



## Ideas, Rules, and Agency: Public Bureaucrats and the Evolution of Family Policies in Hungary and Poland

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*PhD thesis defence on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2009*

### Abstract

The starting point for the thesis is the striking difference between the mixes of family policies in the two post-communist countries: Hungary and Poland. I argue that Poland can be best viewed as a case of *implicit familialism*, and Hungary as a case of what I call, *optional familialism*. Polish family policy is largely residual in the sense that social programs in Poland leave the sphere of care almost solely to the family. In Hungary, in contrast, we find a much more ‘progressive’ family support system with relatively generous benefits and services in support of women and childcare.

In my view, the differences in family policy between these two countries are in themselves substantively interesting. We need to know more about family policies in this part of the world. But I am also interested in explaining these differences. I find it puzzling that these two countries share broadly common historical experiences having both undergone massive *and similar* regime changes over the past 50 years – yet appear to have developed such different policy systems. It would be reasonable to expect that they would have similar social (and in this case: family) policies. What we find, however, is that in spite of the common political and economic transformations - from early democratizing nations, to communist dictatorships, and finally to capitalist democracies - family policies have followed remarkably consistent patterns in each country. Indeed, the family policy regimes found today in each of these countries have more in common with the regimes found in each country 50 years ago than they do with each other. The question is: why?

My main argument is that the development of family policies in Hungary and Poland is the example of a path-dependent institutional evolution. Following the authors that have recently emphasised the role of agency, the thesis presents family policy development in these two countries as the case of an agent-based mechanism of institutional evolution. In particular, I describe the role of different kinds of actors in defining the problems and providing solutions within the field of professional and family life. Furthermore, the mechanism focuses on the role of public bureaucrats playing with the formal and informal rules governing the administrative mode of operation.



Jury: Sven Steinmo (EUI) Supervisor, Ann Orloff (Northwestern University), László Bruszt (EUI), Julia O'Connor (Univ. Ulster)

**Bio:** Dorota Szelewa began her doctoral studies at the European University Institute in 2005, after graduating from the Master Program in Political Science at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. Previously, she completed academic programs at Warsaw University (Poland) and Dalarna University, Sweden. Her research interests are focussed on the questions of family policy and childcare, especially in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. She has published articles devoted to these issues in Hungarian, German, Polish, English and French, and in journals such as *Social Politics* and *Journal of European Social Policy*. Within the broader discipline of political science Dorota Szelewa is particularly interested in the issues of transformation of social policy, methodology of comparative studies, public administration, bureaucracy and organisation studies, as well as generally understood issues of institutional evolution. After defending her thesis in September 2009, Dorota is starting a two-year Postdoctoral Fellowship at Bremen International Graduate School of Social Science.