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Study/Life Balance

A Comparative Study on National Level Polices Aiding Student Parents to Succeed in European Higher Education

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Abstract

Student parents represent a small but not insignificant share of the overall student body. The number of otherwise perfectly qualified potential students not accessing tertiary education due to national level policies that restrict the support they would need for striking a balance between studies and family life, can only be based on an educated guess. It is argued that this loss of bright minds to parenthood may well be identified as a unique form of brain drain and that debates about policies for widening access and work/life balance should explicitly include students with dependants as one of the marginalised target groups.

The situation of student parents in the nations scrutinized for this project, namely Germany, Sweden and the UK, is diverse. Good practise policy approaches in aiding them to succeed in tertiary education can be found in all of them, yet a directly transferrable 'one-size-fits-all' approach cannot be identified. This is due to path-dependent contexts shaping national level policy. The project concludes that nevertheless there is potential for policy transfer when considering good practise for study/life balance in the context of European level interests and existing EU and multilateral programs in the areas of tertiary education and social policy. It is suggested that by explicitly including the group of student parents into the definition of the non-traditional student in EU and multilateral initiatives, their situation could be monitored and good practise could be derived as the base to foster transfer of ideas and values: that indeed, student parents are a marginalised group in tertiary education which should be targeted by policies aiming at accessibility, work/life and ultimately study/life balance.

List of Abbreviations

BFUG SD	Bologna Follow Up Group, Working Group on the Social Dimension
BP	Bologna Process
DV/IV	Dependent/Independent Variable
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LLP	Lifelong Learning Program
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Coordination

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Introduction

In the European, national and institutional level debates on widening access to higher education students with dependants have received little attention. Policies fostering accessibility are traditionally tailored for students from socio-economically marginalised groups. Parents are eligible for support aimed at fostering work/life balance; however, there is little research conducted on how such a balance could be promoted for families in education. The thesis strives to build a bridge between the work/life and accessibility discourses and aims to identify national level policies that foster a 'study/life balance'.

The project commences with identifying the research problem and briefly reviewing the methodological approaches applied. The second chapter reviews background concepts connected to the target group. Hardly any national level policy directly aims at aiding student parents to succeed in tertiary education. However, due to their identity, instruments supporting them as parents, as students as well as equal to non-parent students are applicable. Furthermore, an analogy is drawn between the concept of study/life balance and specific interests of the European Union. In the third chapter, the project proceeds to map the situation of student parents in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Dimensions of a good practise policy approach truly fostering study/life balance are discussed in the fourth chapter. Given the path-dependent policy contexts, it is scrutinized whether said good practise would be applicable throughout the nations. Lastly, the project discusses opportunities and constraints of European policy transfer for study/life balance, given the strategic interests of the Union on the one hand and its lack of legislative competencies in the select policy areas on the other.

I. Problem Specification & Research Design

Research Puzzle

The debate on equal access and widening participation in higher education policy is usually focussed on groups disadvantaged by their cultural and socio-economic background. There is strong agreement on the importance of enabling those who are qualified to participate in tertiary education as well as to generally increase the number of successful graduates in Europe and beyond (EC 2014.i). However, one group of potential students that struggle to access to the tertiary sector or to continue their studies has hardly been covered: students with dependants.

The research problem is of importance in the context of demographic change: developed nations are suffering under an aging population (Vincent-Lancrin 2008). It is especially the group of female academics and students that postpone family formation (Mason et al 2013, Wilson 2003). This has prompted a debate where parent professors, researchers and fellows should be included and gain equal access to career opportunities. In these both institutional and national level policy discourses, the step of second-cycle education, be it motivated by reasons of enlightenment or (academic) career advancement, is left out.

Student parents make up a small but not insignificant share of the student body. The number of potential students not enrolling due to their family situation can only be based on an educated guess. Struggles of raising a child while studying are proven to be one of the many reasons for drop outs (e.g. BMBF 2010). The project treats this phenomenon as a unique form of brain-drain: instead of losing qualified academics to other nations, as the term is usually coined, a number of otherwise perfectly qualified students is 'lost to parenthood' due to restrictive policies hindering them from coping with studies and family life. This issue can also be phrased in economic terms: when young parents are forced to diverge from further education, the state's investment in subsidizing years of secondary education is lost (Goulden in Flaherty 2013).

An additional angle to the puzzle is the EU's pursuit of its strategic 2020 goals fostering 'smart growth'. Headline targets include an increase of the share of successful tertiary level graduates and the decrease of social exclusion (EC 2014.ii). The Lifelong Leaning (LLL) program (LLP) puts emphasis on widening access for non-traditional students, which could include student parents as well (EC 2011). The Bologna Process (BP) contains a social dimension, with equitable access to higher education as one of the main narratives (BFUG SD 2012). Thus, the strategic interests of the EU can be related to the ideational goal to enable student parents to participate and succeed in higher education.

The issue at hand is important from many angles; yet this is opposed by a lack of academic research on the topic, especially with comparative focus on national level policy[1] and with a clear connection to potential EU initiatives in the field. The project aims to build a bridge between the equal access and work/life balance debates by observing the situation of student parents and by mapping policies that foster study/life balance in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The project strives to underline the importance of the issue by identifying good practise and shortcomings in the select nations. Finally, the potential for policy transfer of said good practise is analysed in light of the EU's distinct interests in the related policy areas.

Methodological Approaches

The overall approach of the thesis project is of qualitative nature, despite the fact that many of the indicators derived in the following literature review could be framed in a quantitative way. Secondary data is however consulted to map the situation of student parents in the three nations. The central research question is: *what policies and instruments exist at national level to help student parents succeed in higher education by providing means for a study/life balance?* The situation of student parents in three nations is traced, scrutinizing *whether a good practice approach of such policy can be identified.* Because it is surmised that said good practise would be difficult to

[1] As opposed to institutional level.

implement in other nations, the analysis puts special emphasis on *the opportunities of policy transfer throughout the EU,* given the strategic goals of the Union with regard to tertiary education attainment and social inclusion on the one hand and the lack competence in the field of education and social welfare on the other.

In line with Adcock and Collier's (2001) levels of conceptualization the broad issue of aiding student parents to succeed in higher education can be systematized as the following concept: *Study/Life Balance* is defined as the opportunities for student parents to manage to succeed in higher education as well as family life due to national policy instruments that foster them as families, as students and as equal to non-parent students. *Success in higher education* includes both the, in comparison to non-parents, equal access as well as the completion of tertiary degrees. On the following level, indicators, i.e. instruments from the three policy areas that foster study/life balance are operationalized. The following literature review is conducted as the basis to identify said indicators. The policy instruments then are set as dependent variables (DV) in order to observe study/life balance in the select nations by tracing their availability and scope, thereby deriving descriptive inferences.

Following Lijphart's (1975) and Gerring's (2008) approaches for comparative and diverse selection, the project takes a clear focus on the comparability by selecting cases that are homogenous in a number of important background features, but diverse in the relationships of variables to be scrutinized in the research, thereby illuminating a full range of variation. Policies from Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom are compared. Their sameness lies in general background features, including e.g. EU membership, established welfare systems and the consideration of education as a public good. Their difference lies in the explicit policies and instruments that are scrutinized for the project, which are diverse due to path dependencies and different social constructions of the role of the welfare state and the university.

Research Methods & Evaluation

Firstly, by reviewing background concepts connected to study/life balance particular policy instruments aiding student parents are identified. Secondly, the situation of student parents in the select nations is traced, consulting country reports, legislation and secondary data. Additionally, a small number of student parents per country have been interviewed regarding their perceptions of study/life balance in their countries.[2] Data and interviews merely serve to illustrate the study/life balance 'mapping'. They are not utilized to measure causal effects; thereby remaining in the quantitative domain of an explorative study. Thirdly, good practise policies truly fostering study/life balance and opportunities and constraints to implement it in other nations are discussed. Finally, the analysis proceeds to evaluate opportunities to transfer good practise in light of a European perspective.

Features of the heuristic of policy success (McConnell 2010) are utilized to evaluate the policy situation in the three nations in a qualitative manner. McConnell defines policy success as the achievement of outcomes as planned by the proponents of a policy, the latter hinting at success being a concept strongly linked to conception. The heuristic includes three dimensions: process, operational and political success. The analysis of this project puts particular emphasis on the operational dimension, which indicates the measurable achievement of goals, establishment of benefits for the target group and efficiency of delivery in line with the standards and values of the respective policy domain (Marsh & McConnell 2010, McConnell 2010). Good practise thereby is identified as the 'what works' rather than as the 'what is politically feasible'.

The analysis then proceeds to discuss opportunities and constraints to apply such good practise in other nations. Direct implementation could be hindered, amongst a multitude of issues, especially by socio-economic differences. Thus instead, the thesis project incorporates the European perspective, discussing opportunities of Europe-wide policy transfer of the identified good practise.

[2] Appendix I

This selection has been applied because of the strategic goals and interests of the EU on the one hand, particularly with regard to tertiary education attainment and social inclusion, and on the other hand because of the lack of EU competencies in the field of higher education as well as social/welfare policy, which is not a restriction to the EU's influence in policy per se. The framework of policy transfer of Dolowitz & Marsh (1996; 2000) and Stone's (2004) modes of transfer are applied to guide the analysis.

The concept of policy transfer incorporates dynamics and processes whereby knowledge or features of policies, instruments and institutions are observed in one country and utilized in the development of policies across political systems (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, Stone 1999). The framework is arranged around six questions guiding the analysis of why and in whose interest transfer occurs, what exactly is transferred from where, in which degrees it occurs and which constrains might be met or might lead to transfer/policy failure. The rather broad framework has proven to be a useful tool in observing dynamics of policy making in the globalized world, where policy "(…) takes place in a world system as well as in national political systems" (Parsons 1996, 234 in Dolowitz & Marsh 2000). Out of the many potential pitfalls to successful transfer, the lack of analysis on how a policy operates in a foreign political, institutional or bureaucratic system appears to be the most persistent. Search for potential polices is often criticised as too narrow, limited by language or familiarity of backgrounds. Thus, Dolowitz recommends that a strong analysis of good policy practise for potential transfer includes more than one political system (2003), which is in line with the approach of this project. The selected conceptual framework is especially applicable in light of spreading good practise despite the lack of EU competencies in the select policy areas, because in this respect, the EU is regarded as a 'platform for policy transfer' (Radaelli 2003).

II. Literature Review

The following shall guide the identification of policies and instruments[3] that are related to the concept of study/life balance as a base for tracing the situation of student parents in the select nations. Not only is there a concise research gap on the topic, but also there is hardly any national level policy directly aiming at aiding student parents to succeed in higher education. However, due to their identity, three highly interlinked concepts are applicable: welfare policy supporting families, policy governing higher education and equality policy widening access. The focus of the project mainly lies on social and higher education policy; distinct equality polices might be included in the former two. In addition, the last section draws an analogy between the concept of study/life balance and the strategic goals and competencies of the EU as a base for the final discussion of policy transfer.

Family Policy Concepts

The definition of a family as seen from the viewpoint of a state can take diverse forms: the traditional male/female/one breadwinner concept, single or increasingly recognized same sex parents - family policies of welfare states are addressing all of them. Just as the different family constellations, all of which could include student parents, also the objectives of family policy are diverse. The overall aim can be identified as offsetting both the direct and indirect costs of raising children, the latter targeting the parent's work/life balance and employability (Thévenon & Luci 2012).

Changing concepts and state preferences of the functions and gender roles of a family can be seen as drivers for change in social policy. Daly (2010.i) contrasts the relationship between states and families in the early welfare state with single income ideals and the current welfare state, where both parents are potential earners. An overall trend is that policies move away from subsidizing stay-

[3] Presented *in italics*

at-home carers to a stronger focus on services enabling both parents to work. Distinct policy approaches of nations are intrinsically shaped by the historical understanding of the role of the state towards both the family and the labour market (Thévenon 2011). This path dependence is reflected in the categorization of welfare regimes, most famously Esping-Andersen's (1990) three worlds of welfare capitalism. Clustering regimes along the lines of ideal trajectories with focus on resource mobilization, as well as patterns of persisting ideologies and formation of political coalitions, he identifies a (1) social democratic, (2) a liberal and (3) a conservative model. A categorization of established welfare regimes has been discussed along similar lines by other authors with the conclusion that distributional outcomes of social policy vary drastically between those groups (Arts & Gelissen 2010, Thévenon 2011).

In international comparison, it is vital to not exclusively lay focus on how much is spent, but also to compare in which ways welfare is distributed and what motives stand behind the spending on families: raising birth rates and influencing demographics; improving equity by redistributing between parents and non-parents; alleviating poverty; increasing employment; supporting early childhood development and promoting gender equality (Daly 2010.i). Family support policy to achieve said aims can be categorized along three dimensions: In-cash instruments focus on offsetting direct cost of raising children and include *income support* in form of *benefits, fiscal transfers* or *preferential tax treatment*. Support in-kind involves entitlements to *services* provided at lower or no cost as the *provision* or *subsidization of childcare* and *pre-school facilities*. The legal entitlement to *maternity, paternity and parental leave* falls under the in-time dimension. Both in-kind and in-time instruments focus mainly on offsetting the indirect cost of raising a child by e.g. enabling work/life balance or by securing work after childbirth (Thévenon 2011). A range of these policy instruments are applicable to student parents and due to their identity (not only parents but also students) they are in some instances entitled to preferential treatment.

In light of the final analysis of the project of a European perspective on study life balance, it remains to be pointed out that due to the influence of international organizations, family policies of the regimes recently have been growing closer together (Armingeon 2004, Thévenon & Luci 2012). E.g. both the OECD and the EU have been described to push policy reform through recommendations targeting economic growth by increasing labour market participation and influencing demographic change and the wellbeing of children and their families by fostering work/life balance (Daly 2010.i). The question of whether the EU's recommendations have potential to make a difference to the situation of student parents is discussed in chapter four.

Higher Education Policy Concepts

The trend of mass higher education, no longer only enjoyed by an elite few but desirably offered on a broad level as a crucial element of economic performance, has surfaced long before the EHEA's (European Higher Education Area) education ministers confirmed in 2001 that higher education indeed shall be regarded as a public responsibility (Bergan 2005, Weber 2005). The increased demand for skilled workers, the fast pace of technological change demanding a constant updating of competences as well as demographic change and the connected need to increase the productivity of labour is a nowadays commonly accepted reasoning behind the expansion of higher education. As student numbers increase around the world, two main debates can be identified. On the one hand it is questioned how such large scale education systems can be funded while maintaining a high level of quality. On the other hand, access to higher education shall be made more equitable, moving away from a social elitism to an intellectual one (Barr 2004); i.e. enabling everyone qualified enough to participate. Focus of the latter is those disadvantaged by their socio-economic background. Yet, the norm central to the discourse also applies to student parents and thereby policy instruments fostering equitable access also apply to them.

Most European countries regard higher education as a public good, ensuring its provision though *public funding* (Bergan 2005, Docampo 2007). The level of *spending on higher education* as a share

of overall GDP can be very diverse and is linked to the traditional understanding of the role of the state in providing and regulating education and a path dependency of the general organization of higher education in a nation (Schuetze & Slowey 2000). In most cases, public authorities financially provide for higher education to a certain degree, which is then substituted by *cost sharing*: i.e. utilizing private resources of students. *Tuition fees* are justified with limited public budgets and positive externalities, as higher income and employability prospects. Some scholars criticise this approach by underlining the benefits of an educated population to overall society and that graduates somewhat refinance their education by earning more, thereby also paying higher income taxes (Vossensteyn 2009). In addition to fees, general costs of study as *cost of living* can deter socially disadvantaged groups: the absence of fees does not imply universal accessibility (Boezerooy & Vossensteyn 1999). Thus, in line with the argument of public responsibility, *student support* is offered as a counterbalance, securing fair opportunities and overcoming barriers of access (Weber 2005). The latter can be grouped as barriers of selectivity and affordability. Issues of selectivity concern the student's academic background in the *qualification requirements,* or personal characteristics, as their age or family situation. Thus, *access routes* and *degree structures* that result in flexible attainment options can have a positive effect on participation (Hering & Kruse 2004). Selectivity is interlinked with affordability, as direct public support (*scholarships, grants, loans on favourable interest conditions*) and funding from private sources may be restricted to an eligible age group. Indirect support may be offered over *tax breaks* for student employment, *tuition waivers* or *quotas* to foster access for certain disadvantaged groups.

The latter is an example of the equality policy vision of *differential treatment*, where positive action fosters equal opportunities (Jones 1977). The policy type of *mainstreaming* on the other hand fosters transformation and diversity by aiming to equate all members of a society, as the higher education landscape, through opening up opportunities for all (Pollack & Haffner-Burton 2000). While the typical use of such equality policies is connected to grounds of e.g. gender and disability,

the thesis project surmises that such instruments are also applicable to student parents: to be treated equal to non-parent students.

The European Perspective: Strategic Goals versus Limited Competencies

The aim of the project is not only to observe the situation of student parents and the level of policy support in three EU member states but also to draw an analogy to the goals and interests of the Union. In the final analysis section, opportunities and restraints to policy transfer of the priory identified policy mix are discussed. The following outlines the link between diverse EU programmes, strategies and policies and the concept of study/life balance.

The EU never held any legislative competence in the above discussed policy areas. Social welfare and higher education policy frameworks differ fundamentally in the member states. They are treated as matters of sovereignty and their differences may even be described as sources of national identity. This however has not stopped the Union from formulating explicit targets and levying influence in pursuit of for instance a 'social Europe' and a 'Europe of knowledge' (Palier 2003; Tuschling & Engemann 2006). Launched in 2010, the Europe 2020 "(…) strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (EC 2014.ii, 3) for competitive yet social markets sets a range of objectives to be promoted in line with the subsidiarity principle. Out of the five areas that are understood to contribute to growth, the programs focussing on education and social inclusion can be linked to the issue of study/life balance. Based on the demand for a better qualified workforce, it is targeted to increase the share of tertiary education graduates; access for qualified students shall be broadened and drop-out rates shall be reduced (Armstrong 2012). One may also indirectly connect the headline target of poverty reduction and social inclusion. By addressing disadvantages in education and training, the economic potential of EU citizens and thereby their employability can be maximised. This in turn can potentially lift them out of poverty. After all, the unemployment numbers for tertiary graduates lie far under those for citizens with a lower qualification (BFUG 2012, Frazer et al 2010).

Overall, a sustainable education system should not only maximize the sheer numbers of graduates but also question who is included. The latter puzzle is considered by two long-running programs of higher education policy, albeit not with focus on student parents per se: Life-Long-Learning (LLL) and the Bologna Process (BP). In short, the BP aimed at the creation of the EHEA of nowadays 47 nations, bringing the sector to comparable standards by means of intergovernmental cooperation. Despite the clear European dimension, the BP/EHEA programs respect the national identity of higher education systems. The EU only holds supporting competence[4] (Stöber 2013.ii). Next to structural reforms in e.g. the areas of degree cycles and quality assurance, the BP is concerned with the social dimension: making tertiary education accessible to a large share of the population, thus reflecting the socio-economic diversity of all qualified potential students. While BP structural reforms have been more or less successful, the inclusiveness of higher education remains the main challenge of the EHEA (BFUG SD 2012, Eurydice 2011).

The EC's LLL program (LLP), as of 2014 running under Erasmus+, takes focus on including the particular group of adult (later redefined as non-traditional) learners returning to university after a break from initial education (EC 2006). In brief, it is an overarching strategy of cooperation in education policies, aiming to address trends of the changing face of the student body and to maintain the employability of Europe's aging populations over the course of their lifespan (Tuschling & Engemann 2006). Socio-economically diverse, adult or non-traditional - student parents potentially fit in any of these marginalized groups of learners - yet are hardly considered in either the 2020, social dimension or LLL initiatives.

The programs reviewed above have in common that they deploy the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), the EU's governance tool in the absence of legislative competence (Radaelli 2003). The OMC falls under the category of *dominium*, the exertion of power to achieve socially desirable goals by means of funding, as opposed to legislative power, i.e. *imperium* (Daintiht 1982 in Armstrong 2012).

[4] TFEU Art. 165

This 'power of the purse' was evident in the EC's involvement in the BP: it provided funding and expertise to the Process, which itself had no budgets or institutions to promote or follow-up on the implementation of the reforms (Stöber 2013.ii). The EC's dominium influence also has resonance in the 2020 strategy: initiatives and financial incentives have an allocated budget, yet latter are only one part of the European Semester's[5] wider framework of policy coordination, which also includes non-financial methodologies of OMC as recommendations, objectives-setting, monitoring and benchmarking (Armstrong 2012).

Those rather soft methods at first glance would fall under the definition of voluntary transfer whereby the EC fosters innovation through international comparison and the exchange of ideas between countries (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996; Stone 1999). While the EU in the areas of social and education policy cannot coerce policy transfer through directives or ECJ rulings, it still can be considered as a 'policy-pusher': not only the power of the purse, but also factors of functional interdependence can lead to a policy transfer that is indirectly coercive. While EU member states certainly are not obliged to implement policy recommendations, e.g. benchmarking processes on the one hand 'name and shame' those countries that lag behind and on the other hand open up room for policy learning by identification of good practise (Dolowitz 2003). Lastly, international consensus on the definition of an issue can also act as push factor for less than voluntary transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996): if a common understanding of a problem is identified at EU level and a good practise solution to this problem is evident in at least one member state, all members by adopting the definition also face pressure to implement similar programs. The project proceeds to identify and compare policy practise in Germany, Sweden and the UK, thereby applying a typical OMC scenario and setting the base for potential policy transfer.

[5] Overarching framework of monitoring process of the Stability and Growth Pact: EC sets annual priorities for the member states, asses them and follows up with recommendations (Armstrong 2012).

III. The Situation of Student Parents in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom

Germany, Sweden and the UK are considered established welfare states (Arts & Gelissen 2010), they are members of the European Union, thus eligible for programs under the Europe 2020 strategy as well as the LLP. Higher education in all three nations is following the trend of massification and is, at least traditionally, considered a public good. The higher education systems have been reformed in accordance to the recommendations of the BP. However, the countries are quite diverse with regard to their distinct welfare systems, social conceptions of the family and of the role of the state in interfering in higher education. The following outlines policies that influence the situation of student parents both positively and negatively.

Study/Life Balance in Germany: Supporting Student Parents…

German student parents make up almost 5%[6] of the overall student body. They are more likely to be enrolled in second-cycle degrees and tend to be over the age of 30. The share of student parents of the overall female student body is 1.7% higher than that of their male counterparts. About a third of them studies part-time due to reasons of childcare and employment to cover additional financial obligations. In cases where the dependant is under the age of three, 58% are enrolled in low-intensity courses. The drop-out rates for student parents are considerably higher than for non-parents (BMBF 2010, Eurostudent 2014).

…as parents

Esping-Andersen (1990) categorises Germany's welfare regime as conservative-corporate. Its principles are enshrined in the Basic Law, including the focus on individual liberties, the primacy of family, the principle of subsidiarity and autonomy in delivery by the *Länder*. The main mechanism is social insurance. Eligibility for it mainly depends on employment, past earnings and contributions to the system. Despite its comparatively high levels of benefits, the German system has been criticised

[6] Appendix II: data overview.

to perform poorly from a social perspective: inegalitarian and creating social cleavages along the lines of those who are employed, and those who are not, and fostering gendered inequalities by relying on a patriarchal view of families. The system traditionally reflects the male breadwinner/stay-at-home female conception (Daly 2010.i, Palier 2010; Poole 2001).

Spending on family welfare in Germany is at 3.07% of the GDP slightly higher than OECD average. A third of this is allocated to directly offset the cost of having children, mainly through in-cash instruments as family allowance[7] of 184€ per month per child (increasing slightly with the number of children). Another third is delivered via the tax system, which privileges single-income, married households by giving a lump-sum tax relief per child and per parent for combined earnings[8]. About 0.9% of GDP are spent on in-kind instruments as subsidized childcare and other services. A kindergarten space costs 23% of an average German wage (OECD 2014.ii; Eurydice 2014.ii). Legislation prescribes a right to kindergarten care for children older than three.[9] Problematic for student- and non-student parents alike is a considerable shortage of spaces, especially for younger children. Demand exceeds supply in every single one of the *Länder*, ranging from around 3% to up to 20% (DJI 2012). In a bid to expand the employment of mothers and positively influence low birth rates, Germany has recently invested heavily into the expansion of childcare facilities (Daly 2010.i), tried to introduce a guarantee for care for children from the age of one (yet failed)[10] and thereby is somewhat moving away from policies aimed at the traditional understanding of a family (Palier 2010).

...as students

Even in today's German higher education landscape, traditional concepts of the role of the university and the state in providing for it prevail: the classical Humboldtian concept of the university as

[7] §§ 1-22. BKGG
[8] § 32. EStG
[9] § 24(3) SGB VIII
[10] Facilities were not expanded in time when legislation came into force in 2013. Instead a 'stay-at-home-premium' was proposed to be paid to parents who did not find or want to use a space (Stöber 2013.i).

institutions of research and academic teaching, rather than as providers of services to society, and the firm role of the state in setting forth the structures of higher education still have resonance (Habermas et al 1987, Ertl 2013). While the *Länder* in theory have the right to regulate, higher education structures are somewhat conform across the country due to an overarching national level framework[11] prescribing organization and procedures, yet safeguarding the institution's right to regulate internal matters individually (Ertl 2013; Wolter 2000). Funding of higher education stems from national and *Länder* budgets, the latter carrying the main share (87%) and deciding on the allocation based on needs and, more recently, performance parameters. Overall 1.1% of GDP is spent on higher education (OECD 2014.i). External financing plays a subordinated (yet increasing) role and is mainly procured for research projects (KMK 2012).

Cost sharing in German higher education is minimal: while tuition fees of 1,000€ per year were briefly introduced at the beginning of the century, by 2014 all of the *Länder* abolished them. However, fees are charged when exceeding the regular study period prescribed by the National Qualifications Framework. All students contribute by paying administrative fees to the institution (Eurydice 2014.ii). At around €300 per term they cover e.g. a public transport ticket for the state in question. Cost of study and living are subsidized, e.g. in form of student housing and low-cost lunches (EHEA 2014). The average direct cost of attaining a tertiary degree is 5,150€[12] (OED 2014.i). State student support[13] of up to 670€ per month is paid half as grant and half as interest free loan. Due to the restrictive selectivity of said instrument, affordability and access are only fostered for a small group of students, as eligibility depends on e.g. income of their parents and age of the students when commencing the studies (under 30 (BA) /35 (MA) years old). Students enrolled in part-time courses do not qualify. A range of merit-based student support as well as public and private loans on favourable interest rates is available. Despite the recent reforms in accordance to

[11] Hochschulrahmengesetz
[12] Exchange rate: 1€ to 1.4$.
[13] BAföG

the BP, study structures remain rigid and the profile of the student body rather homogeneous. Policies are oriented towards the traditional student, directly accessing higher education after completion of the entrance requirements, studying full time and on-campus. Flexible, part-time and distance learning programs remain rare. However, there are a rising number of de-facto part-time students, who are enrolled full-time yet substantially prolong their studies due to work and family commitments (Ertl 2013; Schuetze & Slowey 2000; Wolter 2000).

…as equal to non-parent students

Differential treatment to foster equitable access is scarcely given to non-traditional students in Germany (Wolter 2000). National level policy prescribes the responsibility to foster a socio-economic balance of the student body, including those students with dependants, to the universities themselves[14]. Specific support for student parents is exclusively implemented by institutional policy. Together with the student service organizations and unions about half of the institutions offer some low-cost and flexible childcare spaces and other support as meals and baby equipment (EHEA 2014). One of the higher education frameworks of the *Länder* explicitly ensures that student parents are exempt from all types of fees (Lower Saxony[15]). Another state exempts them from tuition payable when exceeding the regular study period (Saxony-Anhalt[16]). Few of the other frameworks mention that institutions may decide themselves, whether to levy fees to student parents (e.g. Bavaria[17]).

Study/Life Balance in Sweden: Supporting Student Parents…

Swedish student parents make up 13% of the overall student body. Amongst the students over 30 years of age, 66% are studying with dependants. In 40% of the cases they have children under the age of three. They are more likely to be female (17% of the female student body, 7% of the male student body) (Eurostudent 2014). 42% of student parents are enrolled part-time, 28% study in

[14] § 2(4) HSG
[15] § 13 NHG
[16] § 112(4) HSGLSA
[17] § 71(5) BayHSchG

distance programs. More than half of Swedish student parents are enrolled in teacher education, nursing and pharmacy programs, which to some degree is due to the generally higher proportion of women in these programmes, but also due to the fact that such courses are offered in more locations than for instance engineering (Högskoleverket 2008).

…as parents

Sweden is often "(…) portrayed as one of the most expansive and progressively redistributive welfare states under capitalism" (Ginsburg 2001; 196). Welfare spending in the social democratic regime (Esping-Andersen 1990) is comparatively high since the 1950's. The municipalities are responsible for social insurance and service provision and have considerable legislative autonomy. A wide range of interventionist policies aims at producing socially desirable outcomes: universalistic coverage of welfare, class and gender equality and full employment. This reflects long established societal values and the influence of organized labour, feminism and pronatalism on the political agenda. The conception of a family is based on a dual-income: female labour participation is traditionally high. The social policy model has been criticised by some, mainly for its high levels of tax duties and the potentially negative incentives such high levels of social protection may foster (Ginsburg 2001, Kautto 2010).

3.75% of Swedish GDP is spent on family policies, which is over 1% higher than the OECD average. Together with parental leave allowances, the in-cash instrument of child allowance makes up about 40% of the overall spending. Parents receive about 100€[18] per month per child; the amount increasing slightly with additional children[19]. Furthermore, a means-tested housing allowance of on average 220€ per month may be applicable[20]. There are no tax breaks for parents in the Swedish system. The provision of services to offset indirect cost of having children via in-kind instruments makes up 60% of the spending on families. The municipalities are responsible for the provision and

[18] Exchange rate: 1€ to 9SEK.
[19] Lag (1947:529) om allmänna barnbidrag
[20] Lag (1993:737) om bostadsbidrag

the main share of funding for childcare facilities. A space for any child over the age of one is guaranteed, given that both parents are working or studying[21]. There is a cap on the cost of childcare of 3% of a household's income for the first child, decreasing one percentage point per additional child. Interestingly, child care facilities translate as pre-schools. As of 1998 they are regulated under the Education Act, which reflects a shift in Swedish policy making towards a stronger commitment to provide services for a knowledge society (Björnberg & Dahlgren 2008; Deen 2007; OECD 2014.ii).

...as students

Since the 1970's the relationship between Swedish higher education institutions and the state underwent major changes: it moved from high levels of intervention to more liberal, market oriented governance with autonomous institutions that have a distinct social and cultural purpose in society. Higher education came to be understood as providing a service to advance economic development, the overall knowledge society as well as ethnic, cultural and gender equity (Kogan & Marton 2000; Deen 2007). The role of the state involves setting forth a general framework[22] with regulations about the governance and program structures of higher education institutions and setting research priorities. The institutions autonomously decide on the specifics of organization, resource allocation and course contents (Universitets-Kanslersämbetet 2013). 87% of funding comes from public sources and is allocated on the base of input and performance measures, with considerable emphasis on the quality of education offered (Deen 2007).

1.8% of Swedish GDP is spent on the tertiary sector. There is no cost-sharing: Swedish students neither pay tuition nor any other type of fee[23]. The average direct cost of a tertiary degree is 3,600€. In line with the aim of affordability and with the political goal of 'education for all', a means-tested student support in form of a grant and loan of combined up to circa 200€ per week[24] is available and

[21] Skollag (2010:800), Kap.8,§§5,14

[22] Högskolelag (1992:1434); Högskoleförordning (1993:100)

[23] Högskolelag (1992:1434) Kap.4,§4; Förordning (2010:543) om anmälningsavgift och studieavgift vid universitet och högskolor

[24] Studiestödslagen (1999:1395)

used by 80% of all students. The support age-limit is 45 years[25] which reflects an overall low selectivity on personal characteristics in the Swedish system. Access routes are remarkably diverse: next to completing secondary school, eligibility without secondary education may also be achieved through work experience and an aptitude test, through a folk high school certificate or via one of the many programmes tailored to broaden access. Unlike anywhere else in Europe, in Sweden young students that directly enter the tertiary sector after high school are the non-traditional ones. It is the cultural norm and long established tradition that higher education is started only after some years of work and life experience. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that numbers of adult learners, more likely to also be student parents, are high and that policies are in place to aid their success in higher education (Bron & Agelii 2000; Deen 2007; OECD 2014.i).

…as equal to non-parent students

Next to the provision of reasonably priced, guaranteed childcare spaces and the favourable conditions set forth by programs targeting the accessibility for learners over the age of 25, Swedish student parents are eligible for additional study grants[26] of 17€ per week per child, increasing slightly with additional children (Eurydice 2014.ii). All in all, the Swedish policy approaches are focussed on mainstreaming: core political statements as work and education for all established somewhat of a normality of working and of student parents.

Study/Life Balance in the United Kingdom: Supporting Student Parents…

In the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) 12.4% of the student body are parents. They tend to be female (17% of the female student body, 6.4% for their male counterparts) and 53% are over the age of 30. Most of them are enrolled part-time and fall under the category of returning students (having left tertiary education for five or more years). They tend to study in vocational courses as healthcare, teaching or social work, which reflects the generally higher share of women in

[25] Studiestödslagen (1999:1395) Kap.3 §9
[26] Studiestödslagen (1999:1395) Kap.3 §13

these types of degrees. UK student parents are rather immobile in their choice of institution: 92% study close by to where they lived before taking up tertiary education (Eurostudent 2014; NUS 2009).

…as parents

In Esping-Andersen's 1990 typology, the UK is classified as liberal welfare regime, strongly oriented towards generic poverty alleviation, otherwise low levels of state-interventionism, a preference for private provision and market mechanisms and delivery through a multitude of more or less independent agencies. The regime has often been critically viewed as social policy of the 'last resort', weak in achieving positive distributive aims, even reproducing social class fault lines through progressivity in taxation and in benefits, mainly directed at the disadvantaged (Castles 2010; Clarke et al. 2001; Daly 2010.i). In line with the liberal heritage, the social construction of the family is one of self-reliance and autonomy. Daly (2010.ii) finds that while the focus on the poor and neo-liberal market imperatives still has resonance in family policy, the last ten years saw a shift to a (slightly) more universalistic approach.

4.2% of UK GDP is spent on family policies, which is the second highest percentage in the OECD countries. Two thirds are allocated in-cash to offset direct family cost. Child benefits[27] of about 100€[28] per month per child, decreasing slightly for additional children, are available unless both parents are earning high individual incomes[29]. Tax credits can be gained for children in general[30] as well as towards the cost of childcare[31], if the parent works more than 16 hours per week. The latter instrument can be included into the in-kind support, which together with general spending on services makes up 1.38% of GDP. Despite an expansion in childcare subsidies, publicly funded spaces are rare and concentrated around areas with lower income families. A full-time childcare space in

[27] Child Benefit Act 2005 & Child Benefit (Rates) Regulations 2008,No.3246
[28] Exchange rate 1€ to 0.8£
[29] Finance Act 2012, Section 8, Schedule 1
[30] Child Tax Credit Regulations 2002,No.2007
[31] Working Tax Credit Regulations 2002,Reg.2&Reg.14(3)&(4)

the UK costs around 46% of an average salary. In addition to the family policies, student parents may be eligible for housing benefits (means-tested on income including loans[32]) as well as job seekers allowance in between terms for part-time students[33] (Daly 2010.ii; NUS 2009; OECD 2014.ii).

...as students

Also in the UK, the relationship between the state and the higher education sector underwent major changes: traditionally emphasising low degrees of intervention, the end of the 1990's saw the beginning of what Watson (2013) describes as 'legislative hyperactivity', creating a range of intermediary agencies, resulting in an 'organizational zoo' of policy mediation (Kogan & Marton 2000). The historically rooted high level of academic and institutional autonomy prevails, despite the fact that the traditionally facilitatory state nowadays sets forth a comprehensive framework of regulations. Competitive allocation of funding is increasingly used to intervene in the sector. Overall, 1.4% of GDP is spent on tertiary education. Public funding is justified with neo-liberal rhetoric: the role of higher education in serving the needs of the economy, tailoring graduates for the market. It is allocated over the funding councils, primarily based on enrolment numbers and research output (Eurydice 2014.i; Kogan & Marton 2000; Leišytė 2007).

Public funding makes up 40% of higher education's institutions income. Cost sharing is high and tuition fees have increased drastically since the introduction of variable fees as basis for institutional competition in 2004[34] and since the cap on what the institutions can charge tripled in 2010[35]. The average direct costs of tertiary degrees are 21,000€ (OECD 2014.i). To increase affordability there is a wide range of grants and loans available, depending on household income, region and study program attended. About 40% of undergraduates qualify for a grant of up to 4.100€ per year. While there is no age limit to qualify for eligibility, most of the support can only be taken up by

[32] Housing Benefit Regulations 2006, No.213,Part 6,Sect. 2(32)
[33] Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 2013,Part 1(2)
[34] Higher Education Act 2004,Part 3
[35] E.g. for England: Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2010, No.3020 & The Student Fees (Basic and Higher Amounts) (Approved Plans) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012,No.433

undergraduate full-time students[36], with the exception of maintenance grants[37] (Eurydice 2014.ii; Leišytė 2007; NUS 2009). The waiver of the age limit also reflects a shift in the conception of the traditional student due to the rising numbers of adult learners since the 1990's. UK higher education's access routes are somewhat diversified. Flexible pathways and recognition of prior learning are on the political agenda and there is an abundance of part-time options available. However, given the restrictive financial support regulations, policy seems to still cater for the student intake directly accessing from secondary education (Slowey 2000).

…as equal to non-parent students

In line with the philosophy of targeted benefit spending, additional differential treatment instruments are available to increase affordability of tertiary education for student parents: undergraduate students (England and Northern Ireland only full-time) are eligible for the parental learning allowance of up to 1,850€ per year. In England, the Access to Learning Fund subsidises childcare for all types of student parents. Single parents get preferential treatment in the means-testing for eligibility for these instruments[38]. Other differential support mechanisms for widening access are in the responsibility of the institutions, prescribed by access agreements ensuring that they invest in e.g. the following[39]: Scottish institutions administer the Lone Parent- and Lone Parent Childcare Grants of combined up to 3,000€ per year, which are not means-tested. Hardship or discretionary funds may be available in all UK countries. Thus, student parents may be eligible for a multitude of support mechanisms - in addition to the brief overview of this section many more e.g. course-specific instruments are available. Due to the agencification of delivery, student parents have to be somewhat of an expert on how to qualify, (re-)apply and switch benefit and support systems several times a year (Leišytė 2007; NUS 2009).

[36] The Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011, No. 1986, Part 2, 4(7)
[37] Ibid. Part 5, Chapter 6
[38] Ibid. Part 5, Chapter 4(42-47)
[39] Set forth by the relevant Founding Council & The Higher Education Act 2004, Part 3(24;31)

IV. Analysis

The previous chapter demonstrated that the policy situation in aiding student parents to succeed in tertiary education in the three select nations, and even within them, is very diverse. In the following, the national level policies are compared in light of the goal of deriving a good practise of policies for study/life balance. It then is discussed, why direct implementation of such practise throughout the nations would be difficult to realize and how a European perspective of policy transfer might be helpful to overcome constraints.

Good Practise for Study/Life Balance

Despite the fact that hardly any of the policies discussed above directly aims at aiding student parents, the literature review of chapter two established that due to their identity, family, higher education and to some extent equality policy are beneficial to their success in tertiary education. The project proceeds to treat good practise as an especially successful mix of national level policies from the three areas. According to McConnell, success ultimately lies in the eye of the beholder: while positive outcomes may be backed up with evidence, "only those supportive of the original goals are liable to perceive, with satisfaction, an outcome of policy success" (2010, 25). He of course was hinting at the politicised nature of the policy process, which is not very applicable in the case of study/life balance, because as a policy goal it is hardly found on any political agenda. However, the notion of perceived success shall still be a fruitful one: in addition to chapter two's identification of policy instruments proven to widen access for marginal groups in higher education and to increase work/life balance for families, the following dimensions of good practise for study/life balance are illustrated with conceptions of the target group. Table 1 gives an overview of the findings of chapter three, comparing what policies are available to foster study/life balance. In light of the programmatic success dimension, the conceptions of the interviewees are deployed to evaluate whether policies indeed produce desirable outcomes and benefits for them (McConnell 2010).

	Germany	Sweden	United Kingdom
Family allowances (offsetting direct cost)	• Universal	• Universal	• Means-tested
Childcare (availablity/cost)	• Guaranteed space (over 3 year olds) • Medium cost	• Guaranteed space (over 1 year olds) • Means-tested	• Few subsidized spaces • High cost
Flexibility (degree types/access routes)	• Mostly full-time • Several access routes	• Full and part-time, distance learning • Several access routes	• Full and part-time, distance learning • Several access routes
Affordability (Cost/support)	• Low cost-sharing • Grants and loans means-tested (family income)	• No cost-sharing • Grants and loans means-tested (individual income)	• High levels of cost-sharing • Grants and loans means-tested (individual income)
Selectivity (access to education/to funding)	• Qualifications based • Support up until 30 years of age	• Qualifications and work experience based • Support until 45 years of age	• Mainly qualifications based • No age limit for support
Responsibility for widening participation	• Higher education institutions	• Both state and institutions	• Higher education institutions accountable to state agency
Equality policy targeting student parents (differential treatment)	• None (except state level: Lower Saxony)	• Additional study grants	• Parental leaning grants • Childcare support

Table 1 - Dimensions of Good Practise: Summary of Support Available to Student Parents

It should be emphasised again, that when comparing family and higher education policy it is more important how support is distributed, rather than how much is spent (Daly 2010.i; Weber2005). For instance, the UK spends far more of its GDP on family policies; yet many of the support instruments are means-tested, while in Germany and Sweden (at least for child allowances) a universalistic approach is taken. Most student parents in the UK still would be eligible, as the income cap for in-cash support is rather high. In the realm of family policy, what seems to matter most for study/life balance are childcare cost and availability: *"If my mum would not look after my kid, then I probably could not do this degree."* (UK 1 2014) or *"They have this great facility next to campus, but we will*

see if I actually manage to get my child in." (DE 3 2014) were answers which in essence were reflected in all interviews with German and UK student parents. The Swedish case stands out with a space guarantee as well as very low, means-tested cost.

The key word for good practise for study/life balance is flexibility. Hering & Kruse (2004) found that the BP reform's modularisation lead to more flexible degree attainment options and had a positive effect on access for students with work or family commitments. Despite modularization, Germany's degrees are mainly offered on a full-time basis; support is not available for part-time students. Studying de-facto part-time is possible, however results in exceeding the prescribed duration of the program, which is rebuked with tuition fees. This scenario was faced by the first student parent interviewed[40] (DE 1 2013). Good practise degree structures and regulations for support should thus encompass diverse attainment options, including part-time and distance learning. Cost sharing or not, grants and loans are available in all the countries scrutinized. The affordability of tertiary education can be restricted by the selectivity of the support instruments and indeed, just over half of the interviewees were eligible for student support. For instance, student parents tend to be over the age of 30 (the median age of the interviewees was 29). The UK stands out positively as the only nation with no age cap for eligibility but as in Germany, part-time students receive little or no support. All countries use merit rather than personal characteristics for access and it has to be positively noted that the UK and Sweden are increasingly considering work experience and prior learning to widen access.

"Of course, the university!" (DE 4; SE 1 2014) was in essence the answer of two thirds of the interviewees when asked who they thought should be responsible to make improvements for study/life balance. Thinking mainly of on-campus childcare facilities but also of e.g. information material for teaching staff on how to accommodate the student parent's needs (DE 2 2014), the interviewees were convinced that the universities could do more, but also acknowledged the role of

[40] And in fact motivated this project.

the state in funding such measures. All countries scrutinised prescribe an important however different role to higher education in their society. Widening participation not only in sheer numbers is on all of their agendas. Thus, responsibility for making study conditions more equitable should lie with both the state and the institutions. The UK's approach of agreements of accountability in return for funding stands out in this field. Connected are equality policies built into higher education frameworks and regulations, mainly prescribing differential treatment for student support. While they certainly make a contribution to the income of student parents in Sweden and the UK, in the latter it has been criticised by all interviewees (& NUS 2009) that the procedures to apply at the multitude of agencies several times a year are an overly complicated burden.

Hence in summary, good practise for study/life balance stems from a coherent mix of family and higher education policy, possibly involving additional equality policy features. Student parents have demanding family and study schedules, thus, good practise is about flexibility: in availability of childcare with costs that are adjusted to means, and in the structures and types of degrees offered. Good practise is not about free of charge education, but rather about a comprehensive support system, for which eligibility is not restricted by personal characteristics or study structures. Finally, good practise is about enabling all those qualified to participate in higher education. This is already recognised by both national as well as institutional level policy agendas; however student parents should be included explicitly into the definition of the marginalized target group of programs widening access.

The Question of 'Implementability'

Examples of good practise can be found in all of the nations scrutinized for the project. The question on whether these policy practises can be implemented in full, or transferred directly without modification from one country to the next can be answered with an outright no. This is due to the socio-economic differences, the path dependency of policy output of the welfare and higher education systems and the diverse traditional conceptions of family and students who these policies

are tailored for. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings of chapter three with regard to the different contexts shaping policy.

	Germany	**Sweden**	**United Kingdom**
Role of State: Welfare	• Income supplementation • Conservative regime	• Universalistic coverage • Social democratic regime	• Poverty alleviation • Liberal regime
Conception Traditional Family	• Male breadwinner	• Dual income	• Self sufficient
Role of State: Higher Education	• Structural requirements • Main share of funding	• Structural requirements • Main share of funding	• Comparatively low intervention on structure • Some funding
Traditional Role of Higher Education	• Enlightenment • Research and teaching governed by the state	• Knowledge society • Service to equitable society	• Employability and poverty alleviation • Service for economic success
Conception Traditional Student	• Direct access from secondary education • Full-time	• Access after period of work/life experience • Full- & part-time	• Both direct access & returning/adult learner • Full- & part-time
Overall Context	***Traditional family - traditional students***	***Families - the mainstream in work and education***	***Families in labour and in higher education markets***

Table 2 - Path-dependent Roles and Conceptions

These contexts can be seen as constraints to 'implementability' of the good practise suggested above. While the conceptions have been changing over time - in fact somewhat converging towards e.g. more emphasis on work/life balance or on the role of higher education in transforming society, they still have resonance in policy making in the three nations (Daly 2010.i; Schuetze & Slowey 2000, Thévenon 2011).

The German context may be summed up as 'traditional families - traditional students'. The conception of a family with a single income and the (female) choice between career versus stay-at-home caring is reflected in e.g. in the lack of childcare spaces but also in the low number of student parents: neither structural frameworks nor support in tertiary education are very accommodating to student parents, or any other non-traditional student. Sweden's traditionally high participation of

women in the labour force as well as an early understanding of the role of the university in contributing to the knowledge society has led to a highly different policy output. There is a commitment to mainstreaming families into work and study to an extent that not only policies are tailored to support them, but that they even became part of the societal normality, as reflected in e.g. the high number of student parents over the age of 30. The UK's context is also rather accommodating to student-parents. This may be due to the fact that they could be framed as low-income; thereby falling under the typical target group of UK welfare policy. Furthermore, the UK's neo-liberal focus is on the efficient functioning of the markets, something that is understood to be fostered by high numbers of successful graduates, hence degree structures are tailored to various needs.

Considering these diverse social conceptions and roles as path-dependent factors influencing policy output clearly shows that it would be almost impossible to implement e.g. the Swedish nearly universalistic approach of childcare provision and tertiary education support into the neo-liberal market-based system of the UK, or to mainstream student parents into the German definition of traditional students, as it is the case in Sweden. How then would the above suggested good practise reach student parents across these countries? A possible answer is that "Path dependencies may be overcome, in some instances, by powerful transnational forces" (Stone 2004, 548).

Potential for European Policy Transfer

As outlined in chapter two, an analogy can be drawn between study/life balance and the distinct interests of the EU in the areas of higher education and social policy. In the absence of legislative competencies, the OMC has been deployed as a tool to influence policy development in the member states. Distinct programs deploying OMC in form of dominium, recommendations and benchmarking are already well developed in the policy areas connected to student parents, especially with regard to tertiary education (Veiga & Amaral 2006). The following gives a brief overview of potential

openings within existing programs and key agents to transfer good practise aiding student parents to succeed.

Utilizing both Dolowitz & Marsh's (2000) policy transfer framework and Stone's (2004) modes of transfer, the main potential in an EU perspective on study/life balance can be found in the ideational mode of transfer, which could occur on a mainly voluntary basis fostering a normative argument: enabling student parents to participate in tertiary education being a desirable societal aim. As typical for the ideational mode, policy transfer should be prompted by evidence or new knowledge. Advocacy of best practise, as presented in this project, is a typical transfer and OMC mechanism to foster policy change. The degree of transfer would be inspiration, rather than direct implementation. Most importantly, the potential lies in ideas, issue framing and problem interpretations, rather than in coercive transfer of hard instruments or legislation. In line with already existing programs reviewed in chapter two, a range of supranational, multilateral or even non-state agents could bring forward this type of ideational 'policy push'.

Under the 2020 strategy, the EC via the European Semester sets adjusted headline targets for each member state and monitors and publishes progress on an annual basis. With regard to the aim of increasing the overall share of successful graduates in Europe, Sweden and the UK have already met the target figures, whereas Germany lags behind[41] (Eurostat 2014). In light of study/life balance it shall be underlined that reaching high attainment numbers does not automatically imply that access is more equitable or that "(…) the role of higher education in (…) social reproduction is a largely a feature of the past" (Schuetze & Slowey 2000, 5). Throughout the EU, students from marginalized social, economic, cultural and demographic backgrounds remain underrepresented in tertiary education (Eurydice 2011). Widening access for them is one of the goals of the LLP[42], as of 2014 running under the Erasmus+ program. Relevant action lines for transferring good practise would for

[41] Country adjusted minimum target/current attainment: DE:42%/33.1%; SE:40%/48.3%; UK:40%/47.6%
[42] DECISION No 1720/2006/EC,Preamble 36,Objective(f)

instance be the (financial and expertise) support the program provides for policy reform of the higher education sector, e.g. regarding the flexibility, quality and transparency of degrees (EC 2014.i). The program furthermore provides funding for research, either carried out by the national agencies for European higher education or by the Eurydice network. Such monitoring functions can be seen as the basis for policy transfer: i.e. providing evidence on marginalised groups, as student parents.

One of the main issues of the situation of student parents is however, that they are not explicitly included into the group typically monitored in relation to LLL and widening access. The debate about non-traditional students on European level focusses mainly on adult and socio-economically disadvantaged learners. This is also evident in the work of multilateral agents as the BFUG SD, which is tasked to coordinate the progress monitoring on widening access in the signatory nations of the EHEA through country reports and collection of good practise. Out of the three nations scrutinized for this project, only Germany includes student parents into the category of learners monitored for their national SD strategy (BFUG 2012; Eurydice 2010). In light of the ideational transfer suggested for study/life balance, a redefinition of the 'non-traditional' student body with explicit mention of students with dependents and the collection of explicit data on their situation could be seen as the first and most vital step to induce transfer of good practise on a European level, at the least as an idea, value or inspiration. The BFUG SD could be a key agent in doing so, as its far reach compromises all EHEA nations as well as all levels of stakeholders, including non-state actors.

The previous considerations focused on policy transfer in the higher education context. However, one of the main suggestions for good practise to foster study/life balance is the flexible availability of childcare. As an issue it is rather difficult to link to the European strategies and existing agencies and networks. The social OMC of the 2020 strategy for instance mentions childcare in connection to social inclusion of children, rather than work/life balance. It shall be suggested that this dimension of good practise might be targeted via the social mission of the higher education institutions

themselves, which again could be inspired by multilateral or even supranational agents. For instance, the monitoring of good practise is an instrument heavily deployed by the BFUG and LLL/Erasmus+. Institutions with outstanding track-records of e.g. flexible degree structures fostering mobility are rewarded with additional funding (via national agencies) and with 'naming' (not shaming): free of charge marketing through mention in e.g. official publications and networks. If the supranational and multilateral agents were to redefine the non-traditional student as suggested above, such action could also be realised in connection to best practise institutions for study/life balance. Framing a lack of study/life balance as one where institutions lose out on qualified students, i.e. a special form of brain-drain, in for instance the BFUG follow up reports or official events might foster institutional level policy change, whereby e.g. the provision of childcare facilities on campus could become an integral part of the institutions' strategic planning. Non-state actors have already developed such an angle by e.g. in Germany awarding the 'family friendly university label' (Hertie Foundation[43]) or publishing good practise examples throughout their network (Gesis/Center of Excellence Women and Science[44]).

There is a lot of potential for ideational transfer of good practise throughout the EHEA via already existing agents and programs which work on the social dimension of higher education. The definition of the target group of these programs lacks to include student parents as particular group of concern. The agents mentioned above have considerable influence in both European and national level agenda setting. Thus, a newly framed emphasis on who it is that should be included into *education for all* potentially could lead to policy learning and transfer of how to aid them to succeed. Utilizing economic arguments as brain-drain, updating the employability of European citizens or even positively influencing demographic change should be particularly fruitful to push policy transfer by advocating the inclusion of student parents as a desirable societal aim.

[43] http://www.beruf-und-familie.de/index.php?c=22

[44] http://www.familienfreundliche-hochschule.org/database/handle/1/3/measurebrowse?type=mcat&value=Familienfreundliche+Studienbedingungen&sort_by=2

Potential for Further Research

Due to the limited scope of the project, several suggestions for further research shall be made: The concept of study/life balance could be scrutinized with a big-n case study, setting the concept itself as DV and measuring causal effects of the diverse policy settings on study/life balance through questionnaires or interviews. Also, the potential for European transfer could probably take up an entire additional project, e.g. scrutinising particular agents and projects or the relationship of transfer between supranational, multilateral and local agents, which depending on the country in question in implementing EU programs can take diverse constellations (Ertl 2003).

Another angle unfortunately not covered by this project is the gendered perspective on study/life balance. The main share of student parents are women who, as a range of other studies suggests, face additional constraints to succeeding especially in the higher levels of tertiary education. As a general group in academia (here encompassing studies, research and teaching), they tend to have fewer children than their male counterparts (Jaschik 2008). In addition to coping with demanding study/work schedules, they may face e.g. intersectionality in studies (Hancock 2007), short work contracts and a 'glass ceiling' in research. One of the interviewees, just commencing a research career, summed up this issue with a particularly gloomy perspective: "The instability [of the study/work environment] in science is just too much. Because of my mother status I have the feeling that sometimes my opinions are not considered" (DE 4 2014).

Conclusion

The review of the situation of student parents in Germany, Sweden and the UK has revealed that they represent a (sometimes) small, but not insignificant share of the overall student body. Policies aiding them to succeed in tertiary education are diverse and intrinsically linked to the traditional role of the state in supporting families, in governing the higher education sector and in translating traditional conceptions of the family as well as the understanding of a typical student into policy. It is

due to such path dependent contexts, that a 'one-size-fits-all' policy aiding student parents cannot be identified. Rather, diverse good practise examples could be traced in all of the three nations scrutinized for this project, mainly involving flexibility in degree structures, in student support and in childcare availability and pricing. Furthermore, good practise can be identified where responsibility for widening access to higher education for marginalised groups lies with both the state and the institutions, possibly prescribing differential treatment policies to foster equality on both policy levels. However, it is found that the target group of such practise only in few cases explicitly includes student parents.

This frame is also evident in the European level policy debate on accessibility of higher education and social inclusion, where despite the absence of legislative competencies the EU has formulated explicit targets: the aim is to broaden overall access, to increase the share of adult or socio-economically disadvantaged learners and to generally build a more inclusive society. It is suggested that the main opportunity for European transfer of good practise for study/life balance lies in the recasting of the definition of the non-traditional student targeted by both EU- and multilateral initiatives, explicitly including the group of students with dependents. Thereby, their situation could be monitored, good practise could be derived and new knowledge could be shared as the base to foster ideational transfer of values: that student parents should be included. Going beyond a normative reasoning, evidence of their situation should be framed in economic terms, as e.g. losing bright minds to parenthood or narratives already deployed frequently in the EU level debate: e.g. the importance of enabling EU populations to update their skills for employability and reversing trends of demographic change by fostering not only a work/life but also a study/life balance.

It should be pointed out that all interviewees were happy in their decision to study with dependents. It would truly be interesting to know how many parents are considering higher education and do not make the final step. In the opinion of one interviewee however, "[they should] just dare to do it! To

have a child now is as good of a time as any, maybe better even. After all, as a student you are still much more flexible than as an employee“(DE 2 2014).

Appendix

I. Interview List

Country	Number	Date	Place
DE	1	03.2013	Skype
	2	17.4.2014	Skype
	3	21.4.2013	Telephone
	4	22.4.2013	Email
SE	1	15.5.2014	Skype
UK	1	15.4.2014	York, UK
	2	18.4.2014	Skype
	3	27.4.2014	Skype

II. Overview of Data (Sources as cited in text)

	DE	SE	UK
Student parents share of student body	4.9%	13.3%	12.4%
… female student body	5.7%	17.2%	16.9%
… male student body	4.0%	7.3%	6.4%
… 25-29 year old student body	6.0%	10.0%	21%
… over 30 year old student body	32.0%	66.0%	53%
Spending on family policies (%GDP)	3.1%	3.75%	4.2%
… spent in-cash/in-time (%GDP)	2.2%	1.58%	2.8%
… spent in-kind (%GDP)	0.9%	2.17%	1.4%
Family allowance (1st child)	184€	100€	100€
Cost of childcare (%average national wage)	23%	7.1%	46%
Spending on tertiary education (%GDP)	1.1%	1.8%	1.4%
State funding, % of institution's income	n.a.	87.0%	40%
Average direct cost tertiary degree	5,150€	3,600€	21,000€
Monthly state student support, loans and grants, combined maximum	670€	800€	Depending on region, pro-gram, income
Support eligibility age cap	30	45	None
Country adjusted 2020 goal, tertiary education attainment, 30-34 year olds	42%	40%	40%
Current attainment	33.1%	48.3%	47.6%

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