The Left Alliance left the Katainen coalition in 2014 and the Greens left the Stubb coalition in 2015.

what the impacts of these are for the overall social welfare, I would also like to introduce a third perspective of studying reform: the input perspective. I argue that the input perspective is highly interesting when studying reform, as it is indeed the first step of the reform process. It is here that policy suggestions (for reform) become politicised: a problem is presented and problematised, and a solution is offered. This solution is then renegotiated, contested and possibly implemented.

This thesis contributes to the academic literature in two ways. First, it adds to the literature on Finnish family policy, especially in terms of how this field has been politicised and reformed from the time just before, during and after the international financial crisis. Second, by introducing the innovative *modus operandi* to studying the reform process – the input perspective – it contributes to the literature on welfare state reform. Drawing on theoretical concepts such as Hemerijck's (2013) notion on normative recalibration and 'politics matter' (see e.g. Allan & Scruggs, 2004; Huber & Stephens, 2001; Korpi & Palme, 2003), this thesis sheds light on how ideas influence reform. Although the input perspective in the reform process still needs polishing, it is nonetheless innovative in the literature on welfare state reform.

### **1.3. Structure of the thesis**

The thesis comprises of a theoretical framework (kappa) consisting of six chapters. In these chapters, different concepts used in the thesis – such as family policy, welfare state reform and their theoretical explanations and ways to study reform – are discussed. Chapters five and six constitute the empirical section of the thesis, and consist of the presentation of the original articles pursued for this thesis, summaries of the original articles and the results in relation to the research questions posed above. This is followed by concluding remarks alongside a discussion on policy implementations and further research.



## 2. Family policy

### 2.1. Definitions of family policy

Family policy is an extensive field containing for example family legislation, social services, monetary benefits and tax deductions, and the definitions and objectives have changed over time and place (Wennemo, 1994). Family policies are interrelated policy solutions that address issues and challenges that families are facing (ibid.), and how these challenges or needs are to be met is largely decided by politicians in power. The solutions are shaped by politicians' motives, ideas and ideologies, but also by social actors, such as women's and labour market organisations.

Family policy became a prominent field of study in the social sciences in the 1970s. In 1978, Kamerman and Kahn (eds.) presented two major definitions of family policy, namely the **explicit** and the **implicit** definition. Simply put, the **explicit** definition refers to a state's action that directly affects families, such as cash transfers, housing and services for families. Today, this could also include social work directed at families, pre- and postnatal healthcare for the mother, as well as health and dental care for the child up until the age of 18. The **implicit** definition refers to all governmental action that indirectly affect families, such as labour market policies, education, safety policies etc. Today, families and their comfort can e.g. also be taken into consideration when it comes to the infrastructure.

Not only did Kamerman and Kahn (1978) define family policy explicitly and implicitly, but they also presented **three dimensions** of family policy: family policy as an instrument, a policy field, and a perspective. During the 1930s and after the end of Second World War, the objective of family policy in the most western welfare state was pronatalism (Gauthier, 1996), thus, family policy actions were mainly used as an instrument to influence the development of families in terms of increasing birth rates (Kamerman & Kahn, 1978). Family policy can also be viewed as a policy field, where political actions aim to compensate families with children for the costs that child rearing bring (ibid.), in terms of redistribution of income (Gauthier, 1996; STM, 2013). Finally, it can also be viewed as a perspective to be taken into consideration in the decision-making process of different policies, for example infrastructure or health (Kamerman & Kahn, 1978).

### 2.2. Objectives of family policy

More recently, scholars have identified certain objectives of family policy. Thévenon (2011) summarises these and identifies six aims of family policy: raising birth rates, economic compensation for costs children bring, fostering

employment, improving gender equity (compared to gender equality), poverty reduction and income maintenance, as well as support for early childhood development. Whereas economic compensation and raising birth-rates largely are drawn on Kamerman and Kahn's (1978) definitions of family policy (see above), the four others are more comprehensive.

According to Thévenon (2011) the four other definitions are as follow: **first**, fostering employment is important for many different reasons; one being the contribution to the economy of the welfare state. Fostering employment is mainly done in three ways: through (parental) leave entitlement policies, through childcare services, and through active labour market policies combined with a benefit and taxation system with incentives to work<sup>5</sup>. **Second**, improving gender equity<sup>6</sup> can partly be achieved by fostering employment, but also through separate taxation systems, which strengthens the woman's economic position in relation to the man's. Furthermore, splitting leave entitlements between the parents can prevent the mother from taking lengthy leaves from employment while raising a young child. **Third**, poverty reduction and income maintenance entail selective or universal benefits to families with children, which functions as a means to guarantee families with children a certain income. And **fourth**, supporting early childhood development stems from two perspectives: allowing for young children to be able to spend time with their parent(s), but later also enabling children benefits to participate in early childhood education and care<sup>7</sup>. Children of working parents usually participate in high-quality early childhood education and care which is essential in terms of social integration and personal development, as well as to the future learning of a child (EU, 2013).

The emphasis of these family policy aims varies over time, but all of them have at some point played a part in shaping family policy. Apart from the abovementioned elements of family policy, other policies – such as housing benefits for families with children and various support for families having caring responsibility for elderly or other dependents (Gauthier, 2010), as well as family counselling and inheritance law (Hiilamo, 2002) – can also be defined as family policy.

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5 In terms of welfare state research, employment fostering has spawned different measurements of welfare, or caring, regimes. For example, the degree of de-familialisation, which suggests that the state or the market provide childcare facilities, is frequently taken into consideration (see e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1999; Leitner, 2003).

6 While Thévenon (2011) uses 'gender equity', most scholars refer to 'gender equality' in this context.

7 Regarding the third and fourth points: a general notion has been put forward that children with parents participating in the labour market are less likely to be poor. While this still prevails, it is noteworthy to point out that national and European evidence suggest that poverty among children with working parents is on the rise, and that employment per se is not a guarantee to lift families out of poverty (e.g. Eurofound, 2015; Karvonen & Salmi, 2016; Sauli et al., 2011; Marx & Nelson, 2013).

### 2.3. Finnish family policy

In the vast literature on comparative family policy studies, Finland is often classified part of the Nordic family policy model, or the dual-earner model (Leira, 2006). The main goal of this family policy model is to combat inequality through vertical and horizontal cash transfers, and to enhance gender equality through encouraging women's (mothers') participation in the labour force (Hiilamo, 2002; Forssén et al., 2008). This is done through investments in public childcare and elderly-care systems combined with comprehensive income-related parental leave systems. The state carries a significant responsibility for the economic well-being of families, the idea of universalism in family policy is crucial (Hiilamo, 2002), and both parents have a shared responsibility in providing economically for the family, as well as responsibility for childcare (Leira, 2006).

Universalism has long been an accepted, popular and treasured principle in Finnish family policy. This principle has played a crucial role in the child benefits system, as child benefits are paid to all families with children under 17 regardless of income or means (Eydal et al., 2018), but the principle has also played an important role to the public childcare system, as it has implied the subjective right to public child care regardless of the labour market position of the parent(s).

The aim of Finnish family policy today is “to give children a safe and secure upbringing and to secure the material and mental capacities of the parents to start a family and raise children”<sup>8</sup> (STM, 2013, p. 6). This system has been developed in different stages, all of which are distinguished by different normative ideas on state vs. family, and the family itself has been the subject of political power struggles as different opinions and ideas have fought for precedence. As such, the family itself has become an ideological construction (e.g. Barret & McIntosh, 2015) where politicians and their parties compete (for the claim) to represent the interests of families. Thus, ideas (see chapter 3.4), presented by politicians, play a vital role in explaining the emergences of family policies (e.g. Eydal & Rostgaard, 2001), as well as reforms of such. Previous research on Finnish family policy (e.g. Hiilamo, 2002; Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009, Nygård, 2007, 2010; Välimäki & Rauhala, 2000) suggest there has long been an ideological divide between conservative (agrarian) and left-wing parties when it comes to family policy, and notably when it comes to the family's freedom to choose in relation to how young children ought to be cared for.

Finnish family policy consists of a vast field of programs and the state has considerable responsibility supporting families with minors. In Finland, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is the main authority responsible for shaping family policy (Haataja et al., 2016), but also the Ministry of Labour (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2011) and Ministry of Education and Culture

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<sup>8</sup> Translated from Swedish by Nyby.

contribute to suggestions and are involved in negotiating. In this doctoral thesis, an explicit definition of family policy is used (Kamerman & Kahn, 1978) and different family policy measures will be examined.

Below, I will describe and discuss the family policy instruments that are central for this thesis – that is leave entitlements, public childcare services and public cash transfers including some means-tested benefits. These four groups represent a major part of the Finnish family policy system, and have been studied in the four original articles.

### 2.3.1. Leave entitlements<sup>9</sup>

As noted above, one of the central aims of family policy is to reconcile work and family life (e.g. Thévenon, 2011) and here, leave entitlements allowing parents time off to care for their new-born and young children are crucial. The leave entitlements consist of maternity, paternity and parental leaves. The maternity leave is generally exclusively for the mother, and it is used right before, during and after childbirth to protect the health of the mother and the infant (Blum et al., 2018). The paternity leave is available for the father of the infant, and is to be taken soon after the delivery in order to support the mother and the infant (ibid.) Finally, the parental leave is an individual right that can be transferred from one parent to the other, and it is available for the parents to share as they find most suitable, whether that implies one parent using the full leave or if the parents choose to split it (ibid.)<sup>10</sup>.

In Finland, the aim of the leaves is not only to guarantee time off for birth and time for raising the young child, but also to guarantee the possibility of the parents to return to ongoing employment or to similar tasks (Haataja et al., 2016). During the leave period parents are paid an income-based compensation (Fin: *äitiysraha, isyysraha, vanhempainpäiväraha*), and the leaves stretch until the child is roughly 10 months old (Kela, 2018d)<sup>11</sup>.

The leave policies are the result of tripartite bargaining between employers and trade unions (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2011), and although this means they are less influenced by political parties in the Finnish parliament, there is a clear political divide on the matter when it comes reforming the system (see **Article II**).

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<sup>9</sup> Here, I do not focus on the leaves that parents can use if a child is ill. For an overview of the current schemes in Finland on this, see e.g. Haataja (2016).

<sup>10</sup> It is important noticing, that leave entitlements also play a crucial role in creating gender equality, which has been on the Finnish family policy agenda since the late-1960s. In 2003, the position of the father in relation to the parental leave was strengthened, as the father was granted a two-week paternity leave period which could be extended to four weeks, and the mother's parental leave rights could be transferred to the father, if the mother for some reason, such as sickness, was unable to care for the child (statute 1075/2002).

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent overview of how the parental leave has developed in terms of length, see Haataja (2016, p. 41, figure 1).

There is political consensus about the need for parents to share the leave periods more evenly, in terms of fathers taking a larger proportion, however, political disagreement mainly lies in who should finance this. Left-wing parties argue that the employers should take on more responsibility, however, the conservative parties (Centre Party, National Coalition), representing the views of the employers, typically oppose this (see **Article II**).

As the leave periods end, parents who wish to still care for the child at home can do so while receiving the home care allowance. This is often referred to as parents' 'freedom of choice.' This freedom of choice is highly popular among the general public and parents (e.g. Repo, 2010), but it has been highly criticised in the other Nordic countries, notably in Sweden, as this is considered a 'trap for women' (e.g. Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009).

### 2.3.2. Public childcare services

Public child care services can be viewed from different perspectives, and these perspectives have played a central role through different stages of the development of the public childcare system (see Ailila et al., 2014). In terms of a social policy perspective, public childcare services can be viewed as a link between the child/family and other social services that support families with children, e.g. public childcare functions as a (social policy) service, which is a link in the chain of different support systems available for families with children, such as child protection services. It can also be viewed from an equality perspective, which sees public childcare services as a tool for freeing the parents from care responsibility and enables parents to participate in the labour market (gender equality) while preparing all children for compulsory education, in terms of supporting them to reach a certain level (equality among children) (ibid.). The family policy perspective combines the abovementioned perspective as it views public childcare services as a tool to support the child's growth, development and learning (ibid.), while equality between children and the two genders are achieved (ibid.)<sup>12</sup>.

It can be argued that these perspectives have been important when it comes to the Finnish public childcare system, which got its start in the 1970s (statute 36/1973). On the one hand, public childcare services free women from caring duties, enabling them to participate in the labour market. Not only does women's participation on the labour market help financing the welfare state, but it also strengthens their economic position and personal independence. On the other hand, investments in public childcare are also seen as an investment in children's well-being and learning (Campbell-Barr & Nygård, 2014; STM, 2007), as participating in public childcare is generally considered being in 'the best interest of the child', at least for children over the age of three.

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<sup>12</sup> Public child care can also be viewed from other perspectives, such as labour, child and education politics (ibid).

In 1997, the subjective right to public child care was extended in Finland to cover all children under the age of seven (statute 1128/1996, see also e.g. Forssén et al., 2008; Hiilamo, 2002) and this was mainly done to increase women's participation in the labour force, which in turn would lead to a stronger financial foundation for the welfare state, and more gender equality in terms of economic possibilities for the woman. The idea of universalism was also crucial, since the subjective right covered all children under school age regardless of social class.

In conjunction with the extension of subjective right to childcare in 1997, a reform to the private care allowance (Fin: *yksityinen hoito tuki*) was also pursued (statute 1128/1996). While parents who wished to use private rather than public childcare prior to this, had to use the home care allowance (see next subchapter), but the reform in 1997 broadened the state-subsidised market-based alternative. This benefit now consists of three parts: care allowance (Fin: *hoitotuki*), which depends on the child's right to public child care; care addition (Fin: *hoitolisä*), which depends on the former as well as on the family's economy; and a possible municipal supplement (Fin: *kuntalisä*) (Kela, 2019a). The aim of this reform was to increase the freedom of choice of the families and support mothers to participate in the labour market. (HE 208/1996 vp).

### 2.3.3. Public cash transfers

Another central aim of family policy is to economically compensate families with children for costs related to child rearing (e.g. Thévenon, 2011). My thesis concentrates on the following kinds of cash transfers: the universal child benefit (Fin: *lapsilisä*) and the home care allowance (Fin: *kotihoidontuki*), as well as on the means-tested general housing allowance (Fin: *yleinen asumistuki*) and social assistance (Fin: *toimeentulotuki*)<sup>13</sup>.

The child benefit, which also consists of the sibling supplements and the single parent supplement, is a monthly tax-free cash transfer paid universally for children under 17. As the benefit is usually paid to the mother, this can promote gender equality (Hiilamo, 2004), through strengthening the economic position of the woman. The origins of today's child benefit lay in the 'family wage' from 1938, which was paid to fathers employed by the public sector (Hiilamo, 2002). The idea, mainly supported by the National Coalition Party but also by the Social Democratic Party, was to help the father to provide for his family and thus maintaining traditional 'male-breadwinner, female-homemaker' roles. After the end of the Second World War, the family wage was introduced in other sectors as well, and after being influenced by Sweden and

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<sup>13</sup> There are no means tested benefits that are per se aimed at families with children. However, to guarantee an income to the poorest and most vulnerable households, including families with children, these two means-tested benefits are available. There are two means tested benefits available, namely general housing allowance and social assistance (Kela, 2018a, 2018b).

the United Kingdom (Beveridge) with the support of the former Agrarian Party (Centre Party), the child benefit became universal in 1948. Furthermore, in the 1960s the sibling supplement was introduced as a response to poverty amongst (larger) families (Hiilamo, 2002). Since their introduction, the child benefits have become very popular among parties and the general public.

The home care allowance is an economic compensation paid to one parent, guardian, or to a grandparent, who stays at home caring for a child under the age of three. This state-subsidised flat-rate benefit is paid after the family leave entitlement period end (see above); however, the amount is lower than the income-based maternity, paternity and parental leave benefits (Kela, 2018d). The home care allowance (sometimes referred to as ‘mother wage’ or ‘cash-for-care’) also includes a supplement for siblings under age (the supplement varies depending on the age of the sibling), which allows on parent to care for their children under school age at home (Kela, 2019b)<sup>14</sup>.

This system is a result of a political compromise between conservative parties (the then Agrarian parties as well as the Christian parties) and left-wing parties (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009). When the home care allowance was introduced in the 1980s, conservative parties defended the right of the farmers’ wives’ right to economic recognition for caring for children at home and for not using public childcare arrangements, which the left-wing parties supported. The conservative parties (Centre Party, Christian Democrats and Finns Party) still strongly support and defend the home care allowance and it has been argued that the home care allowance is “probably one of the clearest examples of a politically motivated decision-making process concerning childcare policy” (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011, p. 164). The home care allowance is widely used in Finland, and it has led to young children being cared for outside public childcare (i.e. at home or elsewhere) to a higher extent than the other Nordic countries (Repo, 2009, 2010). Compared to the other Nordic countries, Finland remains somewhat more conservative in its normative view of how the state should support families with young children (see e.g. Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009).

General housing allowance and social assistance are two means-tested benefits available for households on low income, including families with children (Kela, 2018a, 2018b). In order to cope with housing costs, low-income households may qualify for general housing allowance, and the amount depends on the number of adults and dependent children in the household, as well as on total net earnings (Kela, 2018a). The social assistance consist of basic, supplementary and preventive social assistance is considered ‘last resort’ financial support for the poorest households (Kela, 2018b).

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<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that parents can claim home care allowance for private care of young children, and partial or flexible home care allowance can be claimed if the one of the parents works 80 percent. Depending on the family’s income, a supplement to the home care allowance can be offered. In some municipalities, a municipal supplement is also available. (Kela, 2018c).

### **3. Theoretical explanations of welfare state change – and their role in family policy**

Welfare states<sup>15</sup> can be understood and explained in a multitude of ways. Put simply, some theoretical explanations focus on why welfare states emerged in the first place and took certain shapes during the 1900s, while others focus on how welfare states have changed, or resisted change, in the modern era of post-industrialism and globalisation. These theoretical explanations do not only focus on the reasons for and modes of change, but they also dwell on the inner logics of the welfare state.

The vast literature on theoretical explanations of the welfare state, and its changes, can be categorised in many ways. In this thesis, I have chosen to discuss four major explanations: (1) structural-functionalist, (2) political, (3) institutionalist, and (4) ideational explanations. It is important to note that there are no clear-cut boundaries between these explanations. Also, the aim of this discussion is not to provide an exhaustive or in-depth review, but rather to present theoretical explanations to the welfare state that can offer an understanding of recent developments in relation to the literature on welfare state reform.

#### **3.1. Structural-functionalist tradition**

According to this tradition, social policies developed as a response to social and economic pressures, and the development of social policies is usually viewed as a result of industrialisation. It has been argued that industrialisation, “the great transformation in the history of mankind” (Kerr et al., 1960, p. 238), transformed society from an agrarian collective to a society with widespread individualism, and accordingly, social policies were a response to arising social needs on two levels. First, workers needed protection, such as health care, labour market regulations and pension systems (Wilensky, 1975). Second, urbanisation and new technological development increased the demand on the labour force, both in terms of quality and quantity.

In terms of family policy, this altered the caring arrangements of dependents and thus altered the traditional family role. It has been argued (e.g. Kerr et al., 1960) that in order to meet these new needs, state intervention became necessary and some state responsibility for family members who could not take care of themselves, such as children and the elderly, became a necessity. Raising

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to highlight that there is no universal definition of the welfare state. Simply put, the welfare state must have some degree of social insurance (see e.g. Kuhnle & Sander, 2010), protecting its citizens from different social risks. For an overview of the welfare state and the development of such, see e.g. Castles et al. (2010).



children also became more expensive during industrialism (e.g. Wennemo, 1994), as children, especially after restricting child labour, could no longer contribute to the household income. Thus, families gradually came to be seen more and more as a social responsibility.

According to this tradition, the expansion of welfare state services was feasible due to continuing growth and expanded surplus, but also due to a massive state bureaucracy (see Goldthorpe, 1969). Thus, the economic forces in relation to industrialisation shaped public and social policy, with politics and party politics playing a secondary or minor role (Quadagno, 1987). This tradition was especially popular in explaining major welfare state expansion during the three decades following the end of Second World War. In the 1970s, however, the previous Keynesian consensus, which suggested that social expenditure for public welfare could tame the instable business cycle (ibid.), became questioned as slower economic growth and a foreseeable ageing population altered the economic landscape of most industrialised welfare states. This, in combination with the shocks of the oil crises in 1973 (Wilensky, 1975) and in 1979, led to a scaling down of the welfare state becoming a common policy solution in several Western welfare states<sup>16</sup> and thus, the structural-functionalist tradition was downplayed in the following decades in explaining welfare state change.

However, a few decades later, this tradition regained ground in explaining welfare state change in conjunction with the immense shift in employment pattern which deindustrialisation and globalisation led to (from manufacturing to service jobs, see Myles & Quadagno, 2002), suggesting that social policies pursued indeed are a response to (changing) social and economic pressures. The character of the pressures and the economic situation of the 'deindustrialised' welfare states, however, have changed. In the 1990s, it was pointed out by Iversen and Wren (1998), that the challenge for the state is to maintain a tight state budget, while supporting employment (cf. Keynesian economy) and working to decrease income inequalities ("the trilemma of the service economy": see chapter 3.4).

### 3.2. Political explanations

As the structural-functionalist tradition could not explain the diversity among welfare state systems (Quadagno, 1987; Myles & Quadagno, 2002), attention was in the late 1970s and early 1980s turned to political explanations for welfare state change. One approach was the *partisan politics approach*, or 'parties matter', which suggests that more redistributive welfare states tended to be associated with left-wing parties in government (e.g. Hibbs, 1977; Hewitt, 1977), and that less redistribution was associated with right-wing governments

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<sup>16</sup> This statement is highly generalizing and naturally, this does not count for all Western welfare states.

(e.g. Borg & Castles, 1981). Thus, advocates of this approach suggested that left-wing and right-wing parties hold conflicting positions on social and welfare policies, and these positions reflect the interest of their supporters and voters.

Another important political explanation in this field is the *power resource theory* and its implementation on the role of social-democratic parties (e.g. Stephens, 1979; Korpi, 1983, 1989). According to this theory, party politics influence the shape of social policy in accordance to the literature on the ‘parties matter’ argument, but when studying how social policy is shaped, class conflicts between the working class – who increasingly made up a large voters’ group – and capitalism must also be taken into consideration. This strand used union density, union centralisation, bargaining coordination and the position of left-wing political parties in explaining different social policy outcomes amongst welfare states (Korpi, 1983).

Furthermore, in 1990 Esping-Andersen’s path-breaking *Three worlds of welfare capitalism* further developed the power resource theory, through integrating economic, social and political accounts when studying the development of different welfare systems, regimes. He accounted for the degree of de-commodification, that is, to what degree a person’s social security is reliant on participation in the labour force, and argued that social-democracy – together with trade unions and certain voter groups, such as farmers – functioned as an instrument in class formation, and thus as a political driving force of more encompassing welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

However, Häusermann and colleagues (2013, p. 234) suggest, “the theory of partisan politics [now] needs to be adopted, either by updating some of the underlying assumptions, or by re-conceptualising the approach more fundamentally”. They suggest that the traditional partisan theory assumes that *class* – workers vs. capitalism – still lays as ground for this tradition. Thus, this tradition fails to critically account for the societal and electoral change from industrialism to post-industrialism, suggesting that parties now have different roles than during the epoch of industrialism. At that point in time, the typical left-wing constituency consisted mainly of workers and poorer people, and thus left-wing parties pushed for more (passive) redistribution. Now, however, highly educated (notably) women – who are usually not in need of more (passive) redistribution of resources but rather in need of social investment policies – and the new middle-class vote for left-wing parties, and sometimes even for far-left parties, such as feminist and green parties (ibid). Thus, while the ‘left vs. right’, or ‘more vs. less welfare’, is still a valid measurement when discussing partisan politics approach, the researcher needs to be aware of the change in character of a typical left vs. a typical right-wing voter.

Thus, the traditional partisan politics have altered during post-industrialisation, both in terms of political systems and the struggle for voters, as politics no longer is purely a question of class, and thus unidimensional, but the political arena has become the outlet for multidimensional conflicts.

Furthermore, Häusermann and colleagues (2013) suggest that scholars ought to collectively highlight the issue both empirically and theoretically. This could for example be done through scrutinising and perhaps redefining the importance of class (as traditional partisan politics still centres class in political matters), and to redefine the dependent variable, which typically consist of welfare state output in terms of social spending levels and generosity levels.

Still, looking at the political explanations for reform is especially interesting when it comes to Finnish family policy. In Finland, political parties tend to view the role of the state in relation to the role of the family differently (see e.g. Hiilamo, 2002; Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009; Nygård, 2007, 2010) and thus they *politicise* issues pertaining to family policy differently. Whereas left of centre parties have favoured measures of vertical redistribution and emphasised services such as public childcare services, rightist and centre parties have generally favoured horizontal redistribution and support for the traditional family, such as the child home care system (see chapter 2.3).

### 3.3. Institutionalist tradition

Drawing on the ‘politics matter’ and ‘power resource theory’, scholars in the 1980s and 1990s started to also take into consideration how institutional structures of government as well as the rules of electoral competition affected the social policy outcome (e.g. Skocpol, 1992; Amenta, 1998). The proponents of *institutionalist theory* suggested that welfare states (reforms) take different shapes due to the institutional features of government. These features can imply the organisation and structure of the state, as well as on the rules of electoral competition, such as veto points (e.g. Pierson, 1996) but also on how social policy is structured, such as the degree of centralisation (e.g. Starke, 2006, see also Myles & Quadagno, 2002).

In the case of Finland, certain aspects of social policy such as pensions, workers’ rights, and work/life balance policies for families with children, have been and still are reformed through tripartite negotiations. Social actors, such as employers’ organisations and workers’ unions, have played a significant negotiation role, especially when it comes to negotiating parental leave systems together with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health as well as the Ministry of Labour (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2011).<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the institutional features of government and the organisation of social policy, one aspect that affects how social policy is developed, is that of path dependence (e.g. Pierson, 2004). When trying to understand why the welfare state develops in a certain direction, path dependence suggests that current policy changes are not entirely independent from previous events

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<sup>17</sup> However, not all Finnish family policies, such as the child benefit, are the result of a tripartite negotiation. Thus, theoretically, as child benefit is less institutionally entrenched than others are, such as pension policies (see Clasen, 2005), pursuing reforming is less politically risky.

(Ebbinghaus, 2005). Once a certain policy is in place, it can be difficult to change. Path dependence does not mean that changes do not happen, but that they take place within existing structural frameworks and are incremental in nature (Starke, 2006). Another aspect that might affect how social policy is developed is the popularity of specific social programmes (Pierson, 1994). Pierson's argument is one of *institutional inertia*, suggesting that due to electoral risk the welfare state and its social policy, although highly contested, remains extremely resilient.

In the case of reforming the Finnish family policy system, child benefits and the public childcare system are (theoretically) more prone to reform than the parental leave system. This is because the former is tax-financed and part of a state-controlled scheme, whereas the latter is mainly contribution-based and a result of a tripartite decision-making process, giving social partners a more central role in the decision-making process in relation to reforms (see e.g. Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2011). However, although child benefits and the public child care system are easier reformed, this does not necessarily remove the potential political risk associated with a reform, and especially cutbacks (see Vis, 2010).

### 3.4. The role of ideas

Apart from the theoretical explanations to reform described above, *the role of ideas* has also influenced the literature in social and political sciences. There is no exact definition of what ideas are, but generally ideas within social policy refer to different political views on redistribution policies, in terms of what role the state, the family and the market should have in producing welfare (see e.g. Harrison & Boyd, 2003).

Elaborating on this, Béland and Cox (2010) put forward three dimensions to ideas. *First*, ideas are produced by our understanding and interpretation of our current surroundings, thus, ideas start with us humans. *Second*, ideas hypothesise certain connections between realities and people in the world, that is, one action leads to another. And *third*, by analysing problems and challenges, ideas provide guides for action to meet these (ibid.). Thus, Béland (2005) defines ideas as specific policy alternatives and organised principles which can be found in causal beliefs. Furthermore, Schmidt (2008) argues that there are two types of ideas: *cognitive* and *normative*. The former refers to logic and observation, that is, it presents what the problem/challenge is and how it should be addressed. The latter contains the same as above, but it also contains values and seeks to legitimate certain policies by presenting why something is important and why a particular policy would solve the problem (ibid.).

In terms of Finnish family policy (political) ideas become prominent especially when it comes to the questions on how the young children ought to be cared for in terms of the home care allowance and public childcare (see e.g.

Hiilamo, 2002; Nygård, 2003; 2007). In this question, parties are influenced by different ideas on how work/life balance ought to be arranged.

It could also be argued, that there are more established and more recent ideas that influence Finnish family policy. In the former 'group' of ideas, traditional or even 'familistic' ideas can be found (e.g. Jallinoja, 2006). These types of ideas suggest the role of the state is to protect families economically, but the state should refrain from getting involved in family matters and give parents' freedom of choice when it comes to, for example, raising young children. Another established idea in family policy is that of universalism, and universalism can be seen from at least two perspectives. On the one hand, it is a redistribution principle deciding on who gets what under what circumstances. On the other hand, it can be seen as an idea or ideology (Anttonen, 2002) with normative meaning attached to it (see Schmidt, 2008). The idea, and thus principle, of universalism has played a crucial role in reconciling class- and gender conflicts in the Nordic welfare states (ibid.).

More recently, two other ideas can be said to have influenced social policies in general and family policy in particular: social investment policies (SIP) and neoliberal austerity policies (NAP). It can be expected that these ideas influence Finnish family policy, as the EU emphasises social investment (see EU, 2000), but the economic crisis of 2008/2009 have at the same time led to the call for budget constraints and cutbacks in social policy in general, but in family policy in particular (see e.g. Blyth, 2013; Farnsworth & Irving, 2011; 2015; Jupp, 2015; O'Hara, 2014). Below, I will discuss these two policy ideas.

### ***Social investment policies (SIP)***

SIP is a contested social policy idea with no consensus of what it exactly entails. Broadly speaking, it can be said to differ from traditional (passive) post-war social policy, mostly in the sense that SIP support active social policies. Rather than focussing on combating 'old' social risks, such as old age, unemployment and (work) accidents which the industrialised welfare state mainly focused on, SIP concentrates on combating 'new social risks'. These social risks include new and vulnerable family structures (e.g. lone parent households), women's and notably mothers' participation in the labour force (i.e. reconciling work and family life), caring for a frail relative, possessing low or obsolete labour skills, insufficient social security coverage, and in-work poverty (e.g. Bonoli, 2005; Hemerijck, 2017; Morel et al., 2012a). In order to combat these new social risks, focus has increasingly been put on social programmes promoting prevention of social problems, as well as on social investments, such as life-long learning, activation and 'flexicurity', referring to activating social security (ibid.).

In the 2000s, SIP entered the European political agenda in conjunction with the Lisbon Strategy (EU, 2000)<sup>18</sup>, to make the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (ibid., no page number). The economic theory of the SIP is that it will enable future economic gains and safeguard better life prospects for citizens, and that workers, including female labour participants, are the source of all productivity growth. Thus, the state ought to provide services, such as investment in public childcare, to support workers in fulfilling their potential (Hemerijck, 2017; 2013).

The idea of social investment has, however, received criticism. One certain criticism is highlighted by Iversen and Wren (1998) who suggest that implementing SIP is difficult due to “the trilemma of the service state”. They argue that in a de-industrialised welfare state, it is difficult to implement policies that decrease income inequalities and support employment growth, while simultaneously pursuing budgetary constraints. This criticism itself, however, was later critiqued by Wren and colleagues (2012), who suggested that societal change – such as the rapid information and communication technology (ICT) in the 1980s and an increase in international trade in services (digitisation of information, global trade deals, as well as low cost and instantaneous transport) – has made the arguments on the trilemma weaker.

Another criticism of SIP has been put forward by Cantillon (2011). She suggests that although average incomes and employment rates have gone up, poverty rates in the pre-financial crisis have remained high or even increased, and she calls this “the paradox of the investment state” (ibid.). Furthermore, she suggests that the poverty rates within jobless households have increased (ibid.). Similarly, Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx (2011) highlight disappointing results in terms of lowering the proportion of children and working-age adults who live in jobless households. The criticism is acknowledged, but pushed back by the EU (e.g. European Parliament, 2010), suggesting that due to the economic crisis it is difficult assessing the effects of implementing SIP.

Regardless of the criticism, the reconciliation of work and family life is a central aspect of SIP, and this can be enhanced through, for example, investments in leave entitlements and high-quality public childcare arrangements systems following the Nordic model (cf. Fagnani, 2012; Nygård et al., 2015). In the case of Finland, it could be argued that social investment-related policies entered the Finnish family policy agenda already in the 1960s when paid maternity leave was introduced (statute 364/1963) and that it

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18 It needs to be stressed, that although SIP is reasonable new on the (global) political agenda these ideas can be traced to social-democratic Swedish theorists, such as Alva and Gunnar Myrdal (1934), but also to John Maynard Keynes and Keynesianism, and thus it has a longer history in the Nordic countries than elsewhere (e.g. Lister, 2009).

became consolidated through the introduction of public childcare in the early 1970s (statute 36/1973).<sup>19</sup>

### ***Neoliberal austerity policies (NAP)***

Another influential idea that has received attention in the 2000s is NAP. In the academic literature, NAP derives from austerity policies in post-industrialised societies. Pierson (1996) argued that the post-industrial welfare state can no longer operate on the same premises as the industrial welfare state, and thus modern welfare states face permanent austerity<sup>20</sup>.

Increasing financial strains, slow growth and high unemployment rates, aggravated by the economic crisis in 2008/2009, led to most welfare states becoming prone to austerity measures. Although austerity measures per se are not a new idea, Farnsworth and Irving (2015, p. 1) have argued that most European welfare states have entered “a new age of austerity”. This era differs from other periods of retrenchment, as it in political discourse has a strong focus is on fiscal balance combined with tighter budget control, as well as cuts to social expenditure combined with tax reductions and de-regulations of the labour market.

Furthermore, the austerity discourse that surfaced in conjunction with the economic crisis in 2008/2009 differs from earlier representations due to being presented as ‘the only alternative’<sup>21</sup> and ‘common sense’ in political debates on welfare provision (e.g. Blyth, 2013; Clarke & Newman, 2012; Crouch, 2011; Farnsworth & Irving, 2011, 2015). It has been described as ‘a dangerous idea’ due to its incapacity to increase growth, the repercussions of cuts to social benefits, and through being “ideologically immune to facts and basic empirical refutation” (Blyth, 2013, p. 226). It has further been argued (e.g. *ibid*; Clarke &

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19 Facilitating women’s and mothers’ employment can also be seen as an idea on gender equality, which has played a central role in Nordic family policy since the 1970s (Forssén et al., 2008; Hiilamo, 2002; Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Leira, 2006; Thévenon, 2011). While the aim of gender equality policies in the 1970s was to free women from caring duties in order for them to be able to participate in the labour force, gender equality in the 2000s has been on giving more rights to the father enabling him to care for his young children (see e.g. Haataja et al., 2016). It can thus be debated, whether gender equality per se is a separate and independent idea or not. In accordance to the feminist research tradition (e.g. Koven & Michel, 1993; Skocpol, 1993; Orloff, 1996) gender equality can be seen as an idea driven by women’s political organisations to alter the patriarchal structures of the welfare state. According to this, the idea of gender equality is by no means new. However, in Finnish family policy especially in the 2000s, this idea has changed character emphasising the father’s right and responsibility, particularly when it comes to sharing paid and unpaid labour (see Article II). Gender equality can also be seen as tool in promoting employment through social investment policies (e.g. Van Gerven & Nygård, 2017).

20 This notion has been criticised by for example Hemerijck (2013), who argues that the nations’ growth has not stagnated. However, ‘the permanents austerity’-nation is used to juxtapose the differences in social policy development in general during the golden and silver age.

21 The TINA-argument (there is no alternative) is frequently used by politicians in different settings and arenas.

Newman, 2012) that it is influenced by neoliberal ideology (e.g. Taylor, 2007; Harvey, 2005), which is critical towards public spending, fiscal stimulus, state involvement and welfare state expansion (contrary to SIP), and at the same time it also advocates tax reductions combined with income and wealth dispersion (cf. McBride, 2015). Thus, this new austerity has by many governments been used as a default strategy to respond to the economic crisis, by cutting public expenditures and debt for the general population while simultaneously “protecting the power and advantages of capitalist elites” (ibid. p. 68).

In terms of family policy, the ‘logic of austerity’ (Jepp, 2015) puts pressure on families to rely less on the state in terms of care and general welfare, such as cash transfers, and thus to become more self-sufficient. The outcome of austerity measures in terms of economy and wellbeing has been studied in national and international context (e.g. Eurofound, 2015; Lindberg et al., 2018; O’Hara, 2014; Salmi et al. 2016a & 2016b). However, little attention has been put on the idea of austerity, namely in terms of the political discourse, especially when it comes to Finnish family policy.



## 4. Family policy reform

This chapter focusses on the concept of family policy reform (henceforth in this chapter: reform). How are reforms defined and how are they measured? While the literature on reform is vast, this chapter only aims at pinpointing some of the most influential works of this field in order to give an understanding of reforms. Establishing this is vital for this thesis, as this thesis studies reforms within a specific social policy area, namely in family policy.

### 4.1. The problems of how to understand and measure reform

During the past few decades, scholars (e.g. Hall, 1993; Pierson, 1994, 2001; Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Van Gerven, 2008; Farnworth & Irving, 2011; Hemerijck, 2013) have examined the drivers for, the direction and the scope of reforms in different social policy fields. Simply put, expansion and/or contraction of welfare state transfers in general can imply alternations to entitlement periods, replacement rates and/or eligibility rules regarding a certain benefit (see e.g. Van Gerven, 2008). While the two former are quite straight forward, the latter can imply tighter or looser conditioning for receiving a certain benefit. The conditioning can be related to for example income limits and employment status.

In family policy, reforms can refer to changes in public services and transfers directed at families, that is, changes in legislation that affects the coverage, generosity or duration of a certain social rights, such as the right to public childcare. When discussing the directions of such reforms, they can either imply expansions or contractions of such rights, or be a mixture of both.<sup>22</sup> Reforms can also affect the welfare state institutions, and for example tax policies.

In the case of the Finnish public child care system, the subjective right to public child care was *extended* in 1996 to cover all children under school age (statute 630/1991). In 2016, however, this full-time right was *contracted* to only cover families where both parents are in full-time employment, education or entrepreneurship (statute 108/2016). In the case of the Finnish child benefits, the replacement level of this benefit has often been altered, such as a small *increase* in 2004 (statute 1226/2003), followed by a *decrease* in 2017 (statute 1086/2016).

While expansions and contractions refer to the direction of reform, the scope of reform is also often discussed in the literature on reform. Here

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<sup>22</sup> In practise, it can sometimes be difficult assessing what reforms imply expansions and which imply contractions (see e.g. Van Gerven, 2008).

scholars' opinions differ and the literature gets rather complicated because reforms are referred to differently. One of the most prominent distinction on the scope of reform is made by Hall (1993), who refers to reforms as to *first, second and third order changes* based on changes on three levels: changes in *policy instruments*, changes in *policy instruments and settings*, as well a shift in *paradigm*. According to Hall (1993), first order changes are reforms that can be considered smaller adjustments, which imply no change in overall goals or policy instruments. Second order changes are reforms containing a shift in policy instruments and settings in order to achieve an already established policy goal (ibid.). Finally, third order changes, which do not happen very frequently, imply a shift in a specific policy paradigm. Hall (1993, p. 279) defines paradigm as "a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing". Thus, reform to the policy paradigm implies a third level change.

Another prominent distinction on the scope of reform is made by Pierson (1994), who distinguishes between *programmatic and systemic reforms*. The former relates to minor adjustments to already existing policy programmes (cf. Hall 1993: first order change). The latter refers to a profound change in existing policy programmes, where the traditional role of the welfare programme is altered, however, this change does not have to change the policy programme immediately, but it may alter such in the long run (Pierson, 1994). Thus, systemic reforms take place when redistributive principles of need, insurance and universalism in a welfare system are altered (cf. Van Gerven, 2008). This can imply a change in core values of the policy system, such as a shift in responsibility in the provision of welfare services, or in eligibility criteria, such as change in redistributive principles, e.g. from universalism to selectivity or vice versa (cf. Hall, 1993: third order change).

Pierson (2001) later argued, that in 'an era of permanent austerity' the changes to welfare state services can be considered restructuring, and he puts forward three levels of such, namely *re-commodification, cost containments and recalibrating*. To understand re-commodification, attention needs to be put on Esping-Andersen's (1990) notion on de-commodification, which implies to what degree access to a policy programme, such as sickness insurance, is linked to a person's employment status, and to what degree a person can uphold an income regardless of labour market participation. Thus, re-commodification "involves the effort to reverse that process – to restrict the alternatives to participation in the labour market, either by tightening eligibility or cutting benefits", and leads to a more 'unattractive' position for those outside the labour market (Pierson, 2001, p. 422). Cost-containment is a process that implies cutting social expenditure, often due to external pressures, such as pressure from the European Monetary Union (EMU), as well as internal pressures, such as a change in demography (see Van Gerven, 2008). Cutting social expenditure

is a common policy solution in times of a financial crisis (Pierson, 2001). Finally, recalibration implies reforming contemporary welfare systems to be “more consistent with temporary goals and demands for social provision” (ibid., p. 425). This can be done in two ways: through *rationalisation*, which implies modifications of a programme to respond to new ideas on how to achieve the already set goals with a programme (cf. Halls, 1993: second order changes), or through *updating*, which implies modifications to existing programmes, or creation of new programmes, as a response to newly recognised social needs (Pierson, 2001).

Hemerijck (2013) criticises Pierson’s (2001) three levels of restructuring and its subdivisions, suggesting it is often difficult to separate re-commodification, cost containment, rationalisation and updating from each other. Instead, he suggests that these four notions should belong under one concept of welfare recalibration. Hemerijck starts from Streeck and Thelen’s (2005) work on institutional change, which implies changes to the function of the institution. Here, parallels can be drawn to radical reforms (e.g. Farnsworth & Irving, 2011, 2015; cf. Hall, 1993: third order changes), but it is worth highlighting that although changes may not always appear radical or be abrupt, they can have incremental effects on the policy system in the long run (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). As Green-Pedersen (2007) argues, restructuring can take place without institutional change, and vice versa.

Consequently, Hemerijck (2013), proposes four different modes of *recalibration: functional, normative, institutional and distributive recalibration*. Functional recalibration of welfare programmes is due to the changing nature of social risks, such as changes in demography, family patterns, as well as economic and political integration<sup>23</sup>. Normative recalibration implies changes to the normative idea of the welfare state, i.e. what the state should do and why, affect the design or the suggestions of reform (e.g. Béland, 2010), and in order to fully understand reforms today, one must take this into consideration. Institutional recalibration is about reforms made to the design of institutions, the roles and responsibility assigned for the state, the market, families, communities and parties, as well as reforms to the level of decision-making (cf. Hall, 1993: third order changes) (Hemerijck, 2013). And finally, distributive recalibration is associated with reforms that aim at evening out the inequality caused by other reforms, and thus rebalancing the social protection in favour of the most vulnerable (ibid.).

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23 Hemerijck (2013) uses old age pension as an example of this. He suggests that when the current old age pension system was introduced (in general) in the beginning of the 20th century, the average age was between 45 and 48 years. Today the average age is between 77 and 82 years. Although the difference is significant, Hemerijck (2013) pointing this out might be slightly skewed, as the average age during WWI and WWII was lower than that later. It could be more correct talking about the mean age for the period concerning WWI and WWII.

Thus, the debate on different scopes of reform is basically rooted in two camps: the first suggesting that welfare states are ‘immovable objects’ (Pierson, 2001, 1998), previously known as ‘frozen landscapes’ (Esping-Andersen, 1999), and have not changed much since establishment of the welfare state. Supporters of the other camp (e.g. Hemerijck, 2013; Streeck & Thelen, 2005; Van Gerven, 2008), however, suggest that the welfare state is indeed changing, and the questions should be focussed on whether *how much or how little* it is changing. These researchers also suggest that reforms should be looked at as multi-layered phenomena, and that incremental changes may occur and might indeed prove substantial when using a longer study period. This camp has recently been joined by scholars (e.g. Blyth, 2013; Farnsworth & Irving, 2011, 2015) who suggest that several radical and major reforms, even ideological attacks on the welfare state, have taken place since the post-2008 economic crisis.

In studies on reform – which are often internationally comparative studies, but also comparative studies in longitudinal and internal sense like this thesis – one problem that cannot be overlooked is what is referred to as ‘the dependent variable problem’. According to Clasen and Siegel (2007, p. 6) there are three aspects to the dependent variable problem: “questions of conceptualization, operationalisation and measurement”. The first aspect is the difficulties in conceptualizing reforms: how are reforms defined and what does this mean? As noted above, there are various ways of defining reform. Are reforms defined as restructuring of the welfare state (e.g. Pierson, 2001), are they defined as institutional changes (e.g. Streeck & Thelen, 2005) or recalibrations (Hemerijck, 2013), or are the reforms a question on order changes (Hall, 1993)? To put it simply: how are reforms understood? The second aspect Clasen and Siegel (2007) highlight relates to the operationalisation, that is, what variables are studied? When it comes to approaching the first and second aspect of reform, making “a clear distinction between theoretical and operational definitions is crucial” (Green-Pedersen, 2007, p. 15). And finally, the third aspect relates to what kind of measurements and methods of analysis are chosen (Clasen & Siegel, 2007).

In this thesis, the main focus of inquiry – the politicisation of Finnish family policy reform – largely corresponds to Hemerijck’s (2013) ‘normative recalibration’. This approach is more suitable here, as it is a broader approach taking in different aspects, and I focus on how political language (discourse) is used in viewing the role of the state (and possible changes to this view), as well as how it is used to reform family policy. Furthermore, the scope of reform is defined as policy adjustments and structural reforms. While policy adjustments refer to altering existing programmes without altering the principle of functioning (e.g. Hall, 1993; Pierson, 2001; Van Gerven, 2008), structural reform refer to alterations of the main principles of the programme, or of the policy instrument. These alterations could be radical or incremental (Hemerijck, 2013; Streeck & Thelen, 2005).

## 4.2. The reform process: input, output and outcome perspectives

As noted above, there are several challenging aspects to studying reform. Often when scholars study reform *an output or an outcome* perspective on the welfare state is used (Green-Pedersen, 2007). According to the former the welfare state consists of a set of programmes and policies, such as services and benefit schemes, protecting different groups from social risks, and these programmes and policies, outputs, are decided on and set by the government (Pierson, 2001). If a scholar seeks to study the output perspective of reform, the scholar might study the changes/reforms to specific policies or programmes, i.e. reforms to the outputs. The outcome perspective, on the other hand, analyse reforms from the perspective of the recipient, by for example examining the development of poverty or replacement rates for a specific benefit, such as child benefits. Although the output and the outcome perspectives are usually separated, it is important to note that the outcome perspective is naturally influenced by outputs, even if it is often difficult to establish the causal link (Green-Pedersen, 2007). Therefore, Häusermann and colleagues (2013), have suggested that the dependent variable ought to be redefined.

It could be argued that these perspectives represent certain aspects of the reform process where, simply put, the output perspective focusses on what reforms took place, and the outcome perspective focusses on the impact of these reforms. Although these two perspectives play their role in studying reform, I suggest a third perspective should also be taken into consideration when studying the reform process: *the input perspective*. I argue that this perspective studies the reform process from a slightly different angle and it corresponds to Hemerijck's (2013) notion on 'normative recalibration, whilst recognising the criticism of 'the dependent variable problem' as highlighted by Häusermann and colleagues (2013). This perspective functions as an important *arena of politicisation of reform*. Simply put, this perspective relates to *political standpoints, ideas and values that drive, motivate and impregnate reform where ideas, ideologies and interests relating to reforms are presented, debated, negotiated and combatted*. The result of this process is a legislative product/reform (output), which in turn have consequences (outcomes) for the receivers, such as families with children.

What the input perspective can pinpoint, which the other two traditional perspectives struggle to do is a *potential early stage normative recalibration* of the welfare state (see Hemerijck, 2013). Normative recalibration implies changes to the normative idea of the welfare state, i.e. changes to what services and benefits the state should provide, to whom these ought to be provided to and why/under what circumstances (e.g. Béland, 2010). Access to a service or benefit (i.e. eligibility rules) – such as unconditional access to fulltime public childcare as a social right – are seen as an idea, rather than a tool to redistribute assets of society.

By studying possible normative recalibration of the welfare state, a more

in-depth view of policy changes is provided. This also opens up for a more multifaceted interpretation of the scope of reform, as it allows the researcher to understand which political ideas and ideologies were at play behind the reforms.

To summarise, in this doctoral thesis, I mainly focus on the *discursive dimension of politicisation in the case of Finnish family policy reform by using an input perspective*, i.e. how the political elite framed policy solutions<sup>24</sup> through different outlets. However, to get a deeper understanding of the current family policy debate, I also adopt the output perspective, that is, what reforms did indeed take place given certain premises (see table 1).

	<b>Input-perspective</b>  (what do the parties want to change in family policy and why?)	<b>Output-perspective</b>  (what are the changes in legislation?)	<b>Outcome-perspective</b>  (what is the outcome of the legislation in terms of social welfare?)
<b>Article I</b>		X	
<b>Article II</b>	X	(X)	
<b>Article III</b>	X	X	(X)
<b>Article IV</b>	X	X	

**Table 1.** Overview of perspective used for articles I—IV. X indicates what dimensions of the politicisation is used in articles I—IV, (X) indicates that this dimension is also used, but is not the main dimension.

#### 4.2.1. Politicisation

As mentioned above, politicisation is a central concept of the input perspective, but how can it be defined? Although being a popular concept both within and outside of the academic literature, there is no universal agreement on what politicisation exactly refers to and how it should be measured. In the vast literature on politicisation, Zürn (2014) suggests that the concept implies the demand for or the act of bringing an issue into the political field, and which Hay (2007) suggests is drawing a previous private matter into the public sphere. Heywood (2013) argues that politicisation refers to the process where political actors create, preserve and (re)negotiate distribution guidelines of public resources, as well as resolving social problems, thus, bringing a matter from public sphere to the governmental sphere (Hay, 2007). To further elaborate on this, Hoeglinger (2016, p. 13) argues that politicisation is “essentially a process

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<sup>24</sup> In this thesis, the political elite refers to parties in parliament. This entails a focus on individual politicians from different parties, parties as actors, as well as governments (consisting of a coalition between different parties).

whereby the level and scope of conflict around a particular issue increases” and thus, political conflict is necessary in the process of politicisation. Furthermore, De Wilde and Zürn (2012) argue that not only does politicisation involve the need for reflection about the deciding process (*politics*), but also on the content of the decisions made (*policy*). Thus, my interpretation of politicisation by the political elite contains not only the process of debating a conflicting and private matter in the public/political sphere, but also how the matters ought to be addressed in terms of ideas for the reform and content of the reform itself.

Politicisation takes place in different arenas, such as in public debates, in interviews with politicians, through various media outlets, and in election manifestos or government programmes, just to mention a few. No matter the setting, Zinger (2016) argues that three components are necessary in the process of politicisation. *First*, diverging attitudes and values among social groups or political actors (‘contestation’, Zürn, 2014), in other words a political conflict is needed and this is referred as to ‘polarisation of attitudes’. This polarisation can usually be found in outlets where political parties can express their opinion. Parties are crucial when it comes to politicising (and polarising) a matter, as parties represent different groups in society and they play a crucial role in developing and reforming the welfare state (‘politics matter’, see e.g. Allan & Scruggs, 2004; Huber & Stephens, 2001; Korpi & Palme, 2003)

*Second*, the political conflict created through polarisation of attitudes must to some extent be discussed in public, and Hoeglinger (2016) refers to this as ‘intensity of the public debate’. This can be sparked in different media outlets, in interviews, or in political debates in parliament on a certain reform. *Third*, public resonance, which gathers support and engagement around an issue, that is, ‘connection to political core concerns’, is also needed (ibid.). This can be related to election manifestos, where certain political issues are more discussed in detail, while at the same time being put in context to a particular party’s ideology. Meanwhile, De Wilde and Zürn (2012) also put forward three similar components of politicisation: awareness, mobilisation and polarisation. While awareness refers to there being a greater knowledge and interest among the general public on a certain issue, mobilisation refers to the increasing political engagement over this issue (ibid.). Finally, polarisation refers to the conflicting views on how an issue ought to be solved, thus how public spending should be distributed (ibid.).

If the description above explains what politicisation is and the components of such, how then is an issue politicised? Hoeglinger (2016) argues that there are different strategies for this. For a political party, one strategy is to position itself differently to other groups on the political arena, referred as to ‘voicing dissenting attitudes’ (ibid.). A second strategy is to highlight a specific issue in relation to other opinions, that is, ‘issue emphasising’ (ibid.). A third strategy is ‘framing’, that is, linking the politicised issue to the more general political standpoints of the party in question through using arguments that resonates

with the political core and ideology (ibid.). Once a link is established between the politicised issue and the general political core of a particular party, they stabilise and reinforce each other, strengthening the party's image while simultaneously making the general political division on a certain issue becomes more distinct. This is how framing of an issue contributes to the politicisation of such (ibid.).

#### 4.2.2. Ideas and discourse

As noted above, there are different interpretations of politicisation, and thus there are different interpretations on how politicisation ought to be studied. Although there are no universal *modus operandi* for analysing politicisation, one common way is to seek for **ideas** expressed by the political elite. As mentioned earlier, ideas or 'causal beliefs' (Béland & Cox, 2010), often refer to various views political parties have on redistribution policies and on what role the state should have in terms of producing welfare (see e.g. Harrison & Boyd, 2003). Ideas can help the political elite finding a solution to how problems or challenges – such as high unemployment rates, welfare dependency or poverty among families – should be addressed. Thus, ideas lead to (suggestion for) a certain type of action in combatting a problem or challenge, that is, in policy solutions. Béland and Cox (2011, p. 3) argue that ideas

“shape how we understand political problems, give definition to our goals and strategies, and are the currency we use to communicate about politics. By giving definition to our values and preferences, ideas provide us with interpretive frameworks that make us see some facts as important and others as less so.”

How, then, should ideas be studied? For example, there are several interpretations of what the idea of 'equality' means, and this is often the case in politics. In the political context, ideas refer to various views political parties have on redistribution policies and on what role the state should have in terms of providing welfare (see e.g. Harrison & Boyd, 2003)<sup>25</sup>. According to Schmidt (2008, p. 303, emphasis added), “ideas are the substantive content of discourse”, as ideas are the substantive content of such (ibid; Mehta, 2011). Thus, ideas often become evident in the **political discourse**, which can be expressed in political debates, in election manifestos, supplementary programmes, government programmes and other outlets. Not only does the discourse reveal what is being said, but also who says this to *whom*, *where and why* (Schmidt, 2008). As such, discourse consists of *structure* (what is said, how and where) and *agency* (who said what to whom) (Schmidt, 2008). Furthermore, the

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<sup>25</sup> This, in turn, can be linked to ideologies and how political parties position themselves to them (Nygård, 2003, 2006).



discourse can be on two levels: *coordinative* and *communicative* discourse. The former refers to the studying the discourse among policy actors, whereas the latter refers to the discourse between political actors and the general public (ibid.).

Whereas studying discourse traditionally was mainly linked to the field of linguistics, the past few decades have brought with them a wider 'discursive turn' as social and political sciences have started using discourse analysis to explain why changes take place (ibid.), be it within a specific policy field, in a welfare state or in different institutions.

## 5. Study design and the articles

As mentioned in chapter 1, *the overall aim of this doctoral thesis* is to study the politicisation of Finnish family policy reforms during 2007—2017. This means that not only am I interested in understanding what reforms were pursued, but also *how* they were politicised by the political elite, with an emphasis on *what interest and ideas* were promoted. As discussed above, welfare state reforms are usually measured from an output or an outcome perspective (see e.g. Green-Pedersen, 2007), but for this thesis, I have mainly focused on the input and output perspectives of Finnish family policy reform – that is, what reforms do political actors want to implement to family policy and why? However, focus is also to some extent on the outcome perspective (what did the reforms result in?) (see table 1).

### 5.1. Data

For this thesis, I aimed at reaching a rich and nuanced understanding of the politicisation of Finnish family policy reform 2007—2017. Therefore, I used a triangulated approach (see Rothbauer, 2008) that combined several data sources. In order to answer the first research question, I analysed legislation on what reforms had been pursued in the selected family policy fields for the chosen period. In order to answer the second research questions, I studied political documents in which interests and conflicting ideas could be revealed – such as government programmes, election manifestos, government bills and minutiae from parliamentary debates – but also, as the politicising process take place not only in parliament, but also in other public arenas, I analysed editorials, relating to certain reform, from the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper. This research question fell in line with a previous research project on family policy, for which one of the co-authors had interviewed five Finnish family policy experts. These non-structured interviews, conducted in late 2014, were used as supplementary data in one of the articles, **article III**. By using interviews, the researcher is able to investigate a phenomenon in detail and is also able to get in depth understanding of the phenomenon (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). The use of these five interviews as supplementary data strengthened the analysis in **article III** by presenting an account of how the reforms being conducted around 2014 were evaluated by leading family policy experts.

## 5.2. Methods

Once the abovementioned aim and research questions of this thesis, as well as using this particular set of data, were established, the method chosen to was *qualitative content analysis*, here abbreviated as QCA, was used. QCA is frequently used in social and health care sciences, as well as in humanities, allowing for “the subjective interpretation of the content of text data”, such as protocols, transcripts of interviews and other documents (Mayring, 2000), “through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). It was chosen due to it being a versatile method of studying text data. Its focus lays on establishing the manifest and/or latent material (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), or to phrase it differently: to analyse the implicit and the explicit language (Weber, 1990), i.e. ‘what is’ and ‘what underlying meaning is there’. Thus, this method suited both the research questions posed and data used for this thesis, as I was interested in studying interests and ideas.

QCA allows the researcher to systematically categorise relevant sections of the text data in accordance to coding schemes, and these coding schemes are designed differently depending on what approach to QCA is taken. The core principle in the different approaches to QCA is in the role theory plays in developing a coding scheme (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 2009). The approaches come under different names, but Hsieh and Shannon (2005) summarise the approaches as *conventional and directed*<sup>26</sup>.

The *conventional approach*, or *inductive approach* (e.g. Mayring, 2000; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 2009), to QCA is often used to describe a phenomenon, on which there is no to limited knowledge and theory. Rather than using pre-determined coding schemes, the categories are derived by the researcher in the process of scrutinising the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Analysing text data conventionally or inductively is more than merely analysing the manifest content, as the latent content is also highlighted in an attempt to build a theoretical framework for a particular study (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 2009). Although there are some clear advantages to using this approach, such as being open to gaining new information on a phenomenon without the researcher limiting him or herself to too rigid predetermined categories, there are also challenges to using this approach. These challenges relate to failing to identify key categories as a result of not understanding the context properly and mixing up the approach with other similar research methodologies, especially

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<sup>26</sup> Hsieh & Shannon (2005) also suggest a third approach, the summative approach. Through using this approach, the researcher seeks to quantify the text data in order to understand the contextual use of the words or content, that is, rather than understanding the meaning of the words used, to explore how the words are used (ibid.). Also, rather than just quantifying the words, and thus quantifying qualitative data, this approach also includes interpretation of the latent content, that is, finding the underlying meaning of the content or words used (ibid.).

Articles	Objectives	Theoretical framework	Data and method
<p><b>Article I</b></p> <p>“Radical reform or piecemeal adjustments? The case of Finnish family policy reforms”</p>	<p>Systematically analyse the scope (adjustment/radical reform) and direction (expansion/contraction) of family policy reforms 2007–2017 in the following areas: Child benefit, ECEC, parental leave periods and allowances, Social assistance and Housing allowance.</p>	<p>Welfare state reform theory (e.g. Pierson 2001; 1998; 1996; Vis 2010; Clasen 2005), theories on austerity (e.g. Farnsworth &amp; Irving 2015)</p> <p><b>Output perspective</b> (Green-Pedersen, 2004).</p>	<p>Legislative outputs, government bills, reports and communication (press release), 35 in total.</p> <p>Triangulated method (Rothbauer, 2008) using deductive qualitative content analysis (Hsieh &amp; Shannon, 2005).</p>
<p><b>Article II</b></p> <p>“Freedom of choice, gender equality or employment promotion? Finnish party positions on childcare in the light of election manifestos 2015.”</p>	<p>Study how the principle of “freedom of choice” was politicised during the Finnish general election 2015. How was this principle framed, by whom and to what extent? Were there signs of renegotiation of this principle? If such signs exist, could this possibly indicate an ongoing shift away from the ‘Nordic’ approach to family policy?</p>	<p>Welfare state, and family policy, theory (e.g. Hiilamo 2002; Tyyskää, 1995, Zimmerman 1995; 2001), ‘parties matter’ theory (e.g. Budge &amp; McDonald 2006; Allan &amp; Scruggs 2004).</p> <p><b>Reform perspective(s): Input perspective (+ output</b> [Green-Pedersen, 2004]).</p>	<p>Eight election manifestos from the general election 2015 from the eight biggest parties, plus five supplementary programmes.</p> <p>Qualitative content analysis, mainly a deductive approach (Hsieh &amp; Shannon, 2005), but also an inductive approach (ibid.) on freedom of choice in relation to parental leave.</p>
<p><b>Article III</b></p> <p>“The role of discourse in family policy reform: The case of Finland”</p>	<p>Analyse the discourse used by Finnish governments to legitimate unpopular cutbacks to family policy (2012, 2014, 2015). What policy recommendations, arguments and ideas were used in the discourse? To what extent did this discourse relate to neoliberal austerity discourse? How effective was the discourse in creating public consent?</p>	<p>Discursive institutionalism theory and theory on ideas (e.g. Schmidt 2002; Béland &amp; Cox 2002, Blyth, 2013; Clarke &amp; Newman, 2012).</p> <p><b>Reform perspective(s): Output (Green-Pedersen, 2004) and input perspectives (+ outcome perspective</b> [Green-Pedersen, 2004]).</p>	<p>Government programmes (2011, 2014, 2015), supplement programme (2015), supporting documents (2011, 2016), four government bills, 16 minutiae from parliamentary debates, five non-structured expert interviews (from 2014), 58 editorial pieces from Helsingin Sanomat.</p> <p>Triangulated method (Rothbauer, 2008) focused on the analysis of discourse (Schmidt, 2002) using inductive and deductive qualitative content analysis (Hsieh &amp; Shannon, 2005).</p>

<p><b>Article IV</b></p> <p><b>“From universalism to selectivity? The background, discourses, and ideas of recent early childhood education and care reforms in Finland”</b></p>	<p>Study two reforms relating to formal childcare (2014: childcare to ECEC and 2015: limiting the subjective right to childcare). What policy objectives and instruments were used? How were these objectives framed: what, how and why (arguments and normative legitimating)?</p>	<p>Discursive institutionalism theory (e.g. Schmidt 2002)</p> <p><b>Reform perspective(s): Output and input perspectives.</b> (Green-Pedersen, 2004)</p>	<p>Government bills of two reforms, and minutiae from parliamentary debates relating to these reforms. Other documents: committee statements and protocols, as well as media, editorials from Helsingin Sanomat)</p> <p>Deductive qualitative content analysis (Hsieh &amp; Shannon, 2005).</p>
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**Table 2.** Overview of Articles I-IV.

with grounded theory. Depending on the research questions and the data, this approach can be either suitable or not.

*The directed approach*, also *deductive approach* (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999), on the other hand, can be used when theory or research on a phenomenon does indeed exist, but further studies and descriptions of such is needed to get a deeper understanding of it. The goal of a directed approach is to either validate previous studies or to extend knowledge or a theoretical framework of a phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When categorising text data in accordance to this approach of QCA, a coding scheme is derived from previous research or theory, which allows the researcher to identify key concepts or variables as coding categories, followed by establishing operational definitions of these categories and sub-categories using theory (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). While the researcher aims to find support and/or extend existing theory, there is a risk that by using this approach the researcher only seeks to find what supports the researcher's bias, and too much focus on theory can result in the context of the phenomenon can be overseen (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

As noted in table 2, a deductive approach of QCA was used for **articles I and IV**, and a combination of deductive and inductive approach was used for **articles II and III**. A deductive approach was used for article I to extend previous knowledge on Finnish family policy reform, and it sought to determine a pattern, displaying direction and magnitude, in the reforms made to this field. The same approach was used for **article IV**, and here this approach was appropriate due to the strong theoretical framework on ideas (Schmidt, 2008) in relation to rationales on ECEC in accordance to the European Commission (2009) – that laid the groundwork for the design of this study.

The departure point for **articles II and III** was also deductive, with previous research on political division on Finnish family policy (**article II**: e.g. Hiilamo, 2002; Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009; Nygård, 2007; 2010; Välimäki & Rauhala, 2000) and the idea of austerity and neoliberalism (**article III**: e.g. Blyth, 2013; Clarke & Newman, 2012; Farnsworth & Irving, 2011, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Taylor, 2007) as a starting point. However, after analysing the data for **article II** it turned out that an inductive approach was also needed, as mentions on freedom of choice in relation to the closely linked parental leave system were also found. Leaving out this perspective would not have given the full picture of the discussion of freedom of choice in relation to child care. Finally, for **article III** an inductive approach was primarily used to identify policy recommendations, arguments, and ideas (Schmidt, 2008) on certain reforms. After identifying these, a deductive approach was used to establish to what extent they were relating to a neoliberal worldview (e.g. Taylor, 2007).

### 5.3. The articles

Below follows a brief summary of the original publications published for this thesis. The summaries contain the aim, research questions, and the result of the four articles. In order to visualise how these articles place themselves in accordance to the overall study of reform in the thesis, please see table 1.

#### 5.3.1. Article I: Radical reform of piecemeal adjustments? The case of Finnish family policy reforms

**Article I** was co-authored with Professor Mikael Nygård and Dr. Sonja Blum. This article seeks to understand how (expansion/contraction) and to what extent (adjustment/radical reform) legislation on selected family policy benefits were reformed 2007—2017. The article starts from an output perspective in measuring reform (Green-Pedersen, 2004), and seeks to establish whether theoretical arguments on ‘immobile objects’ (Pierson, 2001, 1998) and/or (radical) reforms (Farnsworth & Irving, 2015) hold sway in terms of Finnish family policy reform during the period of study. Through using a triangulated approach (Rothbauer, 2008), the data consisted of 35<sup>27</sup> reforms as well as government bills, reports and press released relating to these, and they were analysed using deductive qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The results show that the selected family policy fields were frequently reformed 2007—2017. In the beginning of the period mainly expanding policy adjustment, but also one radical reform as well as some contracting policy adjustments were pursued. The aim of these reforms was to protect (vulnerable) families economically and to increase gender equality. From 2015 forward, however, contracting policy adjustments and radical reforms were pursued. It can be argued that these reforms were pursued in the name of austerity (see e.g. Blyth, 2013), as cutting social expenditure overrode the economic well-being of the most vulnerable in society; children. It was, however, justified as ‘everyone participated in the project to save the welfare state’ (see **Article III**).

Based on the result, three conclusions can be drawn. First, Finnish family policy was frequently reformed during this period, which supports Clasen’s (2005) argument that it is easier to pursue reforms, even unpopular (Vis, 2010) in less institutionally entrenched policy fields, including family policy. Second, the magnitude and direction of the reforms varied greatly during the period, affecting different types of families. One structural reform, limiting the subjective right to childcare (HE 80/2015 vp) is perhaps one of the most controversial reform to the family policy system in a long time, and it represents a paradigm shift, as universal cover for families was challenged (see

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<sup>27</sup> Two government bills contained a total of four reforms, thus these were analysed as four separate reforms.

**Article IV).** And third, it is difficult to assess whether Finland is only adapting to current challenges through pursuing policy adjustments (Pierson, 2001), or if the reforms are radical or incremental (Hemerijck, 2013; Streeck & Thelen, 2005), or if there is even an ideological attack on the welfare state (Farnsworth & Irving, 2011), but according to this study there seem to be support for both ‘camps’ on welfare state change. Although not every single reform in family policy pursued between 2007 and 2017 has been scrutinised, an overview of how Finnish family policy was pursued during this period is presented.

### 5.3.2. Article II – Freedom of choice, gender equality or employment promotion? Finnish party positions on childcare in the light of election manifestos 2015

**Article II** was co-authored with Professor Mikael Nygård, Dr. Mikko Kuisma and Dr. Janne Autto. This article mainly analyses family policy reforms from an input perspective, and it examines how the eight leading parties in parliament politicised the highly popular and long-standing principle of freedom of choice in relation to childcare (home care allowance) and parental leave during the general election of 2015. This article seeks to understand how, by whom and to what extent this principle was framed, and whether there were signs of renegotiating of this principle, and if so, whether this leads Finland away from the Nordic family policy model (e.g. Hiilamo, 2002; Korpi, 2000) or not. The data consisted of eight election manifestos representing the most influential parties published for the Finnish general election of 2015, as well as five supplementary programmes. The data was analysed through deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The result shows a clear ideological divide in terms of childcare and parental leave – and the positive and negative freedom of choice of such. Whereas the current form of home care allowance was defended by conservative parties in terms of being ‘a right of parents’, it was criticised by the left, suggesting it is ‘a trap for women’. The parental leave system – and different reforms of such – was advocated among parties on the left to create gender equality and improve the economic situation for families with young children. Conservative parties were critical to quotas in the parental leave systems, as this would ‘infringe upon the family’s freedom of choice’.

Based on the result, three conclusions can be drawn. First, the principle of freedom of choice stills holds sway in Finnish parties’ construction of childcare, especially in relation to the home care allowance, but also in relation to the parental leave system. Second, there is a clear ideological division between parties, and a dualistic view on ‘freedom of choice’ remains, and although most parties highlighted support for an ideology, one of the biggest parties, the National Coalition Party, mentioned very little on family policy. This could possibly be due to the cutbacks to the child benefit that had



previously been done while in government (see **Article I**). Third, the principal of freedom of choice is gradually renegotiated on the left and amongst smaller parties in the centre – the Swedish People’s Party is willing to renegotiate this principle in the case of gender equality being promoted. Whether Finland is or is not moving away from the Nordic family policy model is difficult to assess, but the election platform combined with the restriction of the right to ECEC (see **Article III**), undermining universality, could suggest a paradigmatic change, which is infringing on the freedom of choice, in the Finnish family policy system. This could be considered a step away from the ‘Nordicness’, and studies on Finland in relation to the other Nordic countries when it comes to family policy ought to be pursued by for example social scientists.

### 5.3.3. **Article III – The role of discourse in family policy reform: The case of Finland**

**Article III** was co-authored with Professor Mikael Nygård, Dr. Sonja Blum, Dr. Mikko Kuisma and Dr. Janne Autto. This article investigates family policy reform from an input perspective, and it examines the discourse, in terms of policy recommendations, arguments and ideas used by three recent Finnish governments for legitimating cutbacks to the child benefit and to the restriction to the subjective right to ECEC in 2015 (for a discussion on the latter, see **Article IV**). It also examined to what extent this discourse related to neoliberal austerity (e.g. Blyth, 2013; Clarke & Newman, 2012), worldview (Schmidt, 2008), and how effective the discourse was in creating public and political consent for the reforms studied. The theoretical starting points in the article lay in theories on how ideas influence policy change (Béland & Cox, 2010) and how they are connected to institutional discourses (Fischer, 2003; Schmidt, 2002; 2008). A triangulated methodological approach (Rothbauer, 2008) was used and thus, the data consisted of government programmes with appendices and supporting statements, as well as the government bills for the reforms. The political discourse was analysed through inductive and deductive qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Furthermore, five interviews (conducted in 2014) with Finnish family policy experts conducted for another research project relating to family policy reforms in Finland were used as supplementary data. And finally, minutiae from parliamentary debates and editorials from Helsingin Sanomat were also part of the data.

The results show that all three governments used elements of an austerity discourse in order to pursue the reforms – despite criticism from the opposition, media and family policy experts. The governments argued that cutting the child benefit was ‘an economic necessity’, and when it comes to limiting the subjective right to ECEC, the government used ideas on ‘sustainability’, ‘activation’, and that welfare service should be ‘targeted at those who need it’.

The ‘effectiveness’ of the government’s discourse created both consent (government’s own ranks) and opposition (from the opposition parties) in parliament. Also, some of the family experts expressed their opposition in a written statement to Parliament, suggesting that reform infringes upon the freedom of choice (see **Article II**).

Based on the result, three conclusions can be drawn. First, arguments relating to economic necessities, activation and compensation were used in the governments’ discourses. The governments suggested it is no longer viable for Finland to support (Nordic) universal family policy, and pushed rather for spurring and activating (selectivity) social policy measures. While this indicates that Finnish family policy is moving moves towards a more ‘hybrid’ family policy model, combining universalism and more emphasis on selectivity, and that welfare services become more targeted, it does not necessarily imply an ideological turn towards neoliberalism. It is also important to highlight that the discourse was influenced by Keynesianism and social investment principles. Second, it is clear that the discourses used by the governments contained elements from a neoliberal austerity worldview. Although severe cutbacks have been pursued in previous recessions, it is striking how central a role the austerity discourse had in pursuing these reforms. Third, although it is difficult to assess to what extent the discourse of the government played in creating public consent, it at least created consent among the government’s own ranks. The cutbacks, although heavily criticised by family policy experts and opposition parties and to some degree by the media, but also from experts in child welfare from the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (Mannerheimin lastensuojeluliitto) the governments pursued the unpopular reforms (see Vis, 2013) only suffering minor voter’s loss, except the Finns Party in the Sipilä cabinet (YLE, 2015).

#### **5.3.4. Article IV – From universalism to selectivity? The background, discourses and ideas in recent early childhood education and care reforms in Finland**

**Article IV** was co-authored by Dr. Marina Lundkvist (first author), Professor Mikael Nygård, and Dr. Janne Autto. This article measures reforms from an input perspective, and it examines the objectives, the framing and the ideational drivers of two reforms in the public child care system, namely a change in legislation from childcare into early childhood education and care (ECEC) (2014) and the restriction of the subjective right to ECEC (2015). This article seeks to pinpoint what the policy recommendations (main objectives and policy instrument) of these reforms were and how the recommendations were framed (arguments and normative ideas), with an emphasis on the role on what role global ideas had on national discourses concerning ECEC. The data consisted of government bills and minutiae from parliamentary debates relating to these reforms, as well as a number of additional parliamentary documents

and media coverage in terms of editorials from Helsingin Sanomat (HS). The data was analysed through a deductive variant of qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and theoretically this article stems from how ideas influence reform (e.g. Béland & Cox, 2010), but also discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008) and discursive politics (Fisher, 2003).

The results show that the main drivers of these reforms (policy recommendations) stem from different and conflicting ideational (arguments and normative legitimation) starting points. The first reform was pursued to enhance the development, learning and wellbeing of the child, and the ideas of the social investment paradigm [SIP] (e.g. Morel et al., 2012b) and future economic growth were central. The second reform was considered 'an economic necessity', and was also motivated with efficiency, moral and activating arguments, suggesting public finances ought to be spent on those in need and that children should stay home with the parent if the parent is caring for a younger child.

Based on the results, three conclusions can be drawn. First, ideas do still matter in policy change and in this study, this becomes evident is how austerity policies triumphs when it clashes with policy recommendations for social investment and modernisation. Second, due to the 2015 reform Finnish ECEC provision is now more linked to the employment status of the parent. Not only does this contradict the aims of the 2014 reform, which aimed at more inclusion and a stronger role of ECEC, but it also infringes on the principle of universalism associated with the Nordic family policy model (Korpi, 2000). And third, restricting the right to fulltime-ECEC will most likely exaggerate social and economic differences between families, and in the long run it will potentially undermine the foundations of the Finnish knowledge-based society – which may be seen in the PISA results.

## 6. Findings and discussion

Whereas the previous chapter dealt with the specific findings in each article, in this chapter I will answer the two overarching research questions posed in the introduction. First, I turn the attention to what reforms were pursued in Finnish family policy 2007—2017, and link them to the literature on reform. Then, I discuss the politicisation of the reforms pursued to the main family policy instruments, namely the child benefits and the public childcare system.

### 6.1. Family policy reforms 2007—2017

In accordance to the literature on reform (see e.g. Farnsworth & Irving, 2011; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Hall, 1993; Hemerijck, 2013; Pierson, 1994, 2001; Taylor-Gooby, 2005; Van Gerven, 2008) and based on the results of the articles published for this thesis, I argue that several types of reforms were pursued to Finnish family policy 2007—2017. The scope and direction of the reforms also varied greatly, and focus was on different family policy areas (see **Article I**). Furthermore, I argue that the ten-year period studied for this thesis can be viewed in two phases: the first phase (2007—2014) represented by *mainly expanding policy adjustments* aiming at strengthening work-life balance, increasing gender equality and improving the economic position of families, and the second phase (2015—2017) represented by tighter budgets followed by contracting policy adjustments and even radical reforms in popular benefit schemes.

During the first phase, the focus was on reforming the leave entitlement system in general, and on reforming the paternity leave in particular. As noted above, the emphasis on reforms pursued to leave entitlements had since the 2000s been on creating more gender equality through strengthening the position of the father (e.g. Lammi-Taskula et al., 2009; Eydal et al., 2018). This continued in 2007, as flexibility to the paternity leave was introduced, by allowing the father to postpone the paternity leave up till 180 days after the parental leave ended (statute 1342/2006). In theory, this implied that the mother could first use her maternity leave and the parental leave followed by the home care allowance, and then let the father use his allocated paternity leave. The aim of this reform was to support fathers using their right to paternity leave and to increase work-life family balance, but also to more equally divide the cost caused by leave entitlements between the father's and the mother's employers (HE 112/2006 vp).

Not only was the paternity leave extended, but the economic position of mother was also strengthened. The maternity allowance was made more generous for the first 56 days (from 70% to 90% of previous income) (statute 1342/2006), and in 2009 the minimum leave entitlement insurance, benefitting

parents on low incomes, was set to basic unemployment benefit rates.

The paternity leave was further reformed in 2010, when it was extended by two weeks resulting in a 24 weekday-long paternity leave exclusively for the father (statute 962/2009). In total, however, the paternity leave could be up to 36 weekdays, if the last 12 days of the parental leave was used by the father parental leave, and if the father used all 18 weekdays set aside to be shared with the mother (ibid.). This reform was pursued to increase the father's uptake of the parental leave, and thus enhancing gender equality (HE 131/2009 vp).

The above-mentioned reforms can be considered policy adjustments (see e.g. Van Gerven, 2008), as adjustments, in terms of making an existing policy instrument more generous (economically or length-wise), were pursued. However, in 2013 a radical reform was pursued to the paternity leave. The paternity leave was set to 54 weekdays (statute 903/2012), *independent of* how the last 12 days of parental leave was used (cf. statute 962/2009). This reform can be considered radical, as there was an alteration of the distributional logic of the leave entitlement scheme. The aim of this reform was to strengthen the father's carer role in relation to his new-born and/or young children, and to increase gender equality in terms of more equality sharing unpaid caring duties between the parents (HE 111/2012 vp). Through the strong emphasis on the father's participation in caring for very young children, it can be argued that there was a *shift in the caring responsibilities between the mother and the father* (e.g. Haataja, 2009, 2016; Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2004). The idea of gender equality became evident in the propositions relating to the reforms (see above) and in the political discourse used in government programmes.

The freedom of choice in relation to how children under the age of three are cared for is a long-standing principle in Finland (see e.g. Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009, see also **Article II**), and it allows parents to choose how to care for the young child after the leave entitlements end. While the leave entitlements were reformed, as was the childcare options available following the leave: caring for the child at home while receiving the home care allowance, or using public childcare services or private care. Reforms were also made to these alternatives. In relation to the home care allowance system, the partial home care allowance<sup>28</sup> (Fin: *osittainen hoitoraha*) was in 2010 extended to cover entrepreneurs and farmers, with the aim to easier reconcile work and caring for young children at home (HE 157/2009 vp). A few years later, flexible care allowance (Fin: *joustava hoitoraha*) was introduced and changed the partial home care allowance to only cover children in early education<sup>29</sup> (statute 975/2013). This can be considered a radical reform as it implied a new scheme (see Van Gerven, 2008). The flexible

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<sup>28</sup> The partial home care allowance system allowed for a parent to work part-time (on average max. 30 hours per week), including farmers and entrepreneurs, whilst receiving part-time home care allowance caring for a child under the age of 3, and children in pre-school, first and second grade.

<sup>29</sup> 'Early education' includes education starting from pre-school and through second grade.

care allowance allows one parent to work part-time (max. 80% of full-time employment), including farmers and entrepreneurs, whilst caring for a child under the age of three at home, and receiving part-time home care allowance adjusted with worktime. The aim of this was the same as the reform of 2010, but also to increase the economic position of families with young children (HE 129/2013 vp).

As the recession became more noticeable in Finland in the late 2000s/early 2010s, reforms to strengthen the economic position of (vulnerable) families with children were pursued. In 2011, inflation adjustments for basic income transfers, such as child home care allowance and child benefits were pursued (statute 1142/2010). Reforms to support the most vulnerable – such as families on low or no income, single parent households and households with several children, as well as families with young children (Salmi et al., 2016a & 2016b) – were also conducted. Increases were made to the single-parent supplement of the child benefit (HE 139/2010 vp), to the child benefit addition for the third and subsequent children (HE 116/2012), as well as to the general housing allowance and to the social assistance (e.g. HE 358/2014 vp).

However, as the recession lingered in Finland during the 2010s, reforms in terms of temporary removal of basic income transfers, including the child benefit index, and later removal of the indexation (statute 869/2014) were pursued to balance the public finances (e.g. Government programmes for PM Stubb and PM Sipilä). Furthermore, cuts to the child benefit levels (HE 165/2014; HE 151/2016), excluding the single-parent supplement, were done, and the reason for this was mainly economic.

Whereas the abovementioned reforms can be considered policy adjustments in two directions (see e.g. Van Gerven, 2008), one contracting radical reform was pursued to the public childcare system. In terms of public childcare, the subjective right to childcare was limited to 20 hours weekly per child for parents not in full-time employment or education, or in entrepreneurship (statute 108/2016). This can be considered a radical reform, as the universal redistributive logic was altered (see e.g. Van Gerven, 2008).

To sum up, a mixture of contracting and expanding policy adjustments were pursued during the two different phases of the period analyzed. While emphasis was on reforming the leave entitlements (see also **Article II**), influenced by ideas on gender equality and economically more fair distribution of cost of parental leaves, efforts were also made to improve the economic situation for vulnerable families. However, at the end of the period of analysis, cutbacks were made to all family policy instruments.

## 6.2. Politicising the main reforms: influential ideas

While one aspect of this thesis was to study what reforms took place in Finnish family policy and how these reforms could be considered adjustments, or, radical in character, another aspect was to study *how reforms to the main family policy instruments were politicised*, and *what role influential ideas played in the policy process*. The policy instruments chosen for this purpose were the child benefit system and the public childcare system (ECEC). As my aim was to study the influential ideas behind the reforms, studying the *cognitive* idea behind the reforms was not enough, but instead, a study of the *normative* ideas behind the reforms were needed (see Schmidt, 2008). This required a greater understanding of the context, the discourse used by the government and linking this to existing theory on influential ideas.

I argue, that family policy instruments chosen for this study were heavily politicised, and primarily by two contesting ideas – *social investments policies* (SIP) and *neoliberal austerity policies* (NAP). Below, the influential ideas linked to the reforms are discussed.

### ***Child benefit***

Although the universal child benefit is a popular benefit and has wide-spread support among parties and their constituencies, and regardless of the political risk associated with cutting back a popular benefit (see Vis, 2010), the child benefit was contracted several times in the second reform phase (2015–2017) – during PM Katainen’s, PM Stubb’s and PM Sipilä’s cabinets. The reforms were presented as an economic necessity in order to restore financial sustainability. While this policy solution has indeed been pursued in previous times of economic hardship, notably in the 1990s (see e.g. STM, 2006), the discourse used here by the governments signified supremacy of fiscal prudence and debt control over principles of social welfare and equality (see HE 116/2012 vp, HE 165/2014 vp, HE 70/2015 vp and HE 151/2016 vp).

On the one hand, it could be argued that the influential idea in this lie in NAP, as claims relating to “restoring fiscal balance” and “debt control over social welfare and equality” chimes well with the NAP discourse, as discussed earlier. On the other hand, it could also be argued that cutting ‘passifying’ social transfers is not only part of NAP, but also in fact part of the SIP as it seeks to have first-hand more investing, and second-hand targeting social security systems.

Since the introduction of universal child benefits in the late-1940s, it has functioned as an efficient measurement in compensating families for the cost children bring out (see e.g. Hiilamo, 2002). However, when politicising the cutbacks pursued during the period of study, the importance of the child benefit was downplayed by parties in power (HE 116/2012 vp, HE 165/2014 vp, HE 70/2015 vp and HE 151/2016 vp). The governments argued that the possible negative impact of the reforms on families would be minimal, and

that the most vulnerable families, such as single parent households, would be compensated by a raise in the lone-parent supplement (HE 116/2012 vp), by introducing a temporary child tax credit for families on low income (statute 1086/2014), and by making the means-tested social assistance slightly more generous (HE 358/2014 vp).

Adjusting public expenditure to shrinking public resources – that is, implementing austerity measures – are *per se* not necessarily a negative policy measure (Pierson, 1994), however, cutting a popular policy instrument always involves a political risk (see Vis, 2010). This did not stop the governments, and the cutbacks were presented as a ‘necessary evil’, arguing that the cutbacks would generate future growth (e.g. HE 165/2014 vp). According to the literature on NAP (e.g. Blyth, 2013; Farnsworth & Irving, 2011, 2015; O’Hara, 2014) this is a common discourse used by politicians when trying to implement NAP. Interestingly, however, this idea is criticised as it fails to explain exactly how future gains will come about from weakening the social security system (*ibid.*). While there was largely a consensus on the cutbacks amongst governmental parties, the cutbacks were highly criticised by family policy experts and in media, as it weakens the economic position of families thus undermines growth, increases child poverty and that these reforms were seen as part of an ongoing ideological attack (less state responsibility) on the family (see **Article III**). It is, however, important to notice that the idea and principle of universalism for this monetary benefit for families with children remained intact.

### **Public childcare**

As noted in chapter 2, the public childcare system has since the 1970s served as an important policy instrument both in creating gender equality among men and women, but also for creating equality among children from different socio-economic backgrounds as well as strengthening children’s early learning. In terms of reforms pursued in the public childcare system, two reforms stood out. On the one hand, after several years of political discussion on how to further strengthen public childcare (e.g. STM, 2007) the childcare system was reformed into *early education and care* (ECEC; Fin: *varhaiskasvatus*) (statute 580/2015). This reform – combined with a policy domain shift of public childcare from Ministry of Social Welfare and Health to Ministry for Education and Culture in 2013 and compulsory pre-school education from 2015 – strengthened the idea of SIP through early education and pedagogical means (HE 341/2014 vp). Not only was focus on education and pedagogics, but also on children’s participation in society and their central role in decision-making affecting them (*ibid.*). The political discourse regarding this bill was mainly positive across parliament, and future cost savings as an effect of this bill was highlighted in the parliamentary debate (see **Article IV**). Although there was some discussion if this bill was modern and effective enough, there was no disagreement on the



importance in investing in children and thus following SIP influences (ibid.). Thus, this reform can be described as SIP in line with e.g. the EU Commission Recommendation (2013) on investment in children in terms of ECEC.

On the other hand, these investment principles subordinated to the neoliberal austerity discourse driven by several governments. In PM Katainen's *Structural Reform Programme* (Valtioneuvosto, 2013) it was declared that the subjective right to childcare established in 1996 was to be limited only for those parents in full-time employment, education or entrepreneurship<sup>30</sup>. For all other parents – that is, part-time employed or unemployed parents as well as parents using home care allowance caring for a younger sibling or parents on sick-leave – were only entitled to 20 hours of public childcare per child and week. In 2016, PM Sipilä pursued this reform (statute 108/2016), and thus linked access to full-time ECEC to the labour market position of the parents, or to the ability of non-qualifying parents to pay for full-time ECEC. The overall aim of PM Sipilä's government was in general to balance the state finances through cutbacks and activating social policy reform (see Government programme PM Sipilä, 2015), and thus, this reform was considered part of the cutting of social expenditure.

In conjunction with the politicisation of this reform, the idea of universalism in ECEC became evidently contested. Parties in the opposition<sup>31</sup> argued that the principle of universalism in ECEC was weakened, as only children, whose parents met certain requirements, were entitled to full-time ECEC. Parties in government<sup>32</sup>, however, argued that the principle of universalism indeed remained, and that 20 hours of ECEC per week would be enough to reach the goals of the newly enacted ECEC-legislation. If this is the case or not is difficult to say, however, parents' right to access to public childcare for their children now depend on their labour market position, which chimes well with NAP.

However, signs of NAP on the public childcare agenda have been noticed earlier. Ailila and colleagues (2014) suggest that already in 1997, as the subjective right to childcare was extended to cover all children under school-age, the eligibility rules regarding the private care allowance were loosened. It can thus be argued, that NAP was further emphasised due to a slight increase of the private care allowance in 2009, as the aim was to support private childcare provision facilities (HE 129/2008 vp).

It is also noteworthy, that Finland can be considered part of the Nordic model of welfare/family policy model due to the unconditional universalism in and commitment to investment in early learning. When it comes to public

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<sup>30</sup> It is noteworthy that the home care allowance was also to be equally divided between the parents, however, this reform has to date not been pursued.

<sup>31</sup> Parties on opposition during PM Sipilä: Social Democratic Party, Left Alliance, Green League, Christian Democrats, and Swedish People's Party.

<sup>32</sup> Parties in PM Sipilä cabinet: Centre Party, National Coalition Party and Finns Party.

childcare systems/ECEC, Finland can be viewed as an outlier compared to the other Nordic countries, as Finnish children under the age of three participate less frequently in this service (e.g. Datta Gupta et al., 2006). This is commonly explained by the wide use of the homecare allowance, allowing a parent, guardian or grandparent to care for a child until the child turns three. Limiting the subjective right to full-time childcare could potentially be viewed as altering Finland's position to the other Nordic countries even more.

However, rather than discussing “a shift”, I suggest that in the case of ECEC, emphasis lies on a *partial shift*, from universalism to selectivity. This could be contrary to the ambitions of ECEC, to Nordic family policy and to the EU Commission Recommendation (2013, no page number), which suggests that “tackling the disadvantage in early years is an important means of stepping up efforts to address poverty and social inclusion in general”. Furthermore, it can be argued that it is contrary to the EU's proposal on Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC-systems (2018). Interestingly, it would appear that Finland, in relation these guidelines as well as in relation to the other Nordic countries, is taking a few steps in a different direction.

### 6.3. Credibility and reliability

When it comes to any type of study, establishing credibility and reliability is crucial. While credibility (or validity) refers to the degree of confidence that the data and process of analysis indeed addresses the intended focus (Graneheim & Lundman; Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007), reliability refers to the degree and the accuracy of the results and that the same results are reached every time regardless of which researcher does it (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007).

As **articles I—IV** are a collaboration between me and other scholars, the credibility and reliability of the studies were tested on several occasions. First, the overall research questions were what reforms were pursued in a policy field within a certain timeframe, and how these reforms were politicised. In order to study what reform have taken place, legislation is a good place to start. Second, once we established what politicisation was, we chose text data (different political documents) that would address this. Of course, this could have been further strengthened with for example interviews with politicians, however, we deemed the text data sufficient in this case.

When it came to analysing the data, we used QCA as method. QCA requires a deep understanding of the field of study before coding the data, and due to the slightly different starting points in **article I—IV**, it was of great importance working with established scholars with specific expertise needed for the studies. The expertise of the scholars lied in family policy and the politicisation of such, in the field of early childhood pedagogy, and in political sciences.

Before analysing the data, however, the authors responsible for collecting and the coding of the data (Nyby, Nygård and Lundkvist) test-ran certain sections of the data, allowing auditing of each other's ways of coding and

interpretation of the data. After the test-run, we critically discussed the differences, which turned out to be minor, in our ways of coding and strengthened our interpretation of the text data through discussion of the theoretical frameworks used for a particular study, but also to interpret the text data more carefully. This tests credibility as well as reliability in accordance to Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and Wellington & Szczerbinski (2007). As mentioned, the method chosen to analyse the data was QCA. Furthermore, as most of the data used here consist of political documents and are publicly accessible, the transparency of the data adds to the credibility (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007).

#### **6.4. Limitations**

There are some limitations to this thesis that need to be highlighted. One limitation is that a very narrow approach on family policy has been used, and thus, it is difficult to draw conclusions relating to Finnish family policy on a more general level. At the same time, this narrow definition (cash transfers aimed at families with children and services in terms of ECEC) was in one study (**Article I**) combined with means-tested benefits aimed at the public in general, namely general housing allowance and social assistance. These benefits have received no attention apart from this article, and thus they can seem inept. However, they served a purpose in terms of mapping what reforms have been taken place in family policy during the particular timeframe, relating to the first research question – as these benefits also support the poorest families. The target group was also of interest in this particular study, and this study sought to pinpoint where family policy measures are being put in — is emphasis on all families, poor families or employed families?

Another limitation is, that although this thesis uses the input and the output perspective on reform, it does not discuss the outcome perspective of the reforms in more depth, that is, the effects of the reforms on family policy are lacking. Although this perspective was not the main starting point, it would nonetheless have been interesting tracking the outcomes in terms of e.g. child poverty rates of the reforms. This, however, would not have been as straight forward, as other factors play part in child poverty rates, such as the overall economic situation of a country. Thus, briefly presenting the outcome perspective could have at best been interesting figures, and at worst it could have been misleading.

Finally, one reform that was not discussed but represents a radical reform, was the introduction of the temporarily child tax credit (statute 1086/2014). This reform ought to have been discussed, as it is an interesting policy alternative that deviates from Nordic family policy measures and values. However, as it was not included in any of the articles, it would have been dishonest to discuss this in the empirical section.

## 6.5. Future research and policy implications

Based on the result of the results and the limitations of this thesis, and I would suggest three types of studies to further elaborate on this. The *first* suggested study is an expansion of **Article I**, where the notion of family policy could be broadened, taking into consideration further aspects, such as social work aimed at families and health care aimed at children. Doing a similar study of these, using the input and the output perspectives, would give a broader understanding of ideas on how family policy should change *in general*. Where is the main focus on family policy? Is focus on preventive measurements, or is it on selective or universal support? What ideas are represented in the focus on the broader approach to family policy? These types of studies could be made on international and national levels, allowing for comparative studies to be pursued.

*Second*, I would like to combine the input perspective on these reforms studied in this thesis with the outcome perspective; what are the effects of these reform, in terms of e.g. participation in ECEC, and possible effects on the future? In doing so, the effect of the policies would be included, and I believe the roles of ideas could become even more strongly emphasised if the outcome perspective was to be combined with the input perspective. For example, studying the real value of the child benefit through history and combining this with the input perspective – that is, what ideas were behind these reforms – could say more about the role of ideas.

*Third*, the period studied for this thesis was indeed an extraordinary economic period, where neoliberal austerity policy measures were pursued in various social policy fields within and outside of Finland. Thus, it would be interesting studying if this period (2007–2017) was an exception in Finnish family policy development in relation to its history, or, if this period will come to represent the start of a less generous Finnish family policy system, both in terms of services and benefits. It could be argued that the results only indicate that an ideological divide between the centre-left and centre-right/traditional/bourgeois parties in terms of family policy still remain. If this is the case, future centre-left governments ought to make investments in family policy and reverse some of the cutbacks pursued during the period of analysis.

In the 2019, the Social Democratic Party won the general election, allowing PM Rinne to form cabinet consisting of the Social Democratic Party, Green League, Left Alliance, Centre Party and Swedish People's Party. As noted in **article II**, these parties had different ideas on how the parental leave ought to be reformed already in 2015 – most notably the Social Democratic Party suggesting a “1+3+3+9” model. However, most of these parties have pushed for radical reform of the parental leave system.

In the general election of 2019, the Social Democratic Party advocated for an “(1)+3+3+6” model (Election manifesto, 2019), however, once in government, discussions on radically reforming the parental leave were toned down and

was only vaguely described in the government programme (2019), where it is suggested that the goal is that the parental leave is to be used equally by the parents. Compared to how this party and the other parties in government have previously advocated for radical reform of the parental leave system, this is a rather vague ambition. Whether this is due to inability to agree on how it is to be reformed in terms of quotas, or who is to finance the new system, remains unknown.

PM Rinne has also suggested that the limit to the subjective rights to ECEC is to be reversed (Government programme, 2019), but whether this will be done remains to be seen. Unless this is done during this government, it could well be that Finnish family policy indeed is on a pathway to more selectivity and less generous family policy compared to its Nordic counterparts. Only time will tell if this is the case.

Based on this thesis, it is difficult to pinpoint certain policy implications, however, I would give a suggestion to newly elected and future MPs. As family policy, due to being less institutionally entrenched (see Clasen, 2005), is a policy field relatively easy to reform<sup>33</sup>, this field is an excellent arena for politicians to present and push for certain ideas on how society ought to be shaped. However, while family policy has changed through decades, one central concept has remained: the family. If the reasons for reforming the family policy system truly are to create a better life for families, it would be highly important to listen to what families in general actually want. According to the newest available *Family barometer* (Fin: *Perhebarometri*) from 2018 (see Kontula, 2018), families want more flexibility, but no “musts” or radical gender quotas on the parental leaves. This is now, however, a policy aim of the PM Rinne cabinet (Government programme 2019).

One prominent reason for political parties pushing for quotas in the parental leave systems is to increase gender equality on the labour market. Parties supporting this often argue that in Finland, compared to the other Nordic countries, women and especially mothers with young children, participate in the labour market on lower rates. However, when it comes to this particular reasoning, I suggest politicians take a longer perspective into consideration and educate themselves with some studies on this, such as a recent study by Miettinen and Rothkirch (2018).

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<sup>33</sup> Parental leaves are an exception, being the result of tripartite negotiation (see Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2011).

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# Politicising Finnish family policy reform 2007-2017

This doctoral thesis investigates how reforms in selected Finnish family policy areas were politicised 2007-2017, a period of economic turmoil and varying political landscape. The overall aim is to study *what* reforms were pursued but also *how* the reforms were politicised, in terms of *what ideas* were prominent in the political discourse.

The reforms are studied from the *input perspective*, an innovative way of studying the reform process. For this end, mostly text data consisting of political documents are used to shed light on how ideas - such as social investment and neoliberal austerity - play a part in reforming family policy.