Access to parental leave benefits: Constructing deservingness and undeservingness through policy narratives

Sonja Blum, FernUniversität in Hagen
Ivana Dobrotic, University of Oxford

FernUniversität in Hagen

1
- Eligibility and inclusiveness of parental leave benefits

From investigating eligibility to understanding varying entitlements

- *Own <u>previous work</u> on eligibility to leave rights (conceptual framework: Blum & Dobrotić 2018; Dobrotić & Blum 2019a; empirical application: Dobrotić & Blum 2019b)*

- <u>Findings</u>: Huge variety in degree of universalism to selectivism, but most countries fit selective type and exclude some groups from benefit access

- *How are eligibility aspects of parental-leave policies (and their reforms) legitimised by policymakers?*

- *How is the deservingness or undeservingness of affected social groups constructed?*

2

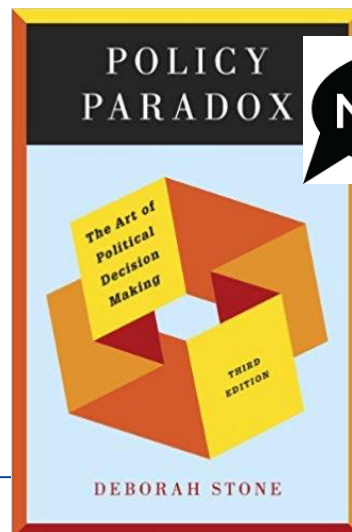- Understanding varying inclusiveness: Narratives and deservingness

3
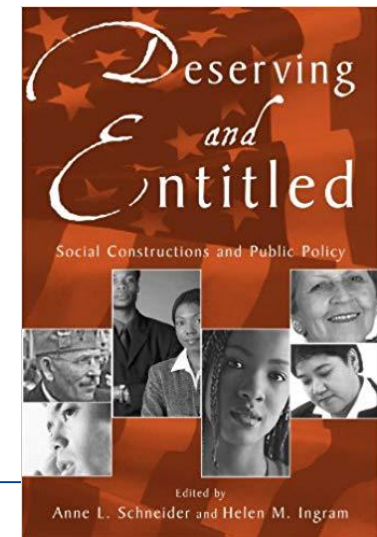
- Empirical illustration

FernUniversität in Hagen

'Stories of how to give or take'

▪ Inclusion or exclusion of social rights can be understood in terms of reform narratives (Blum & Kuhlmann 2019):

  ▪ Stone's (2012; 1988) work on <u>narratives</u>, i.e. as instruments being used by political actors in the policy process

  ▪ <u>Characters</u>: Those narratives can be distinguished by how they build on the <u>deservingness of target groups</u> (Schneider & Ingram)
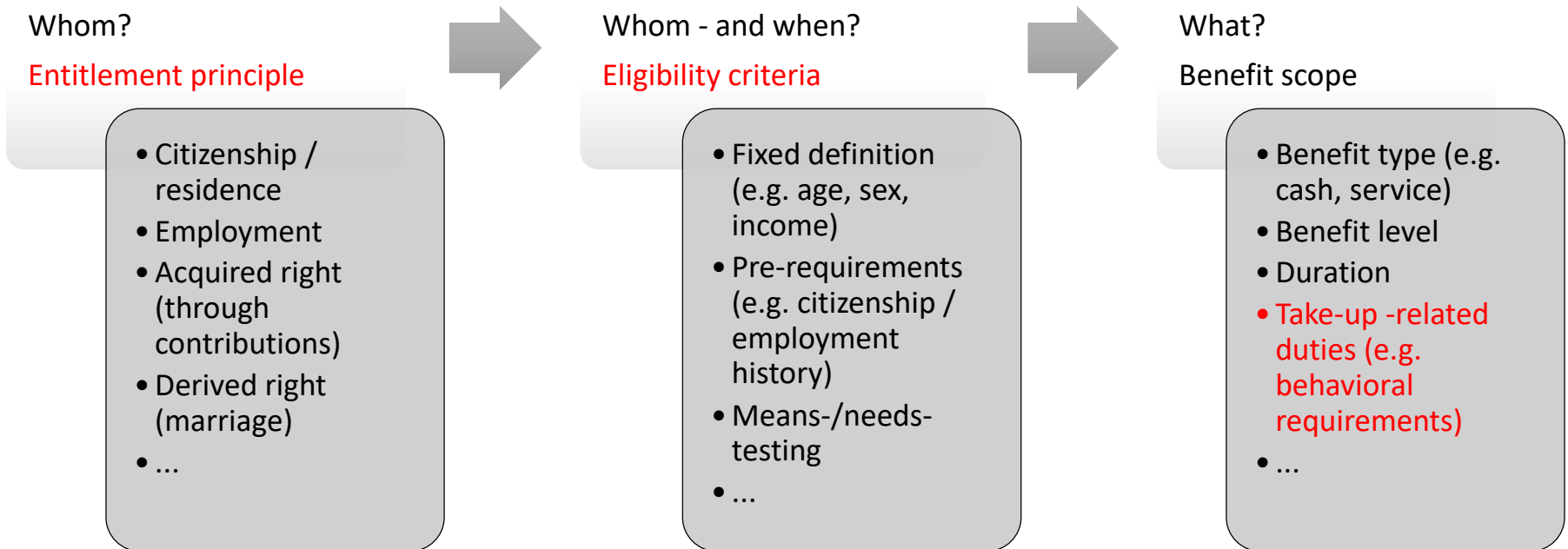
Narratives and aspects of eligibility

- Narratives can contain stories about who should get (or lose!) what – and why (Blum & Kuhlmann 2019)

Whom?	Whom - and when?	What?
Entitlement principle	**Eligibility criteria**	Benefit scope
• Citizenship / residence • Employment • Acquired right (through contributions) • Derived right (marriage) • …	• Fixed definition (e.g. age, sex, income) • Pre-requirements (e.g. citizenship / employment history) • Means-/needs-testing • …	• Benefit type (e.g. cash, service) • Benefit level • Duration • Take-up -related duties (e.g. behavioral requirements) • …

Source: Dobrotić & Blum 2019a

FernUniversität in Hagen

Narratives and deservingness

- Social construction of target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993)
  - **Advantaged**: powerful and positively constructed (e.g. the elderly, middle class, soldiers/military)
  - **Contenders**: powerful but negatively constructed (e.g. the rich)
  - **Dependants**: weak but positively constructed (e.g. mothers, children, poor families)
  - **Deviants**: weak and negatively constructed (e.g. welfare cheats, undocumented immigrants, drug addicts)

Four types of social policy reform narratives

Context	Reforms	
	Expansionary	Retrenching
Old-social-risks policies	(I) Stories of giving-to-give • Deservingness and acknowledgement (<u>Advantaged</u>)	(III) Stories of taking-to-take or taking-to-control • Undeservingness and Self-Responsibility (<u>Deviants; Contenders</u>) • Helplessness and control (<u>Advantaged</u>)
New-social-risks policies	(II) Stories of giving-to-shape • Deservingness and empowerment (<u>Dependents</u>)	(IV) Stories of taking-to-take or taking-out-of-helplessness • Undeservingness (<u>Deviants; Contenders</u>) • Helplessness (<u>Dependents</u>)

Source: Blum & Kuhlmann, 2019

2

- Empirical illustration

Germany: *Elterngeld* reform 2011

- Parental benefit (*Elterngeld*) introduced in Germany in 2007, with income replacement rate of max. 67%, minimum of €300 (e.g. for non-employed parents) and maximum of €1,800

- Reform announced in June 2010, as part of government's post-crisis austerity programme, coming into effect in 2011

- Retrenchment measures
    - 1) €300 minimum amount calculated against benefit for long-term unemployed (i.e. de facto abolished), and employment-based benefit deducted for short-term unemployed recipients
    - 2) Highest-income earners of annually €250,000 for singles and €500,000 for couples no longer entitled
    - [3] For recipients with former incomes of €1,200 net per month and more, the replacement rate is successively decreased to 65%

1) A first glance at narrative stories: The construction of long-term unemployed parents

- *„It is a step that hurts, I am clear on that, and it is also drastic. Nevertheless, one has to say that the logic of* Hartz IV *is to cover the needs of parents and children. (…) Paying the* Elterngeld *additional to it was, basically, a mistake and inconsistent right from the beginning. (…) It makes sense* not *to pay them* Elterngeld*, and one also has to see the principle that benefits have to be lower than wages.*" (former family minister Kristina Schröder; SZ, 7 June 2010)

- – A story of taking-to-take ("they don't deserve it") rather than taking-out-of-helplessness ("our hands are tied") despite this being a 'crisis package'!

2) A first glance at narrative stories: The construction of 'super-rich' parents

- „*If Hartz-IV recipients* (long-term unemployed) *receive no* Elterngeld *any longer, we also have to take something at the top side of incomes. Who pays wealth taxes is not reliant on the* Elterngeld. *We need a signal of fairness here.*" (Miriam Gruß, FDP; WAZ, 9 October 2010)

- – A story of taking-to-control, drawing on fairness and shifting part of the power to control the crisis back to the (former) recipients

Thank you for your attention!

FernUniversität in Hagen

References

- Blum, S. & I. Dobrotic 2018. Wer hat Zugang zu Elterngeld? Soziale Rechte und Anspruchsbedingungen in vergleichender Perspektive. *Sozialer Fortschritt*, 67(8/9).

- Blum S. & J. Kuhlmann. 2019. Stories of How to Give or Take – Towards a Typology of Social Policy Reform Narratives. *Policy and Society*, 38(3).

- Dobrotic, I. & S. Blum. 2019a. A social right? Access to leave and its relation to parents' labour market position. In *Parental leave and beyond*, eds. P. Moss, A.Z. Duvander, A. Koslowski, The Policy Press.

- Dobrotic, I. & S. Blum. 2019b. Inclusiveness of Parental-Leave Benefits in Twenty-One European Countries: Measuring Social and Gender Inequalities in Leave Eligibility. *Social Politics*.

- McBeth, M.K., Jones, M.D. and Shanahan, E.A. (2014), "The Narrative Policy Framework", in Sabatier, P.A. and Weible, C.M. (Eds.), *Theories of the Policy Process*, 3rd edition, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, pp. 225–266.

- Schneider, A. and Ingram, H. (1993), "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87 No. 2, pp. 334–347.

- Stone, D. (2012), *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making,* 3rd edition, W.W. Norton & Company, New York.

Illustration from family/leave policies

Context	Reforms	
	Expansionary	Retrenching
Old-social-risks policies	Possible policy + reform: e.g. granting of pension credits for childcare leaves ('mother's pension') (I) Stories of giving-to-give?	Possible policy + reform, e.g. exclusion of 'the rich' (high income ceiling) from such pension credits (III) Stories of taking-to-take or taking-to-control?
New-social-risks policies	Possible policy + reform, e.g. granting access to leave benefits for additional groups (such as self-employed) (II) Stories of giving-to-shape?	Possible policy + reform, e.g. retrenchment of such policies or exclusion of formerly eligible groups (e.g. self-employed) (IV) Stories of taking-to-take or taking-out-of-helplessness?

To discuss / paper etc.
- linking conceptually with dimensions of social rights + eligibility (e.g. different scope for different groups incl.? take-up related duties as eligibility?)
- Comparison? Other case(s)?

Whom?

Entitlement principle

- Citizenship / residence
- Employment
- Acquired right (through contributions)
- Derived right (marriage)
- ...

Whom - and when?

Eligibility criteria

- Fixed definition (e.g. age, sex, income)
- Pre-requirements (e.g. citizenship / employment history)
- Means-/needs-testing
- ...

What?

Benefit scope

- Benefit type (e.g. cash, service)
- Benefit level
- Duration
- Take-up -related duties (e.g. behavioral requirements)
- ...