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Abstract

Intervention or Prevention? – National Child Well-Being Strategies in Germany and Great Britain Instancing Health Behaviour in Early Childhood

(working title)

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Children and their families have become a focal point of debates on 'new social risks' and innovative 'new public policies' in many western welfare states. Policy-related elites, including those from UNICEF, OECD and the EU, have converged in defining such risks, engaged in mutual policy learning and put in place measures to better safeguard children, activate their potential and promote their well-being. Such measures are part and parcel of what Esping-Andersen (2002) branded a 'child-centred *social investment* strategy' around which there appears to be wide consensus. Some scholars speak of 'surveillance societies' (Flaherty, 1989) and a new 'culture of control' (Garland, 2001). The boundaries between what has been seen as 'family' or 'private' versus 'public' are being redrawn by discourses as well as 'evidence based' measures to intervene and prevent children-related risks.

Health being a crucial aspect of children's well-being, the paper focuses on investigating the national policy strategies in terms of health behaviour in early childhood in a two country comparison. Germany and the United Kingdom follow distinct – rather contrasting? – strategies in supporting parents in good health behaviour concerning their young children. These policies result in very different health outcomes with the United Kingdom showing one of the worst scores in children's health (Bradshaw et al. 2006). The question is how do British respectively German policies approach the issue of health behaviour in early childhood: How are parents' abilities and potentials in good health behaviour addressed? To what extent do programmes balance aspects of social control and supporting parents by empowerment? Are these institutions based on logics of prevention or rather intervention? Which agencies of policy services are involved? The policy analysis in comparative perspective will be confronted with empirical findings concerning health behaviour as well as health conditions of young children.