



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE

Policy Goals and Obstacles for Fathers' Parental Leave in Finland

Presentation of the book *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States*

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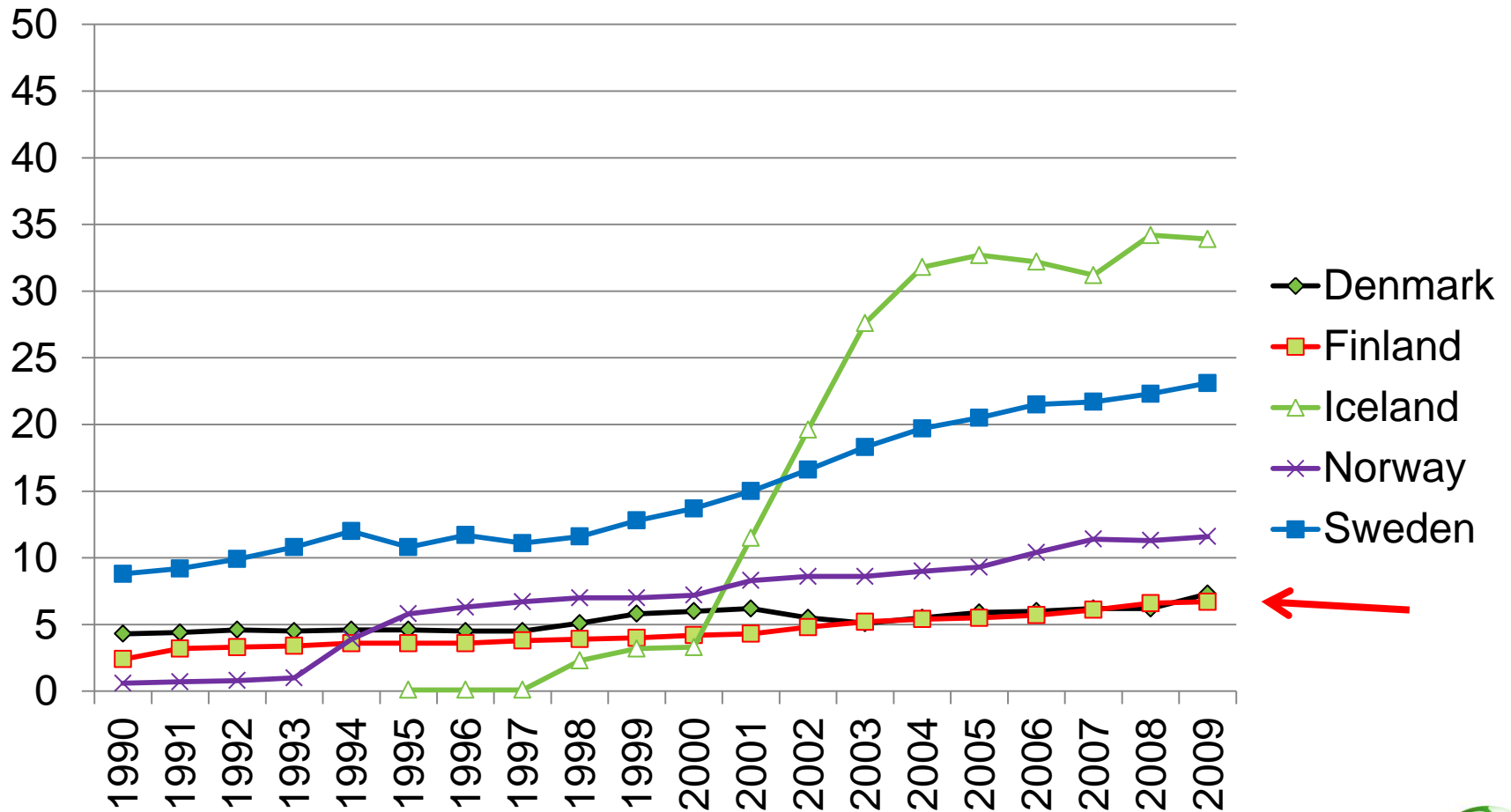


The chapter asks why do more Finnish fathers not take more Parental leave?

- Policy aim for decades: to encourage more fathers to take leave
- Still: fathers take only 9 % of all parental benefit days
- Compared to other Nordic countries: father's quota short, fathers take it clearly less often
- Previous research has located obstacles for fathers' more active leave take-up to individual motivations
- But they do not explain the differences between the Nordic countries: length of the father's quota and number of fathers taking leave
- Why can the Finnish parliament not make similar decisions on father's quota?
- The chapter extends the study of the obstacles to fathers' leave take-up from individual motivations to the significance of the leave system and the policy process.



Fathers' share of Parental leave take-up in the Nordic countries 1990–2009, %



Leave measures in Finland decided on in a tripartite policy process

- Social partners have had a significant role in Finnish working life policy design since the 1970s
- Tripartite groups consisting of central employer and employee organisations and representatives of the government draft decisions on incomes, social benefits, working hours and work – family reconciliation measures
- Practically no Parental leave legislation has been introduced without a unanimous decision in the tripartite negotiations
- The parliament makes decisions according to the proposals constructed in the tripartite negotiations



Fathers' leave entitlements in Finland until 2013:

- *Paternity leave* 3 weeks; introduced in 1978
 - Taken after the birth while the mother is on Maternity leave
- *Parental leave* 26 weeks; introduced in 1985
 - Can be shared between the parents as they wish = transferable leave
- *Father's month* 2+4 weeks; introduced in 2003, lengthened in 2010
 - Bonus leave for fathers who took the two last weeks of Parental leave with the mother's consent

Since beginning of 2013:

- Paternity leave and Father's month merged into a 9 weeks' individual Paternity leave
 - now a true father's quota but no addition to the number of fathers' leave days
 - 1–18 days can be taken while mother on Maternity or Parental leave
- ≡ Transferable leave long, father's quota rather short compared to mother's quota (17.5 weeks)



Fathers' leave take-up in Finland

- *Paternity leave* (1–18 days)
 - Taken by 83 % of fathers (2013)
 - Grew more common in the 1990s: 1990 40 % → 2000 76 %
 - During the first years taken by 14 % of fathers, mainly by those with high education level
- *Parental leave* (158 days)
 - Taken by 1–3 % of fathers; the share has remained stable since 1985
- *Father's month* (12+24 days)
 - Take-up grown from 4 % of fathers in 2003 to 32 % in 2012
 - Taken by well-educated fathers with a well-educated spouse



Political parties, Parliament

TRIPARTITE POLICY-MAKING

Employer organisations

Government

Employee organisations

STRUCTURAL LEVEL

LEAVE SCHEMES

Research NGOs, activists

WORKPLACES

practices
attitudes (boss, co-workers)

FATHERS AS ACTORS MAKING CHOICES

FAMILIES

spouse
friends
own parents

EVERYDAY LEVEL

CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Gendered division of labour (care work, breadwinner / ideal worker, good mother / good father)

GLOBALISED ECONOMY & FINANCIAL CYCLES

Theoretical framing

- Everyday life perspective: interweaves the levels forming the context of fathers' choices to take or not take parental leave
- Everyday life: a process whereby people transform the societal conditions of their lives into lived everyday life; constructed in a continuous movement between actors and structures (Bech Jørgensen 1988)
- The development of fathers' leave take-up is analysed as an issue of choice and change
- In the everyday practices, choices can be made either towards the given and familiar options (the self-evident) or towards other than the familiar (the non-self-evident)
- The non-self-evident choices gradually connect with the self-evident, generating small cracks and shifts. A chain of cracks can bring about a rupture → change
- Thus, the choice between the self-evident and the non-self-evident forms a basis for both continuity and change



Previous research

Obstacles for fathers' more active leave take-up located in

- Family finances
- Pressures from work and workplace attitudes
- Gendered division of labour



Data

- Analysis of take-up of parental leave and motivations of sharing/not sharing parental leave based on
 - National statistics of the Social Insurance Institution
 - Stakes Family leave survey 2006 where 1058 fathers and 1435 mothers of two-year-old children reported of their leave practices
- Policy analysis based on an evaluation of governmental policy documents and programmes on parental leave 1995–2012 + participatory observation of the policy process
 - programmes of five governments
 - four governmental action plans for gender equality
 - six National action plans for the development of working life
 - reports of committees, tripartite working groups and rapporteurs



Findings on individual level obstacles in Finland

Survey data from 2006 (Stakes study on family leaves and gender equality in working life, Salmi et al 2009)

- Family finances seldom an obstacle (1/4 of families)
 - Attitudes at workplaces predominantly positive
 - Few fathers report of negative consequences of taking leave on professional skills or future career opportunities
 - Views on the division of labour between women and men crucial: the main predictor of a father opting not to take Parental leave was his view on men as main providers for the family
- ▶ What is the role of the leave system and the policy process in producing the gendered choices?



Observations of the tripartite policy process

- The interests of the central labour market organisations play an important role, and interests and goals of political parties may come to play a minor role.
- The goal of promoting gender equality through a more equal sharing of Parental leave is expressed in government documents, but is not necessarily a prominent goal for the other two parties in the tripartite negotiations.
- The voice of the government is constructed in a complicated manner not necessarily free of the opinions of the other two negotiating parties.
- The tripartite negotiation system leaves little room for the voice of different groups of citizens and NGOs or research to influence the policy process.



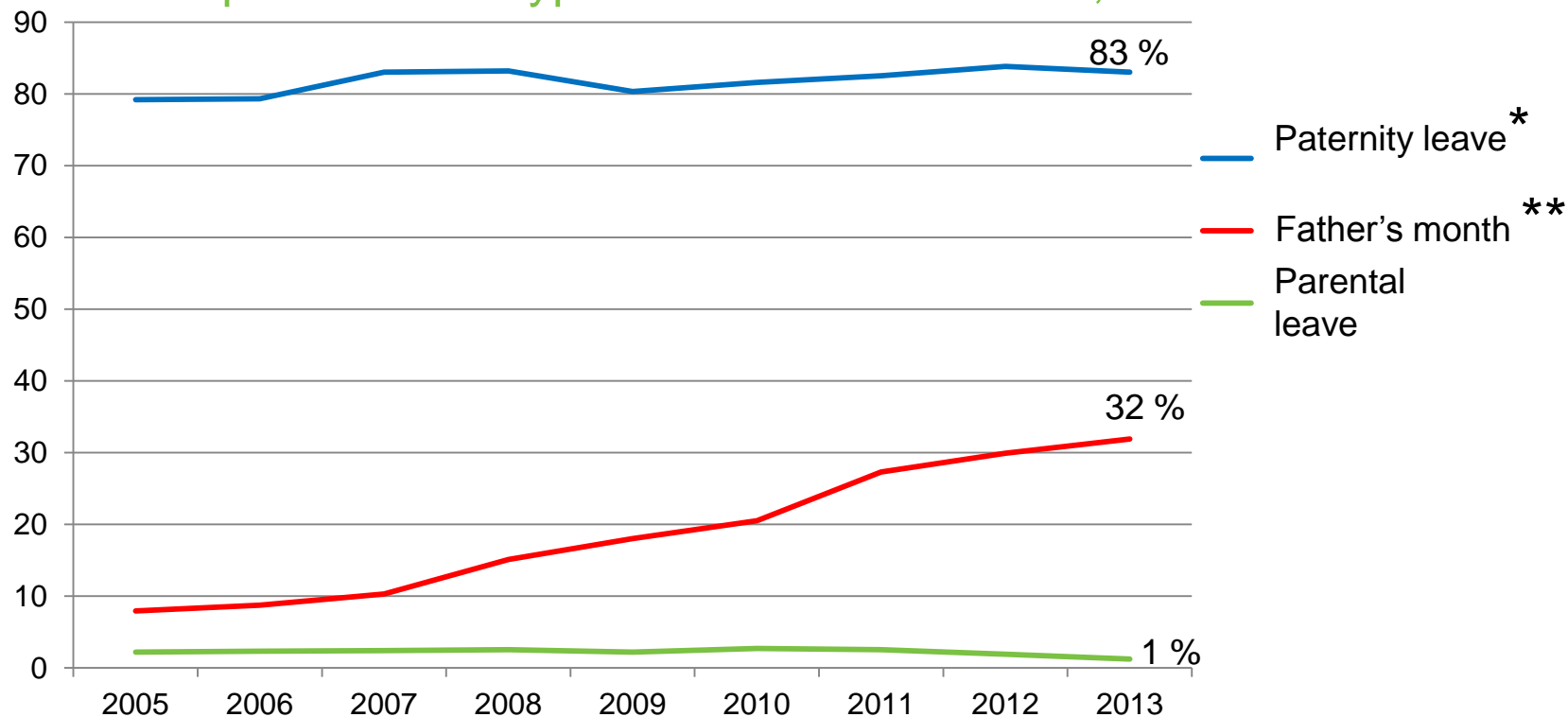
Consequences of the tripartite policy process

- The process has led to policy measures where the gender equality goal is not prioritised but has had to give way to the 'free choice' rationale.
- ► the leave scheme contains a long transferable leave period which in practice is taken almost exclusively by mothers; the father's quota is short
- The 'gender-neutral' transferable Parental leave ignores that the supposed 'free choice' takes place in the context of the long history of the gendered division of labour which maintains an interpretation of Parental leave as the mother's domain.
- The contradiction between the gender equality goal and that of the 'free choice' has not been acknowledged in the policy process.
- Little political debate on rationales behind leave schemes.



'Free choice' rationale reproduces the gendered division of labour: fathers only take the earmarked leave

Fathers' take-up of different types of leave 2005–2013, %



* 2013: the 1–18 days of Paternity leave

** 2013: the rest of Paternity leave days

Source: Statistics of the Social Insurance Institution



Conclusion

- The Finnish leave policy and its realisation highlight the interaction of structural conditions and the choices actors make in their everyday practices
 - the current leave scheme and the decision-making process support mothers' and fathers' choices towards the 'self-evident' = choices in line with the traditional gendered division of labour
 - a long quota for fathers → thoughts towards the non-self-evident = fathercare
 - a political decision on a long father's quota = society expresses its stand that child care concerns both men and women → supports fathers in their choice towards the non-self-evident → towards a change in the gendered understanding of care
- Today: a new political situation as regards leave development
 - the tripartite negotiation system is in a turning point
 - the new government has no plans to develop the leave schemes
 - only one of the parties represented in the government has expressed interest in lengthening the father's quota

