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Facets of Work–Life Balance across Europe

How the interplay of institutional contexts, work arrangements
and individual resources affect capabilities for having a family
and for being involved in family life

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*A journey of a thousand miles
starts from beneath your feet*

Lau Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (c. 500 B.C.)
Translated by Stephen Mitchell (1992)

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Stockholm, October 2012

Introduction

This thesis addresses people's capabilities to plan and have a family, and to be engaged family members by analysing those factors that shape their capabilities and agency to do so; institutional regulations, labour market structure, working conditions, individual resources, and household composition. The topic in focus is the extent to which individuals in different institutional contexts are able to combine work and family life, without being forced to choose either one over the other. This is a journey that will take the reader through different facets of work–life balance across Europe, within a framework of capabilities and agency.

Difficulties combining work and family life have been on the EU agenda for several decades. Policy makers are increasingly concerned about demographic sustainability, particularly in countries faced with an aging population as a result of low fertility (European Commission 2005a) and postponed transition to parenthood, which has been linked to work-family reconciliation obstacles in terms of a lack of childcare and flexible working conditions (European Commission 2005b; 2008). Work–life balance has thus become a matter of quality of life (Hobson 2011; McGinnity and Whelan 2009). EU policies to enhance the capability to achieve work–life balance have mainly addressed parental leave, part-time work, childcare and work flexibility, with the underlying objectives to endorse gender equality in the labour market and promote policies enabling more women to enter and stay in paid work.

These policies are not only driven by gender equality; they also have an economic objective related to competitiveness and productivity, as well as the need to avert excessively low fertility rates (see Lewis 2006; Moss 2004; Stratigaki 2004). Yet, despite the goal of gender equality, policy measures have mainly been directed towards increasing women's ability to juggle their earner-carer roles, rather than encouraging men's greater participation in the unpaid care work (Stratigaki 2004). However, in the last decade we have been able to observe – at least on the discursive level – a call for more effective reconciliation policies that encourage men to share leave provisions and caring responsibilities (Brodolini and Fagan 2010; European Commission 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Even so, women still shoulder the major share of care responsibilities. The question that arises, therefore, since the capability struc-

ture for work-family reconciliation varies by gender and across countries with different institutional settings, is to what extent men and women are effectively able to choose the way of life which they have reason to value, to paraphrase Amartya Sen (1999).

Research questions

The objective of this thesis is to address various facets of work–life balance in a European comparative perspective. The overall research question is: To what extent do institutional factors, working conditions and individual resources influence individuals’ capabilities to plan, to have and to live as a family? Variations on this theme are explored in four different studies. This is not to say that institutions determine behaviour, but they do constitute the structural framework for action within which people make decisions (Immergut 1998) concerning childbearing and labour market strategies related to work–life balance. The analytical lens draws its inspiration from Amartya Sen’s *capability approach*, a multi-dimensional perspective that offers an innovative framework for distinguishing between the different layers of disparities and agency across and within different institutional contexts. This approach has only recently been applied to the field of work–life balance (Den Dulk et al. 2011; Drobnič and Guillén 2011; Fagan and Walthery 2011a; Hobson and Oláh 2006; Hobson et al. 2007; Hobson and Fahlén 2009a, 2009b; 2011a, 2011b; Kanjuo and Černigoj 2011) and to childbearing (Hobson and Oláh 2006), but has not yet been applied to childbearing intentions.

The first study investigates the relationship between economic uncertainties and women’s short-term childbearing intentions at individual level, and the association between aggregated intentions and work-family reconciliation policies across Europe. This is a cross-country comparative study of ten European Union member states (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland). The second study, which is a Swedish case study, addresses the impact of family-friendly working conditions, in terms of flexible/non-flexible working conditions, on young adult women’s childbearing. The third study analyses gender differences in perceived work–home conflict in a European perspective, and the importance of institutional contexts in terms of work-family reconciliation policies and gender norms. The countries included are the same as in the first study. The fourth study examines how parents in Hungary and Sweden – two institutional contexts with differences in working time regimes and gendered discourses around parenting norms –

subjectively experience the tension between work and family demands, and how this is reflected in differences in agency to make claims for work–life balance. This is a qualitative, comparative study of work–life balance among parents in Stockholm and in Budapest co-authored with Barbara Hobson and Judit Takács.

The empirical data are extracted from several sources; the *European Social Survey* (ESS), the *Swedish Young Adult Panel Study* (YAPS), and the qualitative *Capabilities Study*, covering a time span from 1999 to 2008, complemented with aggregated data from various sources such as Eurostat and the OECD.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide a theoretical and conceptual background to the studies comprising the thesis. The first section presents the capability approach and its core concepts. This is followed by an exploration of the concept of work–life balance; its framing and definitions. The second section describes how the approach has been applied in the four studies. The third section discusses welfare regimes and the countries selected for comparison. The chapter then proceeds with an analysis of the country-level implementation and outcomes of different EU directives and goals relevant to this study of work–life balance. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks and summaries of the four studies.

Theoretical framework: The Capability Approach

All four studies in this thesis apply the capability approach (CA hereafter) as an interpretative lens to aid understanding of the relationship between institutional context and individual capability to achieve work–life balance, enter parenthood, or to have additional children. In this section I describe the interdisciplinary character of the CA, its key concepts, and briefly discuss critiques of the approach. I also explain how the CA has been applied and operationalized in the four studies.

What is the capability approach?

The CA was developed as an alternative to the neoclassical approach to welfare economics and foremost pioneered by the philosopher and economist Amartya Sen (see Sen 1984, 1985, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1999). While a growing number of scholars across the social sciences and the humanities also have contributed to its development (see Robeyns 2006), some aspects of the approach can be traced as far back as to Aristotle, as well as to Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx (Sen 1984, 1992, 1993, 1999). The CA can be defined as a broad normative framework for evaluating individual well-being and social states (Kuklys and Robeyns 2005; Robeyns 2005a) and has been applied to a wide range of fields: development studies, welfare economics, social policy, political philosophy. The approach can be used to evaluate various aspects of well-being, living standard and quality of life, or as a normative framework for judging the efficiency and fairness of social arrangements and welfare policy designs (Alkire 2005; Bonvin and Farvaque 2006; Kuklys and Robeyns 2005; Robeyns 2005a, 2006) – what Brown et al. (2004) refer to as dual methodology.

The principal feature of the CA is the focus on what people are efficiently able to do and to be (Sen 1993, 1999), which in turn affects their quality of life. It is not a theory that explains inequalities and well-being, but rather an instrument providing concepts that can be used in such explanations (Crocker and Robeyns 2010; Robeyns 2005a, 2006). The CA differs

from other economics approaches, for instance the utility-based perspective that sees value only in individual utility (interest and fulfilment); that people strive to optimise their pleasure, happiness, or desire fulfilment (Sen 1987, 1992, 1993). This approach, Sen (1992) argues, ignores individual freedom, since only concentrating on achievement or outcome. The CA also diverges from theories concerned with relative or absolute wealth, as these focus on commodities, real income or real wealth (Sen 1993), that is, the distribution of income and resources, rather than what people are able to do with them.

In opposition to traditional economic theories, then, Sen (1987) makes a distinction between interests and fulfilment, arguing that fulfilment does not always reflect a person's interests or the reverse, and that well-being and advantages are two different ways of considering a person's interests and fulfilment. Well-being is related to achievement (how 'well' a person is), whereas advantage is related to the real opportunities a person has compared with others. Therefore, one cannot assess opportunities solely on the basis of achieved well-being (Sen 1987). The core of the CA is the focus on the *capability* to be well, to have well-being, as against being well off. It focuses on a person's "state" of being rather than on her or his possessions (even though possessions can be means to achieve well-being). Ultimately, well-being is a quality of life issue, which is measured by people's capability to achieve valuable so-called *functionings* (Hobson and Fahlén 2009a, 2009b). Quality of life thus can be referred to as an individual's overall level of well-being (Fahey et al. 2003).

Functionings and capabilities

Two core concepts in the CA are *functionings* and *capabilities*. Sen defines *functionings* as a person's achievements or "the state of a person – in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life" (Sen 1993:31). Functionings can vary from rather elementary activities or states of being (being well-nourished, being in good health, escaping avoidable morbidity and premature mortality) to more complex achievements (being happy, having self-respect, taking part in social and community life) (Sen 1992), all things intended to enhance a person's well-being or quality of life (Sen 1992, 1993). *Capabilities*, on the other hand, stand for the actual option to achieve these functionings, that is, the existing leeway to perform.

"[I]f the achieved functionings constitute a person's well-being, then the capability to achieve functionings (i.e. all the alternative combinations of functionings a person can choose to have) will constitute the person's freedom – the real opportunities – to have well-being." (Sen 1992:40)

The distinction between functioning and capability can be described as the difference between what is realised and what is effectively possible to achieve, between an achieved outcome and the freedom to achieve this outcome (Robeyns 2003, 2005a). More simply expressed, functionings and capabilities represent two sides of the same coin. Therefore, disparities in achievements may reflect inequalities in capabilities (Robeyns 2003).

Means and capabilities to achieve

Another feature of the CA is the distinction between means and resources on the one hand, and functionings and capabilities on the other hand. Sen argues that:

“[I]ndividual claims are to be assessed not by the resources or primary goods the persons respectively hold, but by the freedoms they actually enjoy to choose between different ways of living that they can have reason to value. It is this actual freedom that is represented by the person’s “capability” to achieve various alternative combinations of functionings, or doings and beings.” (Sen 1990:114)

To possess means and resources gives a person some control over the characteristics of the good, yet it does not tell us what a person is able to do with it (Sen 1987). In this context, means and resources do not have an intrinsic value. Instead, the value of means and resources derives from the potential opportunity they can provide (Anand et al. 2005). For instance, men and women may have similar education and access to employment, but different capabilities to pursue a career when entering parenthood as a result of weak institutional support for working mothers. All parents within the EU are entitled to at least three months of parental leave (Directive 96/34/EC), but some working parents may find it difficult to exercise this right if there is no leave benefit, compared with parents living in a context with benefits at a relatively high replacement level. This exemplifies the diversities that make it difficult to convert means and resources into capabilities. As indicated, the relationship between functionings, means and resources varies because of diversities in people’s capabilities to convert means and resources into achievements (Salais and Villeneuve 2004; Sen 1990, 1992).

This human diversity derives from external characteristics (e.g. inherited wealth and accountability), personal characteristics (age, sex, physical and mental conditions and abilities), the social environment (public policies, legal regulations, social conventions and norms, discriminating practices, gender roles, power relations) and the natural environment (climate, environmental conditions, geographical location, technological infrastructure)

(Deakin 2004; Robeyns 2005a; Sen 1987, 1992). These characteristics, labelled *personal*, *social* and *environmental conversion factors* (Brown et al. 2004; Deakin 2004; Robeyns 2000, 2005a), influence a person's ability to convert the characteristics of goods into functionings (Sen 1987, 1992; Robeyns 2005a) or, the conversion of formal rights into real freedoms (Barnard et al. 2001; Bonvin and Farvaque 2006; Brown et al. 2004). The linkage between the key concepts of the CA – means, capabilities and functionings – and the conversion process as discussed above has been illustrated by several authors as follows:

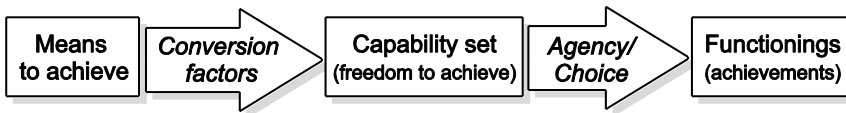


Figure 1: The basic concepts of the capability approach and their linkages.

Note: Author's elaboration of the models by Bonvin and Farvaque 2006; Goerne 2010; Robeyns 2005a

Figure 1 illustrates the translation of means and resources into achievements (functionings). The uses that individuals can make of their means and resources are influenced by various conversion factors, which either obstruct or facilitate the freedom to achieve (capabilities), which in turn influences the real choices that a person has to achieve a valued functioning.

The strong emphasis on functionings and capabilities does not imply, however, that means and resources should be excluded from analyses applying a capability perspective. What needs to be kept in mind is that means and resources do not automatically translate into capabilities and functionings. When estimating people's advantages and disadvantages in regard to the various dimensions of work–life balance, it is not sufficient only to know what means and resources they possess. That does not inform us about what they can achieve. It is also important to know more about the circumstances in which the individuals live (Robeyns 2005a), i.e. to position people in a broader societal context. This implies that different combinations of conversion factors may lead to different levels of freedom to achieve valued functionings.

Critiques against the approach

The main critique of the CA relates to issues of individualism, groups and social structures. Robeyns (2001, 2005a) discusses three main claims – that the approach is too individualistic, as it does not regard individuals as embedded in their social environment; that it does not adequately take notice of

groups; that it does not adequately take notice of social structures – where she argues (2005a) that these claims mainly are grounded in misunderstandings and in too narrow a reading of Sen.

Considering the first claim, Stewart and Deneulin (2002) describe the CA as an example of methodological individualism. Sen finds this to be a misinterpretation, “No individual,” he argues, “can think, choose, or act without being influenced in one way or another by the nature and working of the society around him or her” (Sen 2002:80). This contradicts the idea of methodological individualism, especially in its strict version, labelled *strong* methodological individualism by Udehn (2001, 2002), which derives from ontological individualism, i.e. that only human beings exist and that society is a product of humans (Udehn 2001) and which requires social phenomena to be fully explained in terms of individuals and their interactions (Hedström and Swedberg 1996).

Robeyns (2005a) positions the basic ideas of the CA as ethical individualism, which is agency-centred and places the individual rather than society at the focal point, where social change can be seen as positive only if it has value to actual individuals (Tåhlin 1990). Ethical individualism, which can be traced back to Nietzsche and Kirkegaard, is a doctrine that stipulates that individuals are the source and creators of morality, moral values and principles (Lukes 1973). In other words, ethical individualism implies that individuals are exclusively the unit of moral concern (Robeyns 2000) and that an individual is important in her/his own right, i.e., that the interests of the group should not supersede the interests of the individual (Burchardt 2006). “[W]hen evaluating different states of social affairs, we are only interested in the (direct and indirect) effects of those states on individuals,” Robeyns states (2005a:107). For even though the CA is based on ethical individualism, it also accounts for social relations and the potential constraints placed on individuals, or the opportunities offered by societal structures and institutions. The CA recognises the social, institutional and environmental conversion factors and how they affect people’s ability to convert means and resources into functionings (Robeyns 2005a).

To some extent, Sen’s ideas are similar to the underlying rationale for the Swedish Level of Living Survey, though the latter puts stronger emphasis on the individual’s control over their resources as means to achieve (see Erikson 1993; Johansson 1973; Tåhlin 1990), while Sen emphasises what people are effectively able to do with their resources. Still, Sen refers to the Scandinavian studies on living conditions (and the Swedish Level of Living Survey) in several of his writings as evidence of empirical possibilities to examine various functionings (see Sen 1987, 1992, 1999).

The second claim; that the approach does not account for groups, is not accurate. General analyses of diversities and inequalities need to account for group diversity rather than among individuals alone. Sen argues that especially gender is important to recognise, as gender dissimilarity may reflect capability inequalities that cannot be reduced to differences in income or resources (Sen 1993). “The issue of gender inequality is ultimately one of disparate freedoms” (Sen 1992:125). However, when conducting group analysis the analyst chooses different ways of categorising people, and these “classifications themselves select particular types of diversity rather than others” (Sen 1992:117f). However, Sen (2002) raises a warning finger against regarding a person simply as a member of a certain group, or social category, and by doing so excluding all other aspects of an individual’s identity:

“Individual human beings with their various plural identities, multiple affiliations, and diverse associations are quintessentially social creatures with different types of societal interactions, but their thoughts, choices, and actions are critically important parts of the society in which these individuals live.” (Sen 2002:81)

In terms of capabilities to convert means and resources into functionings, diversities may partly be associated with group identity, yet Sen stresses the importance of acknowledging multiple identities and diversities that influence effective choices (Sen 1992). With regard to work–life balance, consider a low skilled mother with fixed-term employment and a high skilled mother with secure employment; these are two women with very different effective choices and capabilities to combine work and family life; a difference that may be even more evident in Spain, for instance, than in Sweden, as the institutional support for working mothers varies greatly between these countries (see section *Policy framing, national implementations and capabilities to exercise rights*).

Sen’s position regarding multiple identities bears the traces of an intersectional perspective of human diversity, with special emphasis on gender. Intersectionality is a feminist sociological approach to examining how various social categories (e.g. class, gender, race/ethnicity) interact and intersect on multiple levels and contribute to systematic social inequalities (see McCall 2005). Several feminist scholars have addressed gender and capabilities in various aspects, for instance; gender inequality in Western societies (Robeyns 2003); agency and social choice (Peter 2003); social justice (Nussbaum 2003); intra-household dynamics and inequalities (Agarwal 1997; Iversen 2003); women’s agency and fertility decisions (Hobson and Oláh 2006); gender and work–life balance (Hobson et al. 2007; Lewis and

Campbell 2007); gender equality and social policies (Korpi 2000; Korpi et al. 2010; Lewis 2004; Lewis and Giullari 2005).

Men and women may have different capabilities to be and to act and to convert means and resources into functionings because of social expectations and norms regarding their gender. Even if men and women have equal access to higher education, they may have different capabilities to convert their educational degree into a career, economic security and autonomy if women are discriminated against in the labour market on the basis of their sex (Robeyns 2000). Gender is thus a key dimension in work–life balance as gendered norms operate in principle everywhere; at the policy level, in the labour market, within workplace cultures and in households (Crompton et al. 2007a).

Women often have weak capabilities to combine work and family life due to insufficient institutional support for working mothers (Hobson et al. 2011). Even though work-family reconciliation policies can increase mothers' work-family choices and economic autonomy, the anticipated discontinuity of women's work and part-time work may increase employers' statistical discrimination against women (Mandel 2011; Mandel and Shalev 2009a, 2009b).

The fact that gender norms operate at both the household and the workplace level is reflected in women's lesser sense of entitlement, compared with men, with regard to pay for work and the distribution of household tasks (Major 1993). Yet, women often feel more entitled than men to make claims for work–life balance at the workplace as this coincides with gender expectations in regard to care and the fact that such benefits often are aimed at women (Lewis, S. 1997; Lewis and Smithson 2001). In turn, fathers may feel less entitled to make claims for care at the workplace (Hobson et al. 2011; Lewis, S. 1997), and managers may be less likely to grant such requests from men (Den Dulk et al. 2011), especially if no such legal entitlement exists. Managers may also value employees higher if they do not allow family needs to interfere with their work life, as long hours may be seen as an indicator of company commitment (Crompton et al. 2007a).

Each person's freedom to choose also depends on others' actions and needs. For instance, if the male partner exercises his freedom to choose between work and care, the female partner's feasible choices are ultimately limited (Crompton et al. 2007b; Lewis and Giullari 2005). Group-dependent constraints, such as norms and traditions, can therefore affect the conversion of resources into capabilities and functionings (Robeyns 2000). However, expectations and experiences of work-family reconciliation issues may not only vary by gender, but also by economic conditions and resources (Crompton et al. 2007a).

ton et al. 2007b), which lends strong support to the importance of accounting for groups when studying issues of work–life balance to reveal diversities in capabilities to convert resources into functionings, as men and women, parents and non-parents, singles and partnered have different preconditions to combine work and family life.

The third claim – that the approach does not sufficiently account for social structure – appears to be at odds with Sen’s own account of how CA operates:

“Individuals live and operate in a world of institutions. Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function. Not only do institutions contribute to our freedoms, their roles can be sensibly evaluated in the light of their contributions to our freedom.” (Sen 1999:142)

This quote suggests that social structure and institutional context are central to the CA, as indicated by Figure 1, i.e. that social structure and institutions (societal conversion factors) influence people’s capabilities to achieve. Brown et al. (2004) argue that people’s capability is a consequence of their entitlements, and that social rights can contribute to a set of norms that can enhance individuals’ capabilities and functionings. Sen, also, emphasises that the context, in terms of social norms and traditions, influences men’s and women’s aspirations and effective choices (Crocker and Robeyns 2010; Sen 1992, 1999). Considering the issue of care, Lewis and Giullari (2005) state that women experience stronger pressures to care, but that women’s preferences to undertake care work are contextually and socially embedded in gendered norms, seen in the proper roles of mothers and fathers, alongside women’s alternative options to reconcile work and family life. The CA not only advocates the importance of assessing people’s capabilities and functionings, but also emphasises the importance of examining the contexts in which social interaction and economic production take place, and whether such contexts enable or constrain people’s effective choices (Crocker and Robeyns 2010). From this perspective, social and institutional context, seen as social conversion factors (e.g. policies and norms), are key indicators of structural barriers or facilitators regarding people’s capabilities to combine work and family life.

In several respects, the CA framework maps onto sociological approaches that analyze welfare structures and social policy outcomes and the interplay between social structure and individual agency. We may then ask, what is the value added of the CA? Clearly, the CA can provide us with new lenses and concepts through which we can explore diversities and inequalities. In relation to work–life balance and childbearing, the CA has the poten-

tial to capture strains and discrepancies between norms, expectations and practices, and between rights and the capabilities to exercise these entitlements. The approach provides an instrument with which to explore these complexities in several ways; by embedding individuals in specific contexts, by acknowledging individual differences in means and resources, and by recognising people's real freedom to choose (Hobson and Fahlén 2009b).

Considerations for applying the approach

As already stated, the CA consists of two evaluative spaces; a normative framework for evaluating and designing welfare policies, and an evaluative framework of individual well-being and quality of life (Brown et al. 2004). In the latter application, the CA focuses on individual capabilities or functionings, or both, either by comparing individuals within and across societies or by comparing individuals or societies over time (Crocker and Robeyns 2010). However, both applications are important components for linking the institutional macro-level with people's agency and actual practices at a micro-level, and for understanding variations across welfare states (Hobson 2011).

The CA is a useful tool for enhancing our understanding of the interplay of variations between individuals and institutional settings. It also poses several empirical challenges. The first challenge is to identify objects of value. Since the CA is rather unspecified in character (Fukuda-Parr 2003; Robeyns 2003, 2005b), this raises the question of which functionings and capabilities should be selected for a study. The choice of what is considered to be a valued achievement, and the capability to achieve such a value, should be based on "general social discussion or public reasoning" according to Sen (2004:77). The second challenge is to operationalize capabilities and functionings. Even if Sen advocates the importance of assessing and evaluating individuals' capabilities rather than functionings (achievements), the problem lies, for several reasons, in how to operationalize capabilities into empirical variables. First, it is difficult to disentangle what people are actually doing from what they would choose to do if other options were available. One way of dealing with these challenges might be to regard group differences in achieved functionings (outcomes) as an indicator of capability inequalities (Robeyns 2003).

Second, limited information and available data on people's capabilities may compel scholars to use functionings as the dependent variable in their analysis (Sen 1992). In a review of the CA in practice, Robeyns (2006) concludes that most quantitative applications of the CA use existing data that are not directly designed or collected with the aim of measuring functionings, let

alone capabilities. Furthermore, what constitutes relevant valuable achievements (functionings) and capabilities depends not only on the object under scrutiny, but also on the application and the type of capability analysed. Functionings and corresponding capabilities play different roles in different types of application, which in turn has implications for how these factors are selected. For instance, in welfare studies, the functionings and capabilities serve as social indicators that reflect a person's quality of life, while in philosophical reasoning and in theories of justice, they are part of a utopian foundation for a just society (Robeyns 2005b). Therefore, even if the CA can be used interdisciplinarily, some aspects of its application need to be specific to each discipline. There is no one-size-fits-all in its application. The third challenge is thus to develop a sociological application of the CA, which will be discussed in the next section.

Applying the Capability Approach to work–life balance and childbearing

The objective of this thesis is to explore to what extent people in different institutional contexts are able to have a family and to create a balance between the work and non-work areas of their life. Balance implies not having to relinquish or demote the one or the other. The general evaluative space is thus work–life balance, which can be seen as an indicator within the broader spectrum of quality of life. The separate studies in this thesis address various topics that all can be seen as facets of work–life balance: 1) the relationship between economic uncertainties and women’s short-term childbearing intentions, and the linkage with institutional support for work-family reconciliation, 2) the interplay of family-friendly working conditions, individual resources and childbearing behaviour, 3) gender differences in perceived work–home conflict, and the linkage with work-family reconciliation policies and gender norms, and 4) parents’ subjectively experienced tension between work and family life, and agency to make claims for work–life balance. The diverse objects in these studies indicate that the application of the CA varies somewhat between them. In the following section I discuss to what extent work–life balance and childbearing can be seen as values to be achieved (functionings), and how the four studies have applied the basic concept of the CA.

Identifying objects of value

The topics of this thesis are issues addressed in the public discourse, reflected in research on social norms and building upon previous research. Work–life balance has received considerable attention in European public debates and in different academic fields (economics, management, psychology, political science, sociology). The ability to combine work and family life is inscribed in EU policies (Directive 92/241/ECC; Directive 96/34/EC; Directive 97/81/EC; Directive 2010/18/EU; European Commission 2008; 2011a, 2011b, 2011c) and in reports from Eurofound (e.g. Anxo et al. 2007a, 2007b; Fagan 2003; Giaccone and Colleoni 2009). It has also been stated that indi-

viduals' ability to achieve work–life balance affects labour force participation and fertility rates (European Commission 2008). The relationship between work–life balance and quality of life has been reported in several Eurofound publications (see Anxo et al. 2007b; Eurofound 2004, 2009; Fagan 2003; Kotowska et al. 2010), so has the linkage between childbearing and quality of life (Fahey and Spéder 2004). In addition, the vast majority of both women and men across ten European countries (investigated in Study I and Study III) find it important to be able to combine work and family life when choosing a job (Figure 2). This suggests that work–life balance has become a leading norm in EU countries.

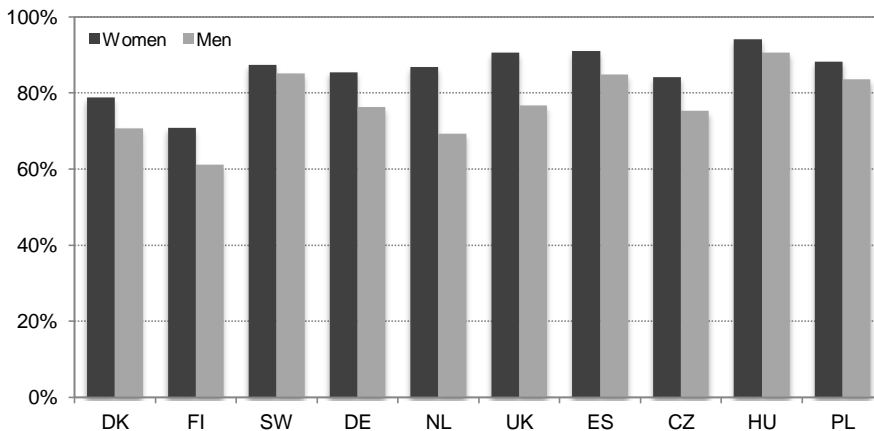


Figure 2: Proportion of men and women aged 20-60 who find it important/very important to be able to combine work and family life when choosing a job.

Note: DK=Denmark, FI=Finland, SW=Sweden, DE=Germany, NL=the Netherlands, UK=the United Kingdom, ES=Spain, CZ=the Czech Republic, HU=Hungary, PL=Poland.

Source: European Social Survey 2004/05, author's calculations.

The second topic, childbearing, reflects many concerns among policy makers regarding demographic sustainability in countries faced with an aging population as a result of low fertility (see European Commission 2005a). Birth rates have fallen to a critical level in many European countries, which can be a threat to economic growth and government revenue (Fahey and Spéder 2004). Today, nearly all European countries have fertility below replacement level (2.1 children per woman), but the variations across countries are substantial. Nevertheless, the ideal family size of two children is relatively consistent across European societies (Testa 2006). To have children can be seen as a valued achievement, given the fact that the vast majority wants to have at least one child, and that intentional childlessness is a preferred ideal by a very small proportion of women (Testa 2006). In the ten selected countries, an ideal family size of two or more children is preferred by

more than 75 percent of the women (Figure 3). Yet, from 6 to 20 percent of women in these countries, born in 1955, are permanently childless, with the highest proportions found in West Germany, Finland and the Netherlands, and the lowest in the Czech Republic, East Germany and Hungary (Sardon 2006).¹ Whether childlessness is intentional or unintentional is difficult to determine, but according to a report from the World Health Organization, approximately five percent of all couples in the world are considered medically infertile (WHO 1991). This indicates that the remaining proportions are childless for other reasons than medical ones. Even if young women want to have children, postponed childbearing plays a significant role in the process of ultimately becoming childless (Martinelle 1993; Morgan 1991).

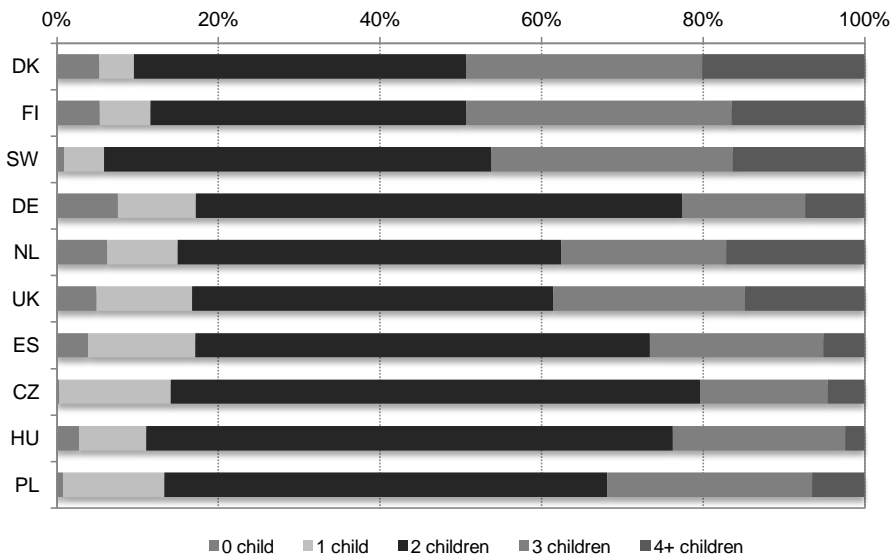


Figure 3: Personal ideal number of children among women aged 20-49 in ten European countries.

Source: Eurobarometer 65.1: The Future of Europe (2006), author's calculations.

As argued, work–life balance and childbearing can be seen as relevant functionings that can enhance quality of life. Their value is expressed both in the public discourse, among politicians and academics, and as social norms, reflected in people's attitudes. Therefore, before discussing how the CA is operationalized in the four studies, it is relevant to discuss the concept work–life balance in a little more detail.

¹ Proportion of permanent childlessness in female birth cohort 1955: West Germany, 20.3, Finland 19.4 (cohort 1961), the Netherlands 16.9, the UK (England and Wales) 15.8, Sweden 12.8, Denmark 12.5, Poland 11.5, Spain 9, Hungary 8.5, East Germany 7.6, the Czech Republic 6.3 (Sardon 2006).

Work–life balance: concepts, framing and definitions

Despite the substantial body of literature and research on work–life balance/work–family balance, these concepts are rarely defined or mainstreamed, nor are such other related concepts as family friendly policies/organisations and work–family conflict. Several scholars who have reviewed this research note a lack of consensus regarding definitions; alternatively that the concepts are taken as self-evident (Frone 2003; Greenhaus et al. 2003; Grzywacz and Carlson 2007; Guest 2002; Harker 1996). The diversity in the use of concepts can partly be related to their applications in different dimensions; the discursive and policy level, the workplace organisational level, and the socio-psychological level. On the socio-psychological level the concepts work–life balance and work–family balance are often treated as the absence of conflict or interference between work and non-work roles (Frone 2003; Grzywacz and Carlson 2007; Guest 2002).

On a discursive European level, the framing of policies addressing the ability to combine work and family life has changed since the 1990s from *reconciling professional/work and family life* to *work–life balance*, yet the issues involved and the policies addressed are often the same, that is, parental leave, part-time work and childcare (see European Commission 2008; Anxo et al. 2007a, 2007b; Fagan 2003).² Further, the concepts work–life balance and family-friendly often are used interchangeably to describe policies aimed at reconciling work with family life (Acker 2002; Lewis and Campbell 2008; OECD 2001, 2005). Family-friendly also often is applied in research to denote workplace practices and the implementation of national or supra-national work-family reconciliation policies, or company level initiatives to meet the needs of employees with family commitments (Harker 1996; Lewis 1996).

The framing *work–life balance* has the potential to be more inclusive, as it reaches beyond the work-family interface, since *life* also encompasses time for care and family as well as leisure time. Within this context, work–life balance becomes a matter of quality of life. The work–life balance frame encompasses not only parents, but also employees without families or care responsibilities, but who nevertheless may experience stress over-demands and difficulties in combining their work and non-work roles (Kossek and Lambert 2005). This broader framing also includes those who do not yet have family/care responsibilities, but whose capability to enter parenthood may be constrained or facilitated by the institutional/social context and

² These policies will be discussed in the section *Policy framing, national implementations and capabilities to exercise rights*.

workplace practices. Nevertheless, in policy practice, the renaming of the policy package is tantamount to putting old wine in new bottles, as very little is changed in substance, or in other words, “more politically strategic than substantive” (Lewis and Campbell 2008: 327). The policy measures are mainly means to reconcile work and family life, not life in general. Further, the policies have been targeted towards gender equality in the labour market, particularly women’s access to the labour market (Moss 2004), but in fact work–life balance implies that a person already is in paid work, which is evident in socio-psychological definitions of the concept.

Definition of work–life balance

Despite the notion of inadequacy with regard to definitions, several scholars have defined work–life balance, or foremost work–family balance, even though these definitions are rarely referred to, which is especially evident in cross-national macro-level studies. Definitions of work–family balance are closely linked to men’s and women’s different roles in the labour market and in private life and the balance between these roles. Inspired by G.H. Mead, Marks and MacDermid (1996:421) define (positive) role balance as *“the tendency to become fully engaged in the performance of every role in one’s total role system, to approach every typical role and role partner with an attitude of attentiveness and care.”*³ Clark (2001:349) defines work–family balance as *“satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict.”* Greenhaus et al. (2003:513) define work–family balance as *“the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role.”*

The core element in these definitions is the notion of equality in the experience of the work and family roles either in terms of role engagement (attention, time, involvement or commitment), which is assumed to be equally distributed between the roles related to the work and the home, or outcomes in terms of satisfaction. Positive balance implies equal levels of satisfaction with work and family roles (Greenhaus et al. 2003).

These definitions have been criticised by Grzywacz and Carlson (2007), who argue that the concept of role balance has more to do with organisational strategies than the characteristics of a person’s work and family life. They also find the definition of balance as satisfaction problematic, because it regards people – and their work and family activities – as detached from the families and organisations in which these activities are carried out

³ According to Marks and MacDermid (1996), positive role balance should be distinguished from negative role balance, in which a person becomes disengaged in his/her roles.

(Grzywacz and Carlson 2007). Furthermore, satisfaction related to work–life balance may be determined by expectations and aspirations, which are influenced by circumstances and experiences. Satisfaction that is based upon a subjective assessment may therefore mainly reflect how well people have adapted to their present situation (Fahey et al. 2003). Implicit in these definitions is that work–life balance is a psychological problem regardless of institutional, labour market and workplace characteristics that might shape people’s capability to achieve such a state. Grzywacz and Carlson (2007:458) suggest the following definition of role balance: “*accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains*”, and argue that a shift from *satisfaction* to *accomplishment* underscores that work–family balance is a social concept, rather than a psychological concept.

Work–life/family balance is often investigated at the socio-psychological level by the absence thereof, that is, in terms of *work–family/home conflict*. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985:77) define work–family conflict as “*a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect.*”

As indicated above, most of these socio-psychological definitions of work–life/family balance and work–home/family conflict implicitly depart from the fact that people are in paid work, and that their ability to achieve work–life balance is detached from structural factors. However, Grzywacz’ and Carlson’s (2007) definition acknowledges that people’s potential agency to achieve work–life balance is shaped by external conditions (workplace organisational structure) as well as role-expectations related to the home sphere. However, none of these definitions fully take into account that role-expectations may be context-bound, i.e. that institutional support for work–family reconciliation and societal norms may shape people’s, and particularly women’s, capabilities, aspirations and expectations to be both workers and carers.

The point of departure in this thesis is that the concept work–life balance encompasses three levels; 1) the institutional/policy level, 2) the workplace level in terms of family-friendly practices, and 3) the socio-psychological level linked to experienced role conflict. Within a capability framework, the ability to simultaneously be both an earner and a carer is influenced by various conversion factors that can be linked to these levels of work–life balance. The figure below identifies five key conversion factors (factors influencing a person’s capability to achieve a valued functioning) operating at different levels (see Figure 4): 1) *Institutional factors* in terms of national

and supra-national work-family reconciliation policies, 2) *Societal factors*, such as gender norms regarding work and family roles, 3) *Workplace factors*, for instance workplace cultures and working conditions, 4) *Household factors*, for instance parenthood and partnership status, and 5) *Individual factors*, specific personal characteristics such as gender and age. To fully understand the mechanism and the processes with regard to expectations, aspirations, perceptions and claims for work–life balance, these intersecting and overlapping conversion factors have to be addressed. The four studies in this thesis address the different facets of work–life balance that can be linked to these levels of conversion factors.

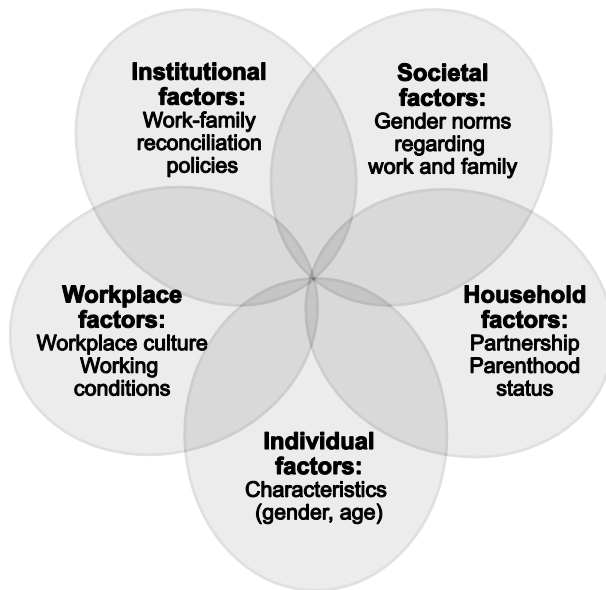


Figure 4: Conversion factors for assessing various dimensions of work–life balance.

Operationalizing the capability approach in the studies

The fact that the data sets used in the first three studies are not designed for applying the CA has brought on several challenges when identifying capabilities and functionings in regard to work–life balance. This section describes how the CA is operationalized in the four studies and how the different levels of work–life balance then are addressed.

Study I: Capabilities and Childbearing Intentions in Europe: The Association between Work-Family Reconciliation Policies, Economic Uncertainties and Women's Fertility Plans

In order to enhance our understanding of how institutional contexts interplay with women's short-term childbearing intentions, the issue of work-life balance is addressed in this study from the structural level, in terms of institutional work-family reconciliation support. Earlier studies have recognised a gap between ideal family size and realised childbearing in several European countries, i.e. the ideal number of children exceeds the number women actually give birth to (Bongaarts 2001; Goldstein et al. 2003; Hagewen and Morgan 2005; Testa 2006). Chesnais (1998) argues that this fertility gap can be linked to insufficient institutional support for work-family reconciliation.

The rationale for studying childbearing intentions is the linkage to actual childbearing (see Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998; Schoen et al. 1999). Intentions are a central component for understanding fertility trends (Hagewen and Morgan 2005). In this study, intentions are regarded as an indicator of women's capabilities to enter motherhood or to have additional children, while realised fertility is regarded as a functioning, yet not directly addressed in this study.

This study departs from the social-psychological theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 2005), which is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). The basic logic is that the intention to pursue a specific behaviour increases the likelihood of realising such behaviour. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (2005), intentions are influenced by a) attitudes towards a specific behaviour, b) subjective norms related to the behaviour, and c) perceived behavioural control. Attitudes refers to positive or negative evaluation of a specific behaviour, social norms relates to perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour (Ajzen 1991). Perceived behavioural control is not only influenced by a person's available resources, but also by her own judgement of her ability to act (Ajzen and Fishbein 2005).

The fact that this is a socio-psychological theory it fails to fully take into account that institutional settings (social norms, legislation and regulations) can affect people's perceived behavioural control. For this purpose, I introduce the CA, to be able to capture people's agency in a broader societal context. By accounting for the fact that individual decision making can be institutionally embedded, the CA allows us to gain a better understanding of the mechanism of childbearing intentions. I argue that short-term childbearing intention (the intention to have a[nother] child in the near future) not only reflects opportunities and constraints in a person's life, but also the percep-

tion of effective options and alternatives for realising such intentions, i.e. capabilities. A capability framework is thus vital for capturing people's agency in differently layered societal contexts.

Within the CA framework, I argue that *institutional factors* (parental leave systems and childcare provision), *individual factors* (characteristics, human capital and household composition) and *individual economic uncertainties* (labour force participation, job and income security), are likely to shape women's sense of risk and security regarding their present situation and future prospects, which in turn influence their short-term childbearing intentions. *Institutional factors*, in terms of work-family reconciliation policies, are seen as institutional conversion factors, as they have the potential to enhance women's capabilities to be both earners and carers and to diminish the risks and costs of having children (Hobson and Oláh 2006). *Individual factors* incorporate individual conversion factors (age), household conversion factors (number of children and partnership status) and individual resources (educational attainment).

A woman's age and household composition are conversion factors that interplay with institutional factors and affect her prospects in the labour market, which in turn can affect her sense of risk and security and ultimately her childbearing intentions. In regard to educational attainment, this factor is seen as a means to achieve, as women's ability to convert this resource into capability can be shaped by structural factors. Hence, educational attainment not only influences a woman's prospects in the labour market and economic returns, but also her perception of economic risk and security. In addition, *economic uncertainty* can be seen as a workplace conversion factor for women's capabilities to be both earners and carers. Beyond having employment, whether one's job and income are perceived as secure clearly is connected to the sense of risk and security regarding the present situation and future prospects, which in turn can obstruct women's childbearing plans (Kotowska et al. 2010).

The data used in this study are from the European Social Survey, Round 2, conducted in 2004/05. The analysis includes a total of 3,184 women from ten European countries, aged 20-45, living with a partner and having at most two children (the youngest less than 14 years of age) living in or outside the household. The dependent variable, *short-term childbearing intentions*, is operationalized in the question: *Do you plan to have a child within the next three years?* Logistic regression is the tool of analysis, and women's childbearing intentions are situated in different contexts with various levels of institutional support for work-family reconciliation.

*Study II: Family-Friendly Working Conditions and Childbearing:
A Capability Approach to Fertility Behaviour among Young Adult
Women in Sweden*

This study addresses realised childbearing in Sweden which, within the CA framework, is defined as a functioning or valued achievement and work–life balance is addressed at the workplace level in terms of family-friendly working conditions. I analyse the extent to which such conditions interact with individual resources and affect women’s capabilities to become mothers or to have additional children. Workplace practices can influence employees’ capabilities to adjust their working arrangements so as to reconcile work and family, and to utilise institutionally regulated work-family reconciliation policies (Den Dulk et al. 2011). Such practices are formed at different levels; the institutional policy level (laws and regulations), and its implementation at the workplace organisational level (Fagan and Walthery 2011a). Hence, institutional support for work-family reconciliation and workplace practices, reflected in women’s own and their partner’s family-friendly working conditions, are regarded as institutional and workplace conversion factors for work–life balance, which in turn may influence actual childbearing.

Here, I define individual resources as educational attainment and economic situation. Within a capability framework, resources are mainly means to achieve, which does not always translate into capabilities to achieve (Robeyns 2003). Economic theories on fertility assume that working women with greater resources (education and income) reduce their fertility as a result of higher opportunity costs, i.e. reduced earnings as a result of reduced work when having children, along with forgone future earnings and job prospects (DiPrete et al. 2003; Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004). However, public policies – such as generous parental leave benefits and highly subsidised childcare services, which is the case in Sweden – can reduce the opportunity costs and increase women’s capabilities to combine work and family life even when the children are relatively young. Such policies may be even more gainful for women with more resources, due to income related leave benefits and accessible public childcare (Oláh 2003). In addition, possession of stronger resources can increase one’s capability to make claims for work–life balance at the workplace (Hobson et al. 2011). Those with less individual resources may be more dependent on institutional conversion factors (laws and regulations), as these factors can enhance their capabilities and sense of entitlement to make such claims at the workplace (Hobson et al. 2011) and to realise their potential childbearing aspirations. Differences in individual resources (education and income) can be relevant factors when studying the linkage between working conditions and childbearing behav-

hour, as these factors, coupled with working conditions and institutional settings, may generate capabilities to combine work and family life (Hobson et al. 2011; Drobnič and Gullién 2011) and increase the capability to have children.

This study uses data from the second wave of the *Swedish Panel Survey on Family and Working Life among Young Adults in the 21st Century* (Young Adult Panel Study, YAPS), conducted in 2003, augmented with register data on vital events including births up to December 31, 2006. The data include information on family and working life, plans, expectations and attitudes, and is a nationally representative sample of men and women born in Sweden in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980. However, this study only includes women with a partner, a total of 819 women. Event-history analysis is applied based on piecewise constant baseline hazard.

Study III: Does Gender Matter? A Capability Approach to Work-to-Home and Home-to-Work Conflict in a European Perspective

In this study, work–life balance is addressed in terms of men’s and women’s perceived work-to-home and home-to-work conflict in institutional contexts with different policy support for work-family reconciliation and gender norms related to work and family roles. Hence, work–life balance is analysed in a multi-dimensional way; at the institutional and societal level, the workplace and household level, and the individual socio-psychological level. Perceived work-to-home and home-to-work conflicts are regarded as factors influencing work–life balance.

Gender is a key component in this study, as men and women may have different expectations concerning work and family life. However, previous studies display contradictory results regarding gender, which can be linked to how conflict is measured. Perceived role conflict has been operationalized either through objective indicators, such as working hours and time spent on other activities (see Guest 2002; Messenger 2004) or through subjective indicators related to satisfaction (Burchell and Fagan 2004; Fagan and Walthery 2011b; Hill et al. 2001; Milkie and Peltola 1999). It has also been measured through indicators related to time and strain pressures (Gallie and Russel 2009; Hosking and Western 2008; Crompton and Lyonette 2006; MacInnes 2006; McGinnity and Calvert 2009; Kinnunen and Mauno 1998; Van der Lippe et al. 2006; Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Strandh and Nordenmark 2006). Studies using satisfaction measures often find no significant gender differences in perceived role conflict, while studies using time and strain pressure measures more often find gender differences in work–home conflict. This suggests that measures of satisfaction or accomplishment may

be gender blind. This could be related to gendered expectations regarding work and that women tend to be more satisfied than men even if their work situation is worse (Clark 1997), or that measures of satisfaction reflect adaptation to the present situation (Fahey et al. 2003), which is especially true for women. Most studies have focused on work-to-home conflict, disregarding home-to-work conflict. When studying perceived tension between the work and the home spheres it is important to consider how to operationalize role conflict. To systematically investigate potential gender differences in perceived work-home conflict, across and within different institutional settings, Study III applies time and strain measures of work-to-home conflict and home-to-work conflict, in an attempt to improve our understanding of the gendered dimension of perceived role conflict.

A widely applied strategy for studying work-home conflict is the resource-demand approach (e.g. Frone et al. 1997; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Voydanoff 2005). Demands refer to psychological, social, physical or organizational factors that involve constant mental or physical effort, which can be related to certain psychological or physiological costs (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Two main sources of demands can be distinguished; time-based and strain-based. Time-based demands denote the amount of time devoted to work and home roles. Time is assumed to be a fixed resource; the more time spent on work, the less time available for home activities, and vice versa. Strain-based demands relate to insecurity and the psychological pressure that can spill over from work to home or from home to work (Voydanoff 2005). Conflict appears if the tension experienced in one sphere (in terms of time- and strain-related demands) obstructs one's performance in the other sphere (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985).

The resource-demand approach is helpful for identifying the tensions between work and home at the socio-psychological level. However, when applied in cross-country comparative studies, this approach lacks the theoretical framework that is needed for analysing work-home conflict within a broader societal context, as the approach fails to take into account that perceived work-home conflict can be contextually embedded (Drobnič and Gullián 2011; Van der Lippe et al. 2006) and linked to policy support for work-family reconciliation and social gender norms, which in turn may shape expectations regarding work-life balance. To overcome these limitations, the CA is introduced into the analysis of gender differences in perceived work-home conflict, in order to shed light on the potential role of institutional context for an individual's capability to achieve work-life balance.

In this study, work and home demands are seen as constraints for work–life balance, as they obstruct people’s capabilities to achieve balance at the individual level. Demands are shaped at various sites – here, at the workplace and within the household – hence working conditions and household structure can be regarded as an intermediate level of conversion factors. The assumption is that higher demands generate weaker capabilities to achieve work–life balance and increase the negative interference between the two domains (Drobnič and Gullién 2011). Further, policy regulations and gender norms are included as part of the institutional capability structure. The assumption is that the institutional capability structure shapes men’s and women’s expectations and aspirations related to work–life balance (Hobson and Fahlén 2009b) as well as their capability to achieve work–life balance. Work-family reconciliation policies and gender norms can thus be seen as institutional and societal conversion factors. The influence of home and work demands on perceived work-to-home and home-to-work conflict are filtered through gender, working conditions, household situation, and policies and norms.

This study uses data from the second round of the European Social Survey, conducted in 2004/2005 (see above), which includes a special module of questions regarding family, work and well-being. The analysis includes a total of 6,527 working men (3,564) and women (2,963) in ten countries, aged 20-60 years and living with a partner. OLS regression is the tool of analysis.

Study IV: Agency and Capabilities to Achieve a Work–Life Balance: A Comparison of Sweden and Hungary

Agency is operationalized most directly in the final study compared with the other three. Here, we examine how working mothers and fathers subjectively experience the tensions between work and family demands and their possibilities for alternative choices. We focus on their expectations to be both carers and earners, and the constraints preventing them from achieving work–life balance. Work–life balance is addressed at the institutional level, at the workplace level and at the individual socio-psychological level. The CA framework is operationalized in a specifically designed qualitative survey as a strategy to capture agency disparities among mothers and fathers with young children in Hungary and Sweden, two institutional contexts with differences regarding work-family reconciliation policies, working time regimes and gendered norms regarding work and family life. These factors are regarded as institutional and societal conversion factors (also called institutional resources in the paper).

Our purpose is to tap into the cognitive level of agency and capabilities, and how institutional/societal conversion factors affect the parents' sense of entitlement to make claims for work–life balance, which is regarded as central for connecting agency (capabilities) and achievements (functionings). We argue that variations in conversion processes can be found in the legal entitlements; for instance whether flexible working arrangements (the right to reduced working hours and parental leave benefits) are regulated by law or negotiated at the workplace. The ability to convert a right into agency is closely linked to whether it is regarded as a social right⁴ (Deakin 2004), which shapes the possibilities of exercising these rights. The institutional/societal conversion factors also operate within workplace cultures at the organisation level (an intermediate level of conversion factors) in terms of gendered norms and expectations regarding work and care. This is the site where parents' claims for work–life balance are granted or denied and where parents may face risks when making such claims in terms of job loss or discriminatory treatment with regard to pay and promotion. By analysing the agency space between rights and the sense of entitlement to make claims, we reveal how gender norms concerning work and care may obstruct agency freedom for work–life balance.

Data applied in this study derive from our *Capability Survey*, an innovative survey instrument especially designed to capture capabilities for work–life balance. The empirical information is based on semi-structured interviews (see Study IV for details on the selection criteria).⁵ The questions target five main areas; 1) the household (questions on childcare, and the division of time on housework and care work), 2) employment and working time situation (shift work and work flexibility), 3) the uptake and division of parental leave, 4) work environment and workplace culture (whether the workplace is family friendly or penalises those with parenting commitments; support from workmates and colleagues).⁶ The interviews were transcribed by question and inserted in SPSS as string (text) variables. Although SPSS is most often used for analysing quantitative data, this strategy allowed us to combine a qualitative and a quantitative approach, as both in-depth responses and quantitative data (basic socio-demographic variables and nu-

⁴ Social rights can be understood as claims on resources in terms of income, services or employment (Deakin 2004)

⁵ The studies took place in Stockholm and Budapest during 2007 and 2008, and include 100 parents in each city. The semi-structured interviews lasted for about 1-1.5 hours.

⁶ The interview schedule also includes a section on social network, and an additional section on country specific policies. In the Swedish case, the module addressed the organisation and division of care leaves (daddy months), equality bonus and care allowance, where the latter two policies were just about to be launched. In Hungary, the module was focused on fertility and related policy issues.

merical shortened encoding of each string) were incorporated in the empirical data set.⁷ In the phase of analysis the numerical variables provided us with basic statistics and an overview of our in-depth answers. After establishing the general pattern, we analysed the in-depth responses according to three main themes; 1) the take-up and division of parental leave, 2) the family-friendliness at the workplace, and 3) the broad contours of organisational cultures regarding potential mistreatment or discrimination at the workplace as a result of prioritising the family. These themes were analysed for Budapest and Stockholm separately, and then compared to discern similarities and differences about the parents' sense of entitlement to exercise their rights, the narratives of risks for those prioritising family, and to what extent the workplace cultures hinder agency and capabilities for work–life balance.

The levels of work–life balance and the operationalization of the capability approach and its key concepts in the four studies can be summarised as follows:

Table 1: Levels of work–life balance and the operationalization of the CA concepts in the four studies.

	WLB level	Functionings	Capabilities	Conversion factors
Study I	Institutional level	Realised fertility	Short-term child-bearing intentions	Work-family policies Working conditions Individual characteristics
Study II	Institutional and workplace level	Realised fertility	Ability to combine work and family life	Work-family policies Workplace practices Household composition
Study III	Institutional level Workplace level Individual level	Work–life balance	Ability to achieve work–life balance	Work-family policies Gender norms Working conditions and home situation
Study IV	Institutional level Workplace level Individual level	Work–life balance	Ability to convert rights into agency	Work-family policies Gender norms Workplace cultures

As seen in Table 1, all four studies incorporate institutional contexts in the analysis, especially in relation to work–family reconciliation policies. Therefore, it is useful to discuss the work–family reconciliation policies referred to in the four studies and their implementations across the ten selected countries, and to present the motivations for the selection of countries.

⁷ An additional rationale for using SPSS was to facilitate data exchange between Sweden and Hungary using the same structure of our data sets.

Welfare states and work-family reconciliation policies

Institutional context is important for understanding the capability structure within which people make decisions about their life. A conventional approach to cross-national comparative analysis of welfare states is to deploy different regime typologies (Van der Lippe and van Dijk 2002). In this section I discuss regime typologies and the choice of countries in the separate studies, followed by a description of current policies relevant to work–life balance.

One of the most influential contributions is Esping-Andersen’s typology, where he applies the concept welfare state regimes to describe the complex relationship between the state, the market and the family, and distinguish between the *liberal*, the *conservative/corporatist* and the *social-democratic* regime (Esping-Andersen 1990. See also Arts and Gelissen 2002; O’Connor et al.1999).

This regime typology has received considerable criticism over the years, with some scholars claiming that it does not address the specificity of the Mediterranean countries and arguing for a separate “southern model” (Ferreria 1996; Trifiletti 1999). Incisive critique has also come from gender scholars who argue that Esping-Andersen’s typology neglects the role of gender and the division of unpaid and paid work (see Hobson 1990; Lewis 1992, 1997; O’Connor 1993; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 2003) and do not encompasses intergenerational care responsibilities between the state and the family (see Anttonen and Sipilä 1996; Leitner 2003; Saraceno and Keck 2010), or policy provisions that enable women to reconcile work and family life (Gornick et al. 1997; Gornick and Meyer 2003).

To encompass the gender aspect, Korpi (2000) developed a typology that address women’s capabilities to combine work and motherhood.⁸ He identifies three broad ideal types of gendered welfare state institutions; the *general*

⁸ Korpi focuses on social rights and to what extent the state leaves the formation of gender relations to the market and/or the family (whether citizens are to find private solutions for the care of children), or intervene in its formation by supporting a dual-earner family model or by granting general support to the nuclear family (Korpi 2000).

family support model, the *dual-earner support model*, and the *market-oriented policy model*.

The established welfare regime typologies also fail to encompass the former socialist countries. However, Ferrarini (2003, 2006) has extended Korpi's typology with a model that simultaneously attempts to preserve high gendered divisions of labour and to support the dual-earner family, which fits several post-socialist countries (Ferrarini and Sjöberg 2010).

As the above paragraphs suggest, the welfare regime typologies have been remodelled, extended and tested, and depending on what social policy schemes are under scrutiny, the countries do not necessarily have the same fit. Nevertheless, Arts and Gelissen (2002) and Abrahamson (1999) argue that the welfare regime typologies have a heuristic and descriptive value, and are useful as an organising principle for comparative studies of welfare states. Typologies have a theoretical and empirical value if they are means to a goal (a representation of a reality) and not a goal in themselves (Arts and Gelissen 2002). This is also my own position. When selecting the countries in this thesis, established typologies are mainly used as a heuristic device for analysing variations across countries regarding childbearing intentions and perceived work–home conflict. The ten selected European countries in the comparative studies represent typical cases of mainly Korpi's typology, with some extensions, and maximise the variations across these ideal types. In the cross-national comparative studies, the United Kingdom represents the *market-oriented model*. Germany and the Netherlands signify the *general family support model*.⁹ Denmark, Finland and Sweden represent the *dual-earner support model*. Spain represents the *southern model*. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland denote the *post-socialist countries* (hereafter labelled as Central East European countries, CEE countries).¹⁰

Policies are central to understanding capabilities for work–life balance within different institutional contexts. It is therefore highly relevant when conducting cross-national comparative studies based on micro-level data to rely on contemporary data regarding relevant policies and regulations (see next section) in order to relate individual level outcomes to their institutional context.

⁹ The classification of the Netherlands varies in different welfare typologies, but is most often clustered together with Germany (see Arts and Gelissen 2002).

¹⁰ The country selection was also influenced by data limitations; several of the countries in the European Social Survey from 2004/2005 lacked data for variables important for my analyses. The fact that I have chosen several countries to represent a certain regime type is a strategy to enhance the sample size, as my main interest has not been to study the total population, but rather the population relevant for childbearing and childrearing. In addition, to give a more comprehensive picture of the different facets of work–life balance, I sought to include the same countries in my cross-national studies.

Policy framing, national implementations and capabilities to exercise rights

Policy instruments for work–life balance at the EU level have foremost addressed parental leave, childcare services and part-time work, with the expressed purpose of harmonising women’s and men’s ability to achieve work–life balance. Such policy instruments can be seen as institutional conversion factors, as they are intended to enable men’s and women’s capabilities to be both earners and carers. This section discusses the implementation of these EU policies at national level and how individuals have responded to the implementation of these policies, which in the four studies, explicitly or implicitly, are referred to as work-family reconciliation policies.

Parental leave policies

The EU directive¹¹ on parental leave (96/34/EC) is gender neutral and gives both parents the individual right to take parental leave for at least three months each.¹² However, although the directive stipulates the right to take time off from work, it does not address leave benefits. Leave entitlements – in terms of qualifying conditions, payment and length, whether it is a family entitlement (to be divided between the parents as they choose) or an individual entitlement (earmarked time for one or both parents) – have implications for parents’ capabilities to exercise their rights and for potential parents capabilities to start a family.¹³

A cross-national overview of leave systems reveals dissimilarities regarding the qualifying conditions for leave benefits. The Nordic countries, Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic and Hungary have extended leave benefits to non-working parents, usually on a flat-rate basis, while in the Netherlands, the UK and Poland only the employed are qualified for leave benefit (ILO 2005; Moss and Korintus 2008). The close link between the leave benefit and previous earnings may be an incentive for potential parents to establish themselves in the labour market before having a child, which in turn can result in postponement of childbearing. For instance, a Swedish study of students (not eligible for earnings-related leave benefit) and their

¹¹ A directive specifies certain goals to be achieved in the member states. National governments are obligated to adapt national laws to accommodate these goals, but are free to decide how to do so (European Commission 2012).

¹² In March 2010 this entitlement was extended to four months (Directive 2010/18/EU).

¹³ Parental leave is usually distinguished from maternity and paternity leave. Maternity leave is only available for women. Paternity leave is only available to fathers and often attached to a period of leave directly after the child’s birth. In some countries paternity leave also includes an additional period of leave, referred to as a “father’s quota” (Moss and O’Brian 2006).

childbearing shows that low income is the major factor for postponement of the first child (Thalberg 2011), while in Hungary it has been noted that unemployed women – those with weak ties to the labour market or with poor labour market prospects – use flat-rate leave benefits as a form of unemployment or welfare benefit (Bálint and Köllő 2008).

Table 2: Parental leave systems in ten European countries (2006/07).

	DK	FI	SW	DE	NL	UK	ES	CZ	HU	PL
Maternity leave										
Duration	18w	17.5w	12 ⁽²⁾	14w	16w	52w	16w	26w	24w	18w
Payment (%)	100	90/70 ⁽¹⁾	80	100	100	90/FR ⁽³⁾	100	69	70	100
Paternity leave										
Duration	2w	18d +24d ⁽⁴⁾	10d +60d ⁽⁵⁾	-	2d	2w	15d	-	5d	-
Payment (%)	100	75/70 ⁽⁶⁾	80	-	100	FR	100		100	
Parental leave										
Duration	32w	158d	480d	52w	13w	26w	3y	3y	2y/1y	36m
Payment (%)	100	75/70 ⁽⁶⁾	80/FR ⁽⁷⁾	67	€668/m ⁽⁸⁾	UP	UP	FR	70/FR ⁽⁹⁾	FR/MT
Full time equivalent of paid parental leave										
Maternity leave	18	16.9	9.6	14	16	9.3	16	13.7	16.8	18
Paternity leave	2	5.7	9.3	0	0.4	0.3	2	0	1	0
Parental leave	32	35.8	52.8	34.8	0	0	0	50.3	72.8	16.1

Abbreviations: d=days, w=weeks, m=months, y=years, FR=flat-rate payment, MT=means tested, UP=unpaid.

Notes:

(1) 56 days with a 90 percent replacement level and 49 days with a 70 percent replacement level.

(2) Sweden has no general entitlement to maternity leave, unless the woman works in a job considered injurious for the unborn child.

(3) Six weeks at 90 percent replacement level and a flat-rate payment for 33 weeks. Remaining leave is unpaid.

(4) The 24 days is the "father's month".

(5) The 60 days is the "father's months".

(6) The first 30 days at 75 percent replacement and the rest of the days at 70 percent.

(7) 390 days with an 80 percent replacement level and 90 days with flat-rate payment.

(8) Payment is a tax reduction of 50 percent of €1,335/month at full-time leave.

(9) Two years with a replacement level of 70 percent and an additional year with flat-rate payment.

Source: Moss and Korintus 2008; OECD 2010a.

The national leave systems also vary in terms of duration and payment levels (Table 2). To facilitate cross-national comparisons of systems, entitlement to paid leave is measured in the *full-time equivalent (FTE) of paid leave*. The FTE of paid leave can thus be described as the duration of paid leave if paid at 100 percent of last earnings (OECD 2010a).¹⁴ Table 2 shows that the Nordic countries, the Czech Republic and Hungary have the most generous leave systems (accounting for the total FTE of paid leave), while the Netherlands, Spain and the UK have the lowest FTE of paid leave, and mainly provide paid maternity leave. In regard to paternity leave, only Sweden and Finland have a statutory paternity leave for more than one month (which is part of the parental leave), while Germany, the Czech Republic

¹⁴ Full-time equivalent (FTE) = Duration of leave in weeks*payment (as a percentage of the earnings of an average wage) received by the claimant. The FTE is also called "full-rate equivalent" (FRE) (OECD 2010a).

and Poland do not have any statutory paternity leave entitlement. However, Germany introduced a “father’s quota” in 2007 (Moss 2009).¹⁵

Take-up of leave entitlements

The available information on leave benefit take-up indicates that it is mainly women who use their parental rights, but the extent to which the right is exercised varies across the selected countries (Moss and Korintus 2008; Moss 2010).¹⁶ Nearly all mothers in the Nordic countries, the Czech Republic and Hungary make use of maternity leave (parental leave in Sweden), and especially in Germany, the Netherlands and Poland, where maternity leave is mandatory (Moss and Korintus 2008). The take-up rate of maternity leave is lower in the UK and in Spain. In 2005 about 65 percent of all children born in Spain had a mother who took maternity leave. In the UK, data on children born in 2000 indicate that 81 percent of employed mothers in the UK took maternity leave (Moss 2009).

In regard to the take-up of parental leave, the general tendency is that where parental leave is unpaid, or the replacement levels relatively low, the take-up is relatively low, as for instance in the UK, Spain, the Netherlands and Poland. Higher take-up rates of parental leave are found in the Nordic countries, Germany, the Czech Republic and Hungary (Moss and Korintus 2008), where the FTE of paid parental leave is relatively generous.

By promoting a gender neutral parental leave, the EU is sending a message to its member states that parenting includes men’s right to be active fathers. This means that the fathers are not restricted to the paternity leave (where such exists) and can make use of the parental leave. In Sweden, where two months of the parental leave are earmarked for fathers, their use of parental leave is relatively high. Fathers’ take-up of parental leave in Spain, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, where no such father’s quota exists, is very low (Moss and Korintus 2008). In Sweden and Germany, fathers’ take-up has increased after these countries introduced a father’s quota (Moss 2010; Moss and Korintus 2008; Reich 2010), indicating that these policy changes have increased fathers’ capabilities to make claims for care. However, despite a shift towards more active fathering in all countries, the take-up of parental leave is still highly gendered; women take the lion’s share.

¹⁵ In 2010, the UK extended the right to paternity leave with additional paternity pay from two weeks to up to 6 months during the child’s first year (if the mother returns to work). This leave cannot be claimed during the first 20 weeks after the child’s birth, however, and benefit is only paid during the period that the mother is entitled to maternity benefit (Moss 2010).

¹⁶ Information on leave benefit take-up is irregular and inconsistent across Europe, which makes systematic cross-national comparison difficult (Moss and Korintus 2008).

Childcare policies

In 1992, the European Council recommended that member states develop affordable and accessible childcare services to enable parents to reconcile work and family obligations (92/241/EEC). After the Barcelona Summit in 2002, the European Council stated an even clearer goal: that by 2010 member states should provide childcare for at least 90 percent of children between the age of three and school age, and for at least 33 percent of children under three (European Council 2002). This objective is framed as a measure to promote gender equality by removing disincentives for female labor force participation; but in 2006 only eleven countries within the EU27 had reached the target of 33 percent for the youngest children,¹⁷ and only seven countries the target for the older children (OECD 2010b),¹⁸ indicating a persistent deficit of childcare facilities in several countries.

Across the ten selected countries, the accessibility and affordability of childcare services varies widely, from a social right with highly subsidized fees in the Nordic countries to fairly costly services in the Netherlands, the UK and Spain, where the demand for childcare services far exceeds the supply. In the CEE countries, the costs are comparatively low, yet even here the demand greatly exceeds the supply for the youngest children (Plantenga and Remery 2005, 2009).

Enrolment rates and average hours of attendance

Enrolment rates in formal childcare for pre-school children indicate the structural provision of care services (Leitner 2003). In 2006, the enrolment rate for children under three was lowest in Germany and the CEE countries. Only Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK and Spain had reached the Barcelona target of 33 percent, and only Denmark, the UK and Spain had reached the target of 90 percent for children aged 3-5 (see Table 3). The low rates in the CEE countries is closely linked to parental leave systems that encourage women to leave the labour market for a relatively long period of time when having children (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006). The average

¹⁷ Countries that had reached the target for the youngest children in 2006: Denmark (63 percent), the Netherlands (53.9 percent), Sweden (45.3 percent), Portugal (43.6 percent), Luxembourg (43.4 percent), France (42.9 percent), Belgium (41.7 percent), the UK (39.7 percent), Estonia (36 percent), Spain (33.9 percent). In 2008, the enrolment rates for the youngest children had not increased to any greater extent within the EU27. Several countries even displayed decreased enrolment rates; Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Poland and Slovak Republic (OECD 2011).

¹⁸ Countries who had reached the target for older children in 2006 are; Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Malta, Spain and the UK (OECD 2010b). In 2008, the enrolment rates for the older children had not changed to any greater extent within the EU27, except for Germany and Sweden, which had reached the target of 90 percent for the older children (OECD 2011).

weekly hours of childcare attendance is highest in the Nordic countries, Spain, Hungary and Poland, where children under three attend childcare services 28-35 hours per week. Lowest attendance is found in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and the Czech Republic (Table 3).

Table 3: Childcare costs and enrolment in ten European countries.

	<i>DK</i>	<i>FI</i>	<i>SW</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>NL</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>CZ</i>	<i>HU</i>	<i>PL</i>
Childcare fees per two-year old in % of average wage (1)	8.4	7.6	4.5	9.1	17.5	24.7	30.3	8.6	4.2	6.8
0-2 year old children (2)										
Enrolment rate	63.0	26.3	45.3	13.6	53.9	39.7	33.9	2.6	10.5	8.6
Average hours of attendance/week	34	35	29	22	17	18	28	17	29	35
3-5 year old children (2)										
Enrolment rate	90.7	69.9	85.6	89.3	57.6	90.5	97.7	82.3	86.8	40.7

Source: (1) OECD 2010c [data from 2004]. (2) OECD 2010b [data from 2006].

The overview of childcare services reveals that the Barcelona targets are not yet met in all countries. Furthermore, costly childcare, opening hours incompatible with full-time work or work outside regular hours, and low quality of the facilities might discourage parents from utilising them (European Commission 2008), which in turn might compel women to withdraw from paid work during a long period of time after childbirth or turn to informal care arrangements. For instance, in Spain and Poland the extended family is an important substitute for formal childcare when parents are at work (Mínguez 2010; Moss and Korintus 2008).

Parental leave and childcare services are not only policy instruments to increase parents' ability to combine work and family life, they are also measures for increasing female labour force participation. This was also a goal set by the Lisbon Treaty in 2000, which states that 60 percent of women are to be employed by 2010 (European Council 2000). In 2008 this goal was met in all ten countries in the studies, when considering the employment rate for all women in their childbearing years (Figure 5). For mothers with young children (0-2 years), however, this goal has not been reached in the majority of the ten countries. This can be linked to the length of parental leave and the persistent lack of childcare facilities. The employment rates for mothers with pre-school children (3-5 years) have not reached the 60 percent goal in the UK, Spain, the Czech Republic or Hungary (Figure 5), indicating that mothers in some contexts may face greater difficulties in re-entering the labour market. However, in some countries a high maternal employment rate coincides with a large proportion of part-time work, which will be further discussed in the next section.

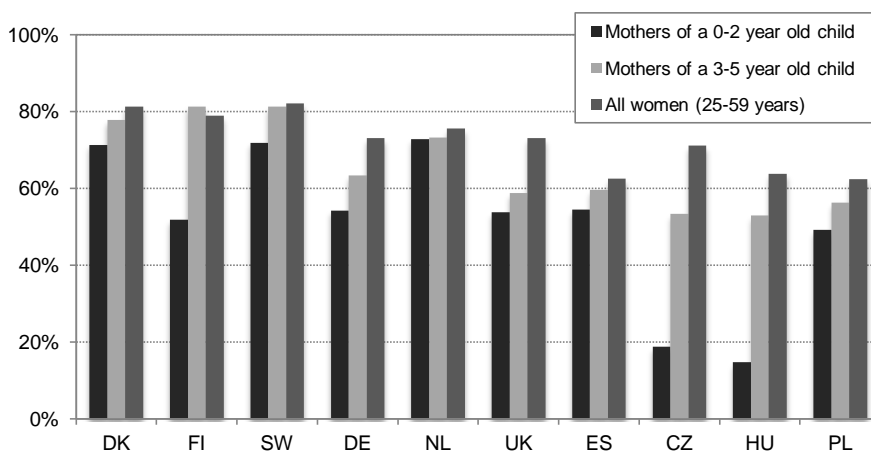


Figure 5: Maternal and female employment rates, 2007, in ten European countries.

Note: Year for maternal employment in Denmark 1999 (OECD 2010d).

Source: OECD 2010d; Eurostat 2011.

Policies on work hours

Working hours are a relevant factor for the ability to achieve work–life balance, i.e. the more hours spent at work, the fewer hours are left for other activities. A directive directly linked to work–life balance is the directive on part-time work (97/81/EC), aimed at eliminating discrimination of part-time workers and enabling men and women to combine work and family life. This directive proposes that member states modify their social security system to include part-time workers, and that an employer should, as far as possible, consider workers’ requests to transfer from full-time to part-time work or from part-time to full-time.

Regular work hours and part-time work in practice

Normative working hours in most EU member states is 40 hours per week (overtime excluded), regulated by law or collective agreements (see ILO 2007). The collectively bargained working week is even below 40 hours in all countries but Hungary and Poland (Table 4). However, average working hours for full-time workers exceeds these collective agreements in all ten countries. In 2007, men from the UK, the Czech Republic and Poland had the longest average working hours (about 44 hours a week), while average hours for full-time working women ranged from 38.5 in Denmark to 41.1 in the Czech Republic (Table 4). This indicates that the time spent at work varies significantly across Europe, as does the gender gap within countries. The latter is even more evident when considering extent of part-time.

The part-time directive is implemented in most European countries as the *right to request* part-time work. However, the eligibility for this statutory right varies, as well as employers' grounds for refusing such requests, and the right to return to full-time (Fagan and Walthery 2011a; ILO 2007; OECD 2010e, 2010f). Furthermore, part-time entitlement is often related to the parental leave system. In all the selected countries, parents with small children can request or apply for part-time work as part-time parental leave (Anxo et al. 2007a, 2007b; Moss and Korintus 2008); but in some contexts these requests might not be executed or realised, which relates to whether part-time work is a legal entitlement or just a right to request. Entitlements are stronger in Finland, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands in terms of the right to work part-time with an automatic reversion to full-time (OECD 2010e, 2010f). Parents in the Czech Republic and Poland do not have a statutory provision for parents to use parental leave on a part-time basis (Anxo et al. 2007a, 2007b). Part-timers in the UK, Spain, the Czech Republic and Hungary do not have an automatic right to revert to full-time (Table 4).

Even if this part-time directive is gender neutral, it has a clearly gendered dimension in practice. It is primarily women who work part-time. The proportion of women (aged 25-59) working part-time in the selected countries ranges from less than 15 percent in Finland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to more than 40 percent in Germany and the UK. The Netherlands tops the list with about 74 percent of the women working part-time (Table 4).

The gender gap in part-time work is extensive, except in the CEE countries where part-time is less widespread among women. One explanation for this gender gap is women's main care responsibilities and the potential childcare problems they may encounter, hence part-time can be a strategy to reconcile work and family life. For some women, part-time work may be a preferred alternative selected from a range of other forms of childcare or working arrangements, while for others it may be a constrained decision, especially if childcare services or other options are limited, expensive or socially undesirable (Fagan 2004). The decision to work part-time may thus not be an individual choice, but rather the result of lack of institutional support for working mothers. However, it is important to note that the definition of part-time is not uniform (Van der Lippe and Dijk 2002).¹⁹ It is therefore relevant to consider the number of hours that women usually work, since some labour laws or social protection systems use an hour threshold with

¹⁹ For example; Eurostat (2009) bases the definition of part-time work mainly on respondents' information. The OECD (2009a) normally uses 30 hours as the limit between full-time and part-time work.

fewer social entitlements (Fagan 2004; Montanari 2009). Further, short part-time employment is often related to lower wages and poorer working conditions (Lee 2004). OECD statistics reveal that there are vast differences in women's working hours. The majority of women in Spain and the CEE countries work more than 39 hours per week. Short part-time (<20 hours/week) is most frequent in Germany and the Netherlands, while long part-time (30-39 hours/week) is most frequent in Denmark and Finland. The majority of women in Sweden and the UK work part-time, but the number of hours varies (Table 4).

Table 4: Working hours and part-time regulations and outcomes in ten European countries (2007).

	DK	FI	SW	DE	NL	UK	ES	CZ	HU	PL
Work hours										
Collectively agreed work hours/week (1)	37	37.5	37.5	37.6	37.5	37.3	37.9	38	40	40
Women's average working hours (full-timers) (2)	38.5	38.8	40.2	40.3	39.2	40.4	40.4	41.1	40.3	40.7
Men's average working hours (full-timers) (2)	41.6	41.6	41.5	42.4	41.3	44.5	42.9	44	41.4	44.7
Part-time work										
Full-time reversibility (3)	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Priority to full-time vacancy (3)	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Female part-time rate (age 25-59) (4)	29.9	13.3	36.6	47.6	73.7	40.0	21.6	7.0	5.0	10.2
Male part-time rate (age 25-59) (4)	6.4	4.8	7.5	7.2	14.2	5.4	2.6	1.1	2.0	4.2
Women's usual work hours (25-54 years) (5)										
<20 hours/week	8.4	5.7	5.4	20.5	26.9	17.5	10.3	1.1	0.4	4.0
20-29 hours/week	10.2	6.1	10.7	17.8	28.8	17.2	12.7	3.2	3.2	8.5
30-34 hours/week	19.2	9.0	19.8	9.2	16.5	8.7	6.3	3.2	2.4	3.7
35-39 hours/week	44.3	56.5	19.7	21.0	16.0	27.0	18.4	13.0	1.3	2.6
40-44 hours/week	10.0	16.5	39.5	27.2	10.8	16.5	42.1	68.6	84.7	66.8
45+ hours/week	7.8	5.5	4.8	4.3	1.1	13.2	10.2	10.7	4.4	14.2

Note: Full-time reversibility refers to an automatic reversion from part-time to full-time as an entitlement.

Source: (1) Eurofound 2007. (2) Eurostat 2011. (3) OECD 2010e. (4) Eurostat 2010. (5) OECD 2009b.

The policy discussion in this section underscores the point that institutional settings provide the context for individuals' action (Immergut 1998). The various conditions seen across the countries are more or less supportive of parents' capabilities to be both earners and carers. Yet, the institutional support and incentives for men to be more active fathers are still quite weak in most countries, except in the Nordic ones. As a result, the outcomes of these policies have a clearly gendered dimension; women still bear the main responsibility for care. After they have children they take the bulk of parental leave, work part-time to a higher extent than men, or withdraw from the labour market. This overview of the policies and practices also suggests that men's and women's capabilities for work-life balance vary within and across institutional settings.

Concluding remarks

The objective of this thesis has been to address various facets of work–life balance in a European comparative perspective. It examines the extent to which institutional factors, in terms of policies and societal norms, working conditions and individual resources influence individuals' capabilities to have a family and to engage in family life. When applying the capability approach, the four separate studies have revealed a clear linkage between these factors and individual capability.

The first study reveals that economic security is an important factor in the family building process. However, the association between economic uncertainties and short-term childbearing intentions varies by the policy support for work-family reconciliation in the country, as well as by the woman's educational level and the number of children she already has. By applying the capabilities approach to short-term childbearing intentions, this study reveals that although individual decisions take place at a psychological level, it is important to embed individual decision processes in a broader societal context in order to reveal the opportunities and constraints that shape women's childbearing plans. In order to understand the processes underlying these decisions, this study shows that more complex multi-dimensional models are needed.

The second study focuses on the impact of family-friendly working conditions on young adult women's childbearing in Sweden. This study highlights the importance for our understanding of women's childbearing behaviour to account for actual working conditions at the workplace, and not only labour force attachment. The advantage of applying the capability approach is that it imposes multi-dimensional analytical lenses that enable us to see the links between the institutional context (laws and regulations), workplace practices, and individual resources. This study shows that individual decisions to have children, along with individual factors cannot be decoupled from institutional factors and working conditions, as all these dimensions shape women's capability to enter motherhood or to have additional children.

The third study analyses gender differences in work-to-home and home-to-work conflict within and across in ten European countries and shows that policies regarding work-family reconciliation and gendered norms are inter-

twined with expectations regarding work–life balance and perceived work–home conflict. Applying the capability approach to this issue allows us to go beyond the widely applied demand-resource perspective, in which the individual’s home and work demands are reflected in perceived role conflict. This study emphasises the importance of incorporating an institutional/normative framework for understanding how perceptions of strain and time demands are embedded.

In the fourth study two basic questions are asked: how are resources converted into agency for work–life balance, and what are the substantive freedoms to do so? We find great agency inequalities between working parents in Sweden and Hungary, which can be derived from differences in institutional resources, structural features of the economy and labour markets, as well as cultural/societal norms. This study adds to our knowledge about institutional settings (laws, regulations and norms) and how they are translated into agency and sense of entitlement to exercise rights to care. It also underscores the importance of evaluating work-family reconciliation policies in terms of capabilities and agency.

The capability approach has shown itself to be an innovative and effective instrument for exploring the complex multi-dimensional space of work–life balance; also for identifying constraints and possibilities within and across national institutional contexts that either obstruct or support people’s capabilities for work–life balance. This includes their plans to have children, their realised childbearing, their expectations and perceptions regarding work–home conflict, and their sense of entitlement to make claims for work–life balance. This has been a fascinating, but challenging, endeavour.

Abstract of the studies

Study I: *Capabilities and childbearing intentions in Europe: The association between reconciliation policies, economic uncertainties and women's fertility plans*

This article investigates the association between economic uncertainties, work-family reconciliation policies and women's short-term childbearing intentions in ten European countries. I introduce the capability approach to this issue and argue that short-term childbearing intentions are an indicator of women's capabilities to start a family or to have additional children. Using data from the European Social Survey, the analysis reveals that the association between economic uncertainties and short-term childbearing varies by the number of children already born, education and institutional contexts. In some countries, having a job have a positive impact on childless women's short-term intentions, while in other countries, low educated childless women out of the labour market are those most likely to intend to have a child in the near future. Other aspects of economic uncertainties, namely perceived job and income insecurity, have a negative impact on short-term childbearing intentions, regardless of motherhood status. The analysis also shows that the combination of weaker institutional support for work-family reconciliation, perceived job and income insecurity and low educational skills are associated with lower childbearing intentions, and the pattern across the ten countries is slightly stronger for childless women. This study underscores the importance of embedding individual decision processes in a broader social societal context.

Study II: *Family-friendly working conditions and childbearing: A capability approach to fertility behaviour among young adult women in Sweden*

Previous studies have shown that unfavourable working conditions, in terms of overtime, unsocial and inflexible working, etc., influence men's and women's work-family conflict. The relationship between working conditions and childbearing has rarely been studied, however. This study addresses the impact of family-friendly working conditions and individual

resources on young adult women's capability to have children in Sweden, and whether these factors have different impact on childless women's and mothers' further childbearing behaviour. The conceptual framework is inspired by Amartya Sen's capability approach, which helps to advance our understanding of how institutional context, workplace practices and individual life situation shape women's propensity to have children. Analysis of data extracted from the Swedish panel survey YAPS shows that especially the transition to the second child is associated with women's family-friendly working conditions, while the partner's family-friendly working conditions is associated with the transition to both first and second births. The analysis also reveals that family-friendly working conditions are most salient for the less educated and low income childless women's transition to motherhood, and for low educated mothers' second birth.

Study III: *Does Gender Matter? A Capability Approach to Work-to-Home and Home-to-Work Conflict in a European Perspective*

This article examines gender differences in work-to-home conflict and home-to-work conflict in ten European countries and considers to what extent such differences can be linked to the institutional/societal context. The study combines the conventional demand-resource approach with an institutional framework on policies and norms inspired by Amartya Sen's capability approach. In applying this framework, I assume that individuals' perceptions of work-home conflict and the capability to achieve work-life balance are institutionally embedded. The study uses data from the European Social Survey. The analyses reveal that the two dimensions of conflict are gender asymmetrical and linked to patterns that result from men's and women's traditional home and work spheres. The cross-country comparative analysis shows greater gender differences in countries with weaker policy support for work-family reconciliation and more traditional gender norms. These gendered patterns would not have been apparent if only work-to-home conflict had been analysed.

Study IV: *Agency and Capabilities to Achieve a Work-Life Balance: A Comparison of Sweden and Hungary*

This study develops a conceptual framework with a capabilities and agency approach for analyzing work-life balance (WLB) applied in two societies (Hungary and Sweden), which have different working time regimes, levels of precarious employment, and gender equality discourses and norms. In-

spired by Amartya Sen, we present a model illustrating how agency freedom for WLB depends on multiple resources at the individual, work organizational, institutional, and normative/societal levels. Using a unique qualitative survey conducted in two cities, Budapest and Stockholm, we analyze how mothers and fathers subjectively experience the tensions between family and work demands, and their possibilities for alternative choices (agency freedom). We find similarities in these tensions involving time pressure and time poverty, cutting across gender and education. Our Hungarian parents, nevertheless, experience greater agency inequalities for WLB, which reflect weaker institutional resources (conversion factors) as well as cultural/societal norms that act as constraints for WLB claims in the workplace and household. Our study reveals that Swedish parents, both men and women, express a strong sense of entitlement to exercise rights to care.

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