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AND GENDER ROLES**

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Child Care in Post-communist Romania between Familialist Ideology, Labour Market and Gender Roles

Ionela BALUTA¹

Abstract

Child care is an issue that should be studied as a social and political process involving several dimensions of public policies, social representations, cultural values and social practices. This article starts from the premise that child care is a key indicator for the well-being and family policies of modern democratic societies and of their gender regimes. It seeks to analyse the Romanian post-communist legislative framework and public policies architecture regarding the child care regulations, provisions and ideologies. After a brief survey of the principal concepts employed, the author refers to a brief historical context, the Communist period being indispensable for understanding the political, economic and social factors affecting child care since 1989. The second part of the article examines the post-communist policies concerning child care and equal opportunities (the state of legislation, statistics, government strategies and the resources deployed). The main hypothesis of the article is that in post-communist Romania, at the level of legislation and public provisions, child care is implemented through the lens of a political ideology and within some public policies strongly influenced by familialism, while labour market is governed by competitions and neo-liberal perspective. Thus, the principle of gender equality plays a marginal role in child care provisions.

Keywords: child care, public policies, familialism, labour market, gender equality.

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Introduction

The fall of Communism in 1989 meant not just a change of political regime but also a re-shaping of economic structures and public policies, of social representations and institutions. The topics of “national importance” at this time were how to build and strengthen democracy, how to re-write the basis of law and order in the country, how to switch over to a market economy – and alongside these themes, the topics of child care as seen through the lens of work-life balance/articulation (Crompton & Brockmann, 2006) and of gender equality were minor topics for discussion in Romanian public life during the transition period.² This is evident in various ways, among them the process of law-making and the structure of public institutions, which focus on creating a family policy informed by familialist ideology and by traditional images of gender roles (Dohotariu, 2013). On the other hand, there is a normative discourse on the role of parents in child care; this discourse was first developed by psychologists but can now also be found in the media and in specialist journals and shows the clear influence of international theory and practice. The discourse increasingly emphasises the responsibility of the parents not just in child-raising and child care but also in education and child development, following the distinction between parenthood and parenting (Cojocaru, 2008; Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). Thus several social and political processes and cultural meanings, often contradictory, all meet in child care, and child care depends (or should depend) on the intersection of different public policies; family and child care policies, labour and employment policy as this affects the interplay of family and professional life and, last but not least, equal opportunity policies. More precisely, what legislative framework and which architecture of public policies regulate child care in post-communist Romania? How far do these laws and regulations reflect gender equality and social equality? What choices are open to social actors who are caught between various arguments, with pressure brought to bear upon them from many directions? These questions were my starting point in the following discussion.

My approach combines the methods of documentary source analysis, statistical data analysis and content analysis using the following source types: (a) legislation governing access to the labour market from the point of view of work-life balance and legislation on equal opportunities; (b) legislation and policies on familial/parental leave; (c) statistics on women’s and men’s participation in the labour market and on public infrastructure for child care, with comparative data on the Communist and post-communist periods; (d) country reports or research findings on the labour market; (e) the strategies of the post-communist governments on equality of opportunity between men and women.

² Concern for the situation of children usually reaches the top of the political and media agenda thanks to pressure from external campaigns, such as were launched for the children in orphanages and for international adoption in the 1990s.

After a brief survey of the main concepts employed, I will summarise the state of legislation and the statistical data for the Communist period, which are indispensable if we are to understand the political, economic and social factors affecting child care since 1989. In the second part of the article I examine policies since 1989 (the state of legislation, government strategies and the resources deployed) concerning child care and equal opportunities. I will confine my discussion here to children who are cared for in families with full legal parental responsibility, leaving aside the situation of abandoned children and orphans who are wards of the state. Analysis of the statistical data on women's and men's participation in the labour market and of the data on public infrastructure for child care (nurseries and pre-schools) will allow discussion of the choice effectively available to social actors. I then examine all these data through the lens of social representations of the role of the parent and gender roles, in an attempt to identify the forces at work in social practices and to point out the specific features of gender regime and child care in the Romanian case.

Leave policies, family policies and gender equality

The literature available generally underlines that in contemporary societies and within the broader context of gender (welfare) regimes and gender arrangements, social work and social policies are fundamental to an analysis of the (re)construction of social, financial and cultural values and practices of child care: "The relationship between employment, care and gender is still contentious, going to the heart of beliefs about childhood and parenthood, men's and women's roles" (Kamerman & Moss, 2011: 5). Child care as a part of social care "refers to a wide range of activities, relations and agencies involved in providing for physical and emotional requirements for those in need of this and the cultural, normative, economic and social frameworks within which they are assigned and carried out" (Pfau-Effinger & Rostgaard, 2011: 2). Considering their multidimensional nature, *care* and *work* are concepts difficult to define. Until 1990, *care* was often taken to be synonymous with unpaid work, mainly provided by women in the household and based above all on the strong emotional relationship between the carer and the cared-for, so that such work has often been called the *labour of love*. In other words, *care* is considered a necessary activity based in "feelings" and "affection", while *social care* has been studied as a public activity and as paid work (Pfau-Effinger & Rostgaard, 2011: 15-19).

Thus the way in which legislation affecting child care comes into being should be studied as a social and political process involving several dimensions of social policy – and the same is true of the institutional and social framework. All these frames require several levels of analysis; structures, legislation, stereotypes and social representations may all be studied at the macro level, while the decisions,

behaviours and values of the social actors may be studied at the micro level. It seems to me that three of these dimensions are indispensable for understanding child care as a socio-political process (though in fact they frequently overlap and are hard to separate).

- a) Leave policies (Kamerman & Moss, 2011: 9) as related to other types of public policies, especially those on ‘childhood education and care services’ (ECEC). The type of welfare regime, the shape of the labour market and the existing resources and infrastructure for child care all directly influence the behaviours and choices of social actors as to how they implement child care. Certainly many emotional factors are also at work here, such as “love, duty and guilt”, but the provision of care also has direct economic implications which impose a pragmatic choice upon parents, who must strike a balance between the opportunity cost of care and the labour market (Simozzi, 2011:127-134).
- b) Along with the type of breadwinner model (Gauthier, 2002), family policies play a very important role in creating structures which determine behaviour – either both parents take part in the labour market, with a short period of child care leave and the use of public provisions and structures for child care (which, in this instance, is *social work*), or child care happens in the family, with longer periods of child care leave or through other family or informal arrangements (a situation closer to the idea of *labour of love*, where the mother’s role is accorded more importance). Undoubtedly there is a whole range of possible practices and behaviours in between these two options (Engster & Olofsdotter Stensöta, 2011:84). The literature available refers to three complex processes of: a. *de-familialisation* – where the state provides for family measures such as day-care (Lewis 2001; Lewis & Giullari 2005); b. *individualisation* (Daly, 2011); c. *re-familialisation* – where the state provides paternal parental leave and generous cash for care benefits (Bjørnholt, 2012). All these processes involve complex aspects which make it ever more difficult to categorise family policies, since every policy which affects the family as a social institution or family life goes beyond the traditional domain of family policy, involving elements from the spectrum of several social policies: “parental leaves, cash benefits, tax allowances (especially those relating to the care of children), and service provision for families with children” (Daly 2011: 3).
- c) *Gender equality*, understood from a dual perspective: (1) *The gender welfare regime*, based on the link between public policies (including perspectives on the economic structure of the labour market) and politically supported and legitimated gender relationships (for example, households with dual earners, one-and-a-half earners and male breadwinner) (Lewis, 2010); (2) *Gender arrangement* as a “specific field of interrelations of

cultural factors with institutional, social and economic factors that frame women's (and men's) behaviour and the structures that this behaviour produces" (Pfau-Effinger & Rostgaard, 2011: 38). Without in any way minimising the role of the other factors and dimensions, I wish to stress the importance of the gender dimension and its transversal nature: "Gender is central to the transformations of the contemporary welfare state, in a host of ways. Familial and work arrangements that had underpinned systems of social provision and regulation for many decades have been destabilized by changing gender relations, reflected in increased levels of mothers' employment, women's greater autonomy vis-à-vis partnering, reproduction and sexuality; declining fertility; and the terminal decline of housewifery and 'male breadwinner' households" (Orloff & Bruno, 2009: 406-407). For instance, in a context which considers that young children should be cared for at home by parents (usually by the mother), parental leave should be longer and the policies for early childhood education and care (ECEC) should consequently be re-examined. Otherwise, if this solution is considered to compromise gender equality where young children should benefit from ECEC policies, parental leave should be shorter and the ECEC policies should be developed (Kamerman & Moss, 2011: 10-11).

Thus our starting premise is that child care is a key indicator for the well-being and family policies of modern democratic societies and of their gender regimes. Apart from the transversal aspects and common elements (especially at the European level), national contexts largely influence how child care is implemented at the level of public policies or through the choices of social actors. In the case of post-communist Romania, we advance the hypothesis that at the level of legislation and public provisions, child care is implemented through the lens of a political ideology and public policies strongly influenced by familialism, and that the principle of gender equality plays a marginal role. Thus the choices of social actors are subject to multiple constraints and pressures: the public care provisions are designed from a familialist viewpoint, the social values on gender roles and on the mother's role in particular, and on the other hand the structures and ideology of a labour market governed by the criteria of competition and efficiency, which leaves only a marginal space for equality of opportunity and work-life balance.

A brief historical context: structures and legislation under the Communist regime

Among the numerous ideological, social and economic changes enacted by the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe was the massive inclusion of women in the workplace. Communist ideology considered sexual equality as part of equality between social classes, and did not encourage the idea that gender roles might be abolished by promoting images of men sharing the household work and child-raising. Broadly speaking, the equality between men and women proclaimed in the public sphere (especially in the workplace but also in the political realm) was not developed in the domestic sphere (Miroiu, 2004: 199-207; Pasti, 2003: 109-112). The original Communist ideology basically followed Engel's belief that women could be emancipated by collectivization of women's tasks coupled with women's participation in the workplace. Since traditional gender roles within partnerships were never called into question, whatever was not taken over by the state (through provision of public services) continued to be women's work, thus giving rise to the concept of the "double work burden" (Saxonberg, 2011: 53-55).

In participation in the workplace, according to a United Nations report on Romania, "In 1984 10.5 million out of a total population of 22.7 million had been actively employed in the economic and social sector, 71 per cent being employed in industry and other non-agricultural sectors and 29 per cent in agriculture, whereas in 1965 only 43.5 per cent of 9.6 million actively employed had been working in non-agricultural sectors and 56.5 per cent in agriculture s...t Over 5,500,000 jobs had been created between 1950 and 1984" (Second periodic report on Romania, UN, 1985, 2-3). As for the distribution by gender, in 1985 women represented 40% of the workforce and held 27% of management roles. Communist party ideology held that in all other matters the planned economy would resolve all social problems, an attitude which explains the dismantling of structures for social welfare.³

Family life was regulated through the Soviet Family Code adopted in Romania in 1954 (Dohotariu, 2012: 63); maternity leave and family allowances put resources into place for all sectors of society, although the way in which this system was implemented reflected a traditionalist view: only maternity leave was regulated, family allowances were paid mostly to men, but all special programs were labelled "mother and child" (Miroiu, 2004: 206). Maternity leave could not exceed 112 days (Doboş, 2010:248-250).⁴ A system of public pre-schools and

³ As Saxonberg shows, the ministries of social welfare were dismantled in all Communist countries (Saxonberg, 2011: 61).

⁴ Unlike Poland, where parental leave was extended to three years in 1972, (Heinen & Wator, 2006). For a detailed analysis on the types of family allowance payments and other measures proposed by the Romanian Communist government to support families and increase the birth rate, cf. Doboş, 2010, chapter V, pp. 223-263.

nurseries developed to care for smaller children, especially in the urban areas, and these were in principle available to all sectors of society. Thus by the end of Communist rule, there were 840 nurseries with 47,239 children enrolled (NIS 1, 2⁵). Such aspects of child care were largely shared by all Eastern European Communist states; in Romania there was also the special case of a powerful nationalist strand accompanied by hard-line reproductive policies (Kligman, 2000; Doboş, 2010) which transformed the birth rate into a political goal and made motherhood into a major component of the regime's ideology. Although it may seem that the party lines promoted the family model of double bread-winner, the pro-natalist policies also maintained differentiated gender roles in the private sphere and were amplified by propaganda in praise of the woman's role as mother. Communist rule thereby created further tension at the level of gender regime and gender arrangement, influencing post-communist developments not least in how policies and practices around child care were implemented.

The legislative framework and child care provisions in post-communist public policies

As far as legislation is concerned, we may say that the issue of child care has been treated from two different points of view. On the one hand, the issue of children who for various reasons have become the wards of the state has seen major transformations in the post-communist period, including the development of a system of foster parenting (Rus et al. 2011). On the other hand, child care within families, the main focus of our analysis here, is primarily promoted through parental leave and child allowance payments. While parental leave is by now, after several changes in the law, notably generous given the median income in Romania, the child benefit payments themselves have always been almost laughably low (10 Euro/month)⁶. Child care leave was introduced as early as 1990 as an extension of maternity leave. This parental leave lasts for up to two years, and from 2005 the father is also eligible (OUG 148/2005). The legislation on parental leave changed six times between 1990 and 2011, adjusting either the length of the leave (whereby the parent is encouraged to return to work after a year, although there is the possibility of staying at home for two years) or the level of pay.⁷ Paternity leave (of between 5 and 10 days) has also been enshrined in law since 1999 and from 2011 the total period of parental leave contains one month allocated to the other parent (which may not however be used as an additional month by the parent taking the main period of leave; OUG 124/2011; HG57/2012).

⁵ NIS – National Institute of Statistic. I'd like to express my sincere thanks to Cătălin Raiu for the access to the statistical data provided by NIS.

⁶ In fact, the monthly allowance for children up to 2 years old is around 50 EUR, and then it drops to 10 EUR/month (until the age of 18).

⁷ For a more detailed presentation of these changes, see Dohotariu 2013.

On the other hand, public provision of child care services has seen significant cutbacks since 1990. Given that parental leave is granted for a period of two years but the public pre-school system does not take children younger than three years, there is a serious child care problem in the fact that the number of nurseries has fallen from 840 in 1990 to 286 in 2011 (NIS 1).⁸ The number of children enrolled in public nurseries has fallen from 47,239 in 1990 to 12,967 in 2004, then rose again slightly to a figure of 18,114 children in 2012 (NIS 2). Furthermore, the number of pre-school centres has fallen from 12,599 in 1990 to 1,222 in 2012 (NIS 3), which creates serious difficulties especially for those sectors of society at or below the average wage who cannot afford private services (nurseries, pre-school or child minders). The liberalization of the labour market has seen a growing black market encouraging the development of child-minding as a specific type of “care” service. The C.O.R. (Classification of Occupations in Romania) lists three occupations connected to child care: 531101 – child minder; 531102 – governess and 531103 – babysitter. These occupations do not benefit from separate professional status however in any labour market legislation, and their absence from any policy discussions on parental leave or work-life balance shows that in fact these jobs are not seen as social work or as an instrument in work-life policies. The ability to employ a child minder depends strictly on the parents’ budget. We must add here that quite apart from the situation of smaller children, in Romania the situation of school-age children (6-11 years) is problematic: state-sector primary schools end at 12.00 and the after school programmes created in the public sector are absolutely inadequate (for instance there is no such thing in rural areas) and are not provided free of charge. As for the presence of women in the labour market, this continues at a fairly high level (Marinescu & Pricopie 2003). In 1990, the employment rate was 63.7% for men and 51.85% for women (International Labour Organization). In 1991 women represented 44% of the workforce in industry, 56% in telecommunications, 57% education, 43% in administration, etc. (CEDAW 1994: 33). These percentages have held constant up to the present, despite the economic crisis: women represented 45.37% of the workforce in 1996 and 44.66% in 2012 (NIS 4).⁹ Legislation on access to the labour market and the rights and obligations of employers and employees claims to uphold the principle of equality of opportunity, respecting binding European legislation; equal pay for women and men, respect for maternity in the workplace (OUG 96/2003). So far however these legal provisions have not yet been translated into coherent public policy with targeted instruments and resources (Baluta, 2007; Dragolea 2007). Since 1990 the market economy has created significant changes (the closure of

⁸ The situation is similar in most Eastern European countries (Saxonberg, 2011; Heinen & Wator, 2006, 201-202).

⁹ The percentages of working women in the population as a whole are a little higher in a study by the UNDP: 46.5% in 1995, 48.3% in 2000 (UNDP, 2003: 97). Aside from statistical fluctuations arising from data collection methodology, we may note that the percentage of women in the workforce remains high.

unprofitable Communist companies, the promotion of a neo-liberal viewpoint which put the principle of competitiveness centre-stage in political discourse and public policy, etc.), to which are added the economic difficulties of the crisis of the past few years, and as a result measures to ensure social equality and gender equality in the labour market most often remain mere principles in governmental or ministerial strategy.

Thus parental choices as regards child care are subject to multiple stresses. To recap for a moment, we may mention the massive cuts in available public services, the very low income on which the greater part of the population still subsists and a labour market ruled by competition and largely unresponsive to parents' needs for enough time and decent pay. All this is especially true when public opinion surveys show that "working hard" is still seen as a condition for success in life by 80% of Romanians (Barometrul de opinie publică). Further, a strongly familialist political discourse and an implicit familialist ideology in the legislative process (Dohotariu, 2013; Baluta, 2013) are reinforced by constant praise of the importance of the mother's role for the "child's well-being"; in this context, the mother's "choice" to stay home for two years to give a child the care that "it needs" is strongly tied to social values and cultural meanings which amplifies the effect of the material and economic constraints mentioned above. We may also mention that this idealisation of the family is found in the political discourse and social values of all Central and East European countries (Gal & Kligman, 2003: 96-100). On the other hand, the pressure exerted upon parents by the new cultural values that surround parenting and child care doubtless influences their decisions in how to implement child care. Especially in families with a reasonable standard of living (which need not be very high), the preference for employing a child minder (most often without a formal contract) is influenced by the idea that the child is best cared for within the family and at home – if not by the mother or grand-mother, then at last by someone who is seen as a "mother substitute" and treated as such.¹⁰

Gender equality, work-life balance and child care

As we have seen above in discussion of the theoretical approach and from the data analysed so far, the legislation and public policies affecting child care and the choices of social actors are closely connected to policies on equality of opportunity between men and women and the question of the work-life articulation. Our initial finding is that gender equality is not seen as an issue in post-communist Romania; the equality of men and women is proclaimed and there is nothing more to be done, so that complaints or objections are dismissed as feminist or even neo-Marxist (Baluta, 2013), so that the only acceptable argument (especially for a

¹⁰ These remarks are based on research carried out with Anca Dohotariu as part of the research project Child minders in Bucharest: a shadowed category between law, employment and social norms, December 2012-December 2013, financed by the ERSTE Foundation.

politically correct attitude) is to appeal to European law. I may also mention here that Romania's entry into the European Union and the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* directly informed the Law on Equality of Opportunity (202/2002) and the creation of institutional structures (the parliamentary commission on equality of opportunity, the national agency for equality of opportunity ANES¹¹ which was downgraded to a simple directorate of the Ministry for Employment during the financial crisis, social and family protections).¹² Furthermore, whenever legislation is proposed or ministers announce their strategies, European norms are always invoked as a reason; indeed some of these laws have been passed in extremis as emergency decrees in order to avoid infringement penalties (for example OUG nr. 61/2008). This lack of political and social attention to gender equality can only favour and indeed amplify the familialist view of gender roles and implementation of child care.

In the second place, measures on the articulation of the work-life balance are few and far between and do not play a principal role in shaping legislation and public policies in post-communist România.¹³ Thus the Romanian Labour Code, the main piece of legislation governing the labour market, contains very few clear and binding provisions to lighten the burden of employees who have small children to care for. Apart from regulations obliging an employer to hold the position for an employee in the case of maternity leave and parental leave, the sole aspect regulated by the Labour Code of 2011 is that "The Employer may design an individual work programme with the agreement of or at the request of the employee in question" (art. 118). This legal principle is in accordance with European norms but there are no dedicated resources or instruments for its implementation, so that we may state that there is no public policy on the matter.¹⁴ Furthermore, in European statistics on part-time employment Romania is at the bottom of the league table, with an average percentage of 10-11%, lagging far behind the Netherlands (over 50%) and less than half the rate registered by the majority of EU countries (above 20%) (Eurostat).

The principles of equality of opportunity for men and women are addressed in Law 202/2002, adopting the *acquis communautaire* in the matter. Chapter 2 of the law (on equality of opportunity in the labour market) contains provisions forbidding any kind of discrimination in recruiting or hiring for any management position and to protect maternity leave. There is no provision in the law however that refers even implicitly to any aspect connected to work-life articulation. The

¹¹ Created by law 202/2002, repromulgated in 2007, cap. 5, art. 26-30.

¹² For an overview of Romanian legislation adopting EU law as part of the admission process: Ghebrea, Tătărâm, Cretoiu, 2005; Zamfir 2010.

¹³ This has been remarked by the (few) researchers looking at gender equality in the labour market: Dragolea, 2007 a; Dragolea 2007 b; Marinescu & Pricopie 2003.

¹⁴ Cf. public Policy instrumentation analysis: P. Lascoumes & P. Le Gales, 2007.

legislative framework does not propose any concrete legislation or mechanisms for coercion, even though it observes binding European legislation on the matter and allows for the development of special regulations to encourage equality between men and women or to draw up policies for a work-life articulation.

So far none of this has happened. Among the many factors which could explain this lack, it is essential to look at governmental strategies to understand how the problem is put onto the political agenda (manifestos and government programmes) and to identify directions in public policy proposed in specific domains. I examine here the strategies developed after EU accession to see how far the legislation adopted during the accession process has since then been translated into public policy: thus I shall analyse the government programmes from 2009-2012 and 2013-2017 as well as the two national strategies on equality between men and women drawn up by the ANES agency (2006-2009 and 2009-2012). No new strategy has been drawn up since 2012 (ANES was dissolved by the OUG 68/2010).

The government programme for 2009-2012 contains two separate chapters on the “Labour market” (cap. 7) and on “Family, child protection and equality of opportunity” (cap. 9). While chapter 7 contains not a single reference to any measures to ensure gender equality on the labour market, chapter 9 point 4 sets out government objectives which aim at “active participation in decision-making by women” (p. 32). The sub-chapter on “Family” mentions several action plans including one on “policies to reconcile family and professional life” (p. 32). The sub-chapter on “Equal opportunities” contains eleven points, one of which aims to combat discrimination against women in the job market and another which sets out care plans for the elderly. In the government programme for 2013-2017, equality of opportunity does not appear in the title of any chapter or subchapter. The only reference to the subject is in the chapter on work – a point addressing equal opportunities for women and men via wage regulation (p. 101). Measures connected to work-life articulation appear in two points in the subchapter on social welfare, referring to the creation of services to support families in child care, education and care for the elderly (pp. 101-102) and in three points in the subchapter on “Family and child protection”, likewise concerned with “the creation of public service structures for child care and care of the elderly” (pp. 101-102).

The two national strategies on equal opportunities between men and women drawn up by the ANES agency (2006-2009 and 2009-2012) identify difficulties in reconciling “family and professional life” as one of the major causes for persisting inequality in the job market. “Inequality between men and women is aggravated by the difficulties women, especially mothers, face in finding and keeping paid work, by stereotypes perpetuating the idea that only women are responsible for looking after the family, and in particular by cultural expectations that the man shall be the sole breadwinner for the family” (National strategy for equal oppor-

tunities between men and women for the period 2006-2009: 5). Among the actions planned we may mention the promotion of measures to ease flexi-time working; encouraging fathers to become involved in child-raising and child care, including by requesting paternity and parental leave; developing social services within society for child care and the care of other family dependents. ANES analysis from 2008 on women's participation in decision-making in family life and in the community reveals the following worrying conclusions. In rural regions, women take responsibility for domestic matters especially in the North-East region, with 98% of women taking on this responsibility. Similarly, in rural regions the majority of women have an income of less than 500 lei (ca. 120 Euro). In urban regions, a large percentage of women surveyed (80%) are responsible for house-keeping and child care and their median income is between 500 and 1000 lei (Report on the implementation of the National Strategy for equality of opportunity between men and women, 2006-2009). Moreover the strategy for 2010-2012 identifies child care problems alongside the stereotypes and tradition which influence matters of equality between men and women on the labour market: "The absence of accessible, affordable, high-quality child care services consolidates this imbalance. This being the case, it is still predominantly women who apply for parental leave." Despite declared EU objectives (Lisbon and Barcelona), in Romania "we cannot yet speak of family responsibilities as being equally shared, nor can we say that women and men participate equally in economic and in family life." (National Strategy for equality of opportunity between men and women for the period 2010-2012: 4). Although the principal problems affecting gender equality and child care are identified in these strategies, they do not propose any targeted action to resolve or ameliorate the situation any more than they allocate a budget for the matter.

When we follow the development of the political agenda from 2007 to 2013 using the sources mentioned, we see that political interest in the issue of gender equality has fallen steadily. National strategies for equality of opportunity have remained suspended at the level of 2012, and there has been no report evaluating results obtained so far, nor any specific new national strategy.¹⁵ The governmental programme for 2013-2017 proposes certain objectives related to the work-life balance and child care, but these are included in the subheadings of "Social welfare" and "Child protection", reflecting the reduction – if not the total elimination – of gender equality as a political lens for framing policy on child care services and structures (and on the labour market, we might add). Familialist ideology remains the main vector of the public agenda in this field.

¹⁵ Only in December 2013 was a public debate launched, now on-going, around the new strategy for gender equality.

Conclusions

The choices of social actors in Romania today are constrained by multiple pressures, caught between the laws and statutes, the economic resources actually offered by public policy and their own informal or family arrangements. On the one hand, the regulation and functioning of the labour market are subject to the laws of the capitalist free market, though the higher share of female workers attained by the end of Communist rule has remained fairly constant even in the transition economy. Measures to address work-life balance, however, are still more or less non-existent, even though the EU accession process might be supposed to have favoured such policies. From this point of view and taking similar analysis into account (Kamerman & Moss, 2011), we might expect a framework which would favour or at least facilitate both parents' participation on the labour market. On the other hand, however, leave policies and family policies regarding child are all framed within a familialist approach which emphasises the interests of the family and the child and the importance of the mother's role especially in the early years, which encourages longer parental leaves (1-2 years, principally taken by the mother¹⁶), most often corresponding to the model of the male breadwinner family. Furthermore, gender equality, which should drive legislative and policy change in order to assure equal participation by men and women in the labour market, is rarely taken up as a political principle and even less often translated into legislation and public policies. At the level of dominant cultural meanings and social practices, norms and values about gender roles are cast in very traditional terms, dominated by an essentialist and differentialist perspective, in which women are by the very nature more suited to the child-rearing role and in which they are also primarily responsible for family matters and the household.

Child care thereby becomes a litmus test for these contradictory dimensions and is broadly seen as far more in terms of labour of love than it is seen as social work. In Romania after 1989 it is difficult to speak of a breadwinner model based on the existing categories; we can still discern a tension between a local form of the double breadwinner on the labour market and that of male breadwinner model within childcare and family policies.

¹⁶ At a rate of over 85% cf. Buletin statistic 2013.

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