

# Enhancing gender equity through evidence-based policymaking? Theorizing and tracing the use of systematic knowledge in family and tax policy reforms

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*How can evidence—systematically generated substantive knowledge—be used to reach policy outcomes that promote gender equity? Initial hypothetical answers to this question are derived from three distinct theories of the policy process: the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC), the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), and the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA). With the help of these theoretical frameworks, we trace the use of evidence in four case studies in the fields of family and tax policy in Swiss Cantons. These empirical studies reveal that, within a policy process which follows the Rational Policy Cycle, evidence documenting existing deficits and studies indicating the efficiency of proposed measures are crucial for a progressive outcome. Attempts to promote policies that enhance gender equity by linking them to dominant topics like economic competitiveness are not successful as long as no strong evidence is provided and such a linkage can also be used for promoting policies that undermine gender equity. Finally, in a battle between rival advocacy coalitions, evidence that indicates the correspondence between a proposed policy and constitutional norms seems to be most powerful.*

**Keywords:** Evidence-based policymaking, Gender equity, Rational Policy Cycle, Advocacy Coalition Framework, Multiple Streams Approach, Family policy, Tax policy, Congruence analysis

## Introduction and Overview

The goal that men and women should have equal opportunities within the family and at work is as much an offspring of the Enlightenment notion that humans are free to determine their own destiny as it is the aspiration that democratic rule-making should be justified with reference to generalizable norms and empirical facts. Advocates of gender equity have always used evidence about the gaps between men and women to bolster their requests

for specific measures to reduce these gaps (e.g., Fraser 1994, p. 592). Yet, until now, there has been no mutual recognition and exchange between those activists and social scientists who are involved in gender politics and those promoting evidence-based policymaking. A major reason is that the latter are perceived by the former as advocates of a technocratic endeavour that ideologically and epistemologically belongs to an “early modernity,” with naïve beliefs in human progress through the generation of objective knowledge as the foundation of

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rational choices; whereas they see gender politics as an expression of the so-called “second modernity” characterized by the recognition of diversity and reflexive rationality (for a critical view on evidence-based policymaking see e.g., Rüb and Strassheim 2012).

One goal of this paper is to build bridges between the two camps by theorizing and tracing the role that evidence can play in the making of laws with strong impacts on gender equity. We start by briefly outlining what we understand by gender equity, and by delineating how specific social transfer and tax policies provide (dis)incentives for specific family models (single breadwinner/single caretaker model versus dual breadwinner/dual caretaker model). Furthermore, we lay out our generic understanding of evidence as systematically generated substantive policy knowledge that is used to support certain policy goals and specific policy measures. In the theoretical part of the article, we introduce three analytic frameworks: Rational Policy Cycle (RPC), Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), and Multiple Streams Approach (MSA). These are used to theorize potential pathways and roles through which certain kinds of evidence can be used to enhance gender equity when family and tax policies are reformed. Within the context of RPC, evidence is used to diagnose existing deficits in a policy field and for evaluating the efficiency of policy measures to reduce these deficits. Within ACF, evidence is used by coalitions to legitimize policy goals as congruent with fundamental social values and to justify specific policy measures as adequate for fulfilling these goals. Finally, MSA assumes that the primary roles of evidence are to signal the current priority/urgency of specific socioeconomic challenges and to bolster the claim that measures from a distinct policy field are relevant to meet-

ing these challenges. The three frameworks show that the concept of evidence-based policymaking is compatible with rationalist, normative-cognitive, and discursive theories of collective decisionmaking.

In the empirical section we apply the theoretical frameworks to four cases in order to empirically trace the role of evidence in divergent policymaking processes. We look at two processes focusing on the provision and the financing of day care facilities and two processes in which tax deductions for family-external and family-internal childcare have been debated. The first case study, in the Fribourg canton, reveals the process corresponds strongly to the Rational Policy Cycle in situations where there is a normative consensus on policy goals. Here evidence is used extensively and productively for delineating the deficits and for specifying effective measures. In the canton of canton, by contrast, the discussion about day care facilities was embedded in an ideological struggle between advocacy coalitions with divergent belief systems. In the end, the proposed law failed in the parliament. This was partly because the progressive coalition bolstered their proposals with scant and inappropriate evidence. However, most of the explanation can be identified with the MSA, since the FDP faction in parliament adjusted its position in accordance with the “problem of the day” and switched from supporting to undermining the public provision of day care facilities.

The discussion about tax deductions for family-internal and family-external childcare in the canton of Uri also corresponded strongly with the ACF; conservatives mounted a strong challenge against the progressive measures put forward by the government by proposing that family-internal child care should be tax-deductible. The government prevailed by referring to evidence provided by legal authorities and

claimed that the conservative demand was unconstitutional. In Nidwalden, by contrast, the government supported the introduction of tax deductions for family-internal childcare and succeeded without much resistance. They achieved this by linking the measure to the dominant discourse of economic competitiveness and by focusing the evidence they produced on bolstering this link.

In the final section of the article, we draw conclusions: (a) for those who promote gender equity, (b) for those who are interested in the use of evidence in policymaking, and (c) for the more academic discourse on theories of the policy process.

### **Linking gender studies and evidence-based policymaking by applying a plurality of theories of the policy process**

**T**his article is based on research conducted within the context of an applied and policy-driven research program geared towards enhancing gender equity. As it is often the case with applied research, we had to develop an analytic framework that cut across divergent research fields and paradigms. By applying theories of the policy process, we try to bridge the fundamental differences between gender studies, a field of research that is dominated by critical theory and social-constructivist epistemologies, and the literature on evidence- or expert-based policymaking which is dominated by rationalist theories and positivist epistemologies. The literature on theories of the policy process contains a strong plurality of theories,

capturing a broad spectrum of conceptual and epistemic approaches, and the use of information or knowledge plays an important role.<sup>1</sup> Employing a plurality of theories of the policy process and specifying the function of evidence within divergent theories allows us to escape the narrow confines of the evidence-based policymaking movement. Hitherto, this movement has primarily been concerned with the question “what works effectively and/or efficiently?” in cases where a policy goal has been clearly formulated and focuses on diagnostic and prognostic/causal knowledge (Davies, Nutley, and Smith 2000). We intend to include the other core question within a policy process—“What is it all about?”—and employ information about the corresponding processes of interpretation and framing (Häusermann and Kübler 2010). The plurality of theoretical lenses allows us also to investigate the role of evidence in divergent contexts: law-making processes in which gender equity is a goal (maybe not the only or an undisputed one) within a rather clear-cut policy field (such as family policy), but also processes in which it is contingent whether gender equity is seen as a (major) goal and where a policy-field cannot be considered a coherent “subsystem” of the political system (Weible 2008)—as is the case with tax laws.

Kübler (2007) has introduced one theoretical framework (ACF) to explain the expansion of public programs for day care facilities in Switzerland and has put much emphasis on the role of scientific evidence in explaining the breakthrough at the turn of the century (Kübler 2007, p. 228). Kübler applies only one theory and traces the policy process mainly during the 1990s and at

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<sup>1</sup> Incorporating a plurality of theoretical frameworks based on different ontologies and with different epistemological affinities into a single empirical study, only makes sense if one assumes that these frameworks are not incommensurable and that it is possible to find an “epistemological middle ground” that connects theory and empirical information (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 13-15).

the federal level. Given the importance of the Swiss cantons and the fact that Kübler and Häusserman (2010, p. 189) showed how fragile the reform coalition has been, we focus on reform processes at the cantonal level in the first decade of the new century, so this study functions as a follow up to Kübler and Häusserman's research. But our research focus is slightly different; we are less interested in the preconditions for successful reforms than in the roles that evidence plays within reform processes. To this end, we use a plurality of policy process theories to not only conceptualize divergent functions of evidence within divergent understandings of the policy process, but also to reduce the danger of theoretical predetermination and bias that comes with applying only one theoretical framework (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 161-162).

Embracing divergence not only helps us to get a broader understanding of the role of evidence within the policy process, it serves also an epistemic function. Often, we are not able to observe the decision-making process closely enough to make strong claims about whether and how evidence has influenced the belief systems, preferences or positions of political actors on an individual level. Comprehensive theoretical frameworks help us to deductively connect specific functions of evidence with the role and importance of specific actors and with specific contexts in which substantive knowledge is used. A holistic approach such as this, based on consistent theoretical frameworks, gives us more heuristic guidelines and indicators for tracing the role of evidence in policymaking processes than a particularistic variable-centered approach which treats the use of evidence as an independent variable in order to find out whether (and under what conditions) a specific kind or strength of this variable would lead to successful reforms.

## Basic Concepts

First, we introduce our normative understanding of gender equity. Second, we lay out how the public provision of day care facilities and how tax-deductions of family-internal and family-external child care influence the emergence of family models and gender equity. We indicate that there exists national and international evidence for these causal claims. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that existing knowledge about the causal relationship between policy measures and gender equity is not the only kind of evidence that is important within the policy process. Introducing policy process theories helps us to do this. Therefore, we discuss and introduce a broader generic understanding of evidence before we further specify different kinds of evidence in accordance with different policy process theories. When we conducted our empirical case studies, we applied this broader understanding and noted the use of different kinds of systematically generated knowledge in the policy process.

In the literature on gender justice, gender equality, gender equity, and gender mainstreaming there has been a long debate about the adequate meanings of these concepts (e.g., Verloo and Lombardo 2007, p. 22). Within this study, we cannot do justice to the latest developments within this theoretical discourse. Instead, we want to justify our normative stance towards the policy measures that we focus on in our case studies with a brief reference to this debate. Our cases center around whether the state should provide or promote public facilities for family-external child care and whether the state should stimulate and support family-external and family-internal child care.

In Switzerland, family issues have long been perceived as a private matter; therefore, they took a long time to join the

political agenda. In consequence, Switzerland is a “laggard” in comparison to other countries in respect to the modernization of family policies (Mosimann and Giger 2008, p. 228; Häusermann and Kübler 2010, p. 164). In such a context, the provision of family-external childcare facilities and the financial stimulation of their use represents not only a “liberal” but also a “transformative” approach to gender equity (Fraser 1994). This not only allows the free choice for women and men to balance their work and family life according to their individual preferences, but it also contributes systematically to the transformation of family practices towards the so-called “dual breadwinner/dual caretaker model”—a family model in which both men and women participate in the labor market and share family duties, especially caring for children and the elderly (Pfau-Effinger 1998). The following evaluations are based on our own normative stance, which goes beyond a liberal approach and includes a transformative approach to gender equity. This is because we believe that the socioeconomic opportunities created by political decisions not only profoundly shape individual decisions but can also never be fully neutral in this respect.

The availability of moderately-priced family-external childcare facilities is an important precondition and stimulus for women to participate in the job market (Mosimann and Giger 2008; OECD 2004). Participating in the job market in turn has positive effects on all normative criteria that Fraser (1994, p. 594-601) postulates as necessary to achieve gender equity: for example, it reduces the risk of poverty for women and the risk of exploitation within the household; it contributes not only to income equality, but also to leisure-time equality, and equality of respect.

The provision of family-external child care facilities is only the first precon-

dition for the emergence of the dual breadwinner/dual caretaker model. Existing social transfer and tax systems in Switzerland provide negative incentives for adopting this model, since they favor a traditional family model with a single male breadwinner and a single female care-giver (Bauer, Strub, and Stutz 2004; OECD 2004). Therefore, we judge all reforms that reduce the cost that families have to bear for external child care as positive for gender equity. Social transfers and tax deductions for family-internal child care, in contrast, are seen as counterproductive to gender equity. They might be seen in line with a “difference” approach to gender equity, since these measures reflect the social recognition of care work, but under the current conditions in Switzerland, they clearly contribute to the stabilization of the traditional family structure with men as single breadwinners and women as single caretakers (e.g., Bauer, Strub, and Stutz 2004).

Proponents of evidence-based policymaking equate evidence with “facts” that represent the “true state of the world,” or with “objective” causal knowledge about “what works and what does not work” (examples can be found in Nutley et al. 2010). Critics argue that evidence-based policymaking should be seen primarily as a turn away from norm- and interest-based justifications of political decisions and that it is a myth that tries to mask increasing uncertainties and ambiguities (Rüb and Strassheim 2012). We neither adhere to a consequent positivist nor to a radical critical theory stance, but start with an understanding that comes close to the notions that we find within the literature on the policy process. First, in line with James and Jorgensen (2009) we treat evidence as substantive policy knowledge rather than knowledge about the political process. Second, for us evidence means any kind of systematically generated information that is used to bolster diagnostic,

evaluative and prognostic claim-making in public argumentation. This latter definition is broader than that used by Weible (2008, p. 616), who distinguishes expert-based information from local information based on trial-and-error learning within a specific community. We do not share his belief that the former has greater legitimacy in the policy process, either from an empirical or normative point of view. Empirically, it is better to see this as an open question; normatively, it is not representative of the current trend in deliberative theories of democracy, which values as relevant and productive to the democratic process all kinds of experience-based information, even emotional narratives that represent subjective experiences of individuals (Bächtiger et al. 2010). Nevertheless, in contrast to strong relativists, we would argue that the more the information is based on systematic and transparent methods of data collection and data analysis, the more powerful the evidence should be in the policy process. Furthermore, for analytical and practical reasons we focused on the use of evidence that was produced by academics or experts within public administrations or think tanks. The focus on externally and internally produced written documents (ranging from large “studies” via “summary reports” to simple “fact-sheets”) provides a practical distinction between evidence and non-evidence-based claim-making. The result is a definition of evidence not far-removed from the one found in the field of evidence-based policymaking. However, this should not imply that we follow the narrow understanding of the function of evidence common in that literature. Furthermore, our understanding comes close to Weible’s notion of expert-based information in respect to “producer” but not when it comes to “source,” since we also include overviews on local or cantonal experiences (e.g., those produced by local or cantonal bureaucrats).

## Theoretical Frameworks

Our analysis follows the congruence analysis approach to case study research (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 144-204). Accordingly, we will introduce three theoretical frameworks as heuristic guidelines for tracing how evidence is used to make the policy process more gender sensitive and to find out whether and how the use of evidence leads to policy results that enhance gender equity. These frameworks are the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC) approach, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and, the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA). These frameworks all assign information a central role for explaining policy processes and outcomes, which makes them suitable frameworks for tracing the role of evidence in these processes. We have not included three other policy theories, the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Ostrom 2011), the Punctuated Equilibrium theory (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), or the Policy Design framework (Schneider and Ingram 1997), although they have been recognized as important approaches (Sabatier 2007) and information and knowledge are crucial elements within these approaches (Weible 2008). The primary reason is practical; using three approaches is a lot and presents a challenge for data collection, data analysis, and the presentation of results. Our selection has been influenced by the following considerations: The IAD framework is very much concerned with the analysis of governance structures for common pool resources. Furthermore, it has a clear rationalist conceptualization of the use of knowledge, something that we take into account with our RPC approach. The Punctuated Equilibrium theory is focused on different kinds of policy change (incremental and rapid), which is not our major concern. Its emphasis on shifting attention is covered by the MSA. Finally, the

Policy Design framework concentrates on the social construction of target populations. Since gender is very much a socially constructed category, this approach might have revealed further important insights, but it would have demanded a different method (content or discourse analysis).

The three frameworks that we selected will be briefly introduced in the following. From each framework we formulate expectations of what we will discover in the case studies if the empirical reality corresponds to the framework. These constitutive and causal propositions guide our information collecting process and structure our analysis of the cases.

Theories and analytic frameworks are not “natural givens” with clear-cut content and boundaries. There are many, often divergent, descriptions of most theoretical frameworks, and therefore it is necessary to explicitly specify the theoretical concepts applied during this empirical study (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p. 167). In order to cast the net of possible pathways as wide as possible, we specify the theoretical frameworks in such a way that they provide interpretative and analytic frameworks which differ from each other as much as possible (which does not mean that there is no overlap at all). Our framework specifications are constructed using the four strands of neo-institutionalism that inform many fields of political and other social science research (Hall and Taylor 1996; Schmidt 2010): The RPC is very much in line with what is called “economic institutionalism,” since it presumes rational actors and focuses on formal institutions and processes. Aligning RPC with economic institutionalism allows this framework to be transformed from a prescriptive model into a descriptive and causal theory. In contrast, the ACF can be aligned to “sociological institutionalism,” which assumes that the behavior of actors corresponds to normative

and cognitive beliefs. Finally, the MSA corresponds to “historical institutionalism,” both in respect to its focus on critical conjunctions but even more to the “discursive institutionalism” that has been introduced more recently (Schmidt 2010). This is because the MSA highlights the importance of structurally determined frames, but also the use of framing techniques by political actors. Aligning our three policy-oriented analytic frameworks with the distinct strands of neo-institutionalism is especially useful for disentangling the concepts and expectations of the ACF and the MSA, for which we discover some overlap in the literature.

### **Rational Policy Cycle (RPC)**

Stage models equate politics with policymaking and presuppose a rational handling and processing of societal problems (Jann and Wegrich 2003, p. 71). It is assumed that societal problems are first identified, translated into political demands, before finally being solved or reduced by political measures. Hence, the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC) is a linear and chronological problem-solving model which can be clearly structured into consecutive stages and which breaks the policy process “into functionally and temporally distinct sub-processes” (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994, p. 176). The standard Policy Cycle mode includes five stages: It starts with agenda setting, where societal problems are identified and translated into political demands by interest groups and party politicians. The next step is called policy-formulation; during this stage different options for solving the problem and for reaching the goals are compared and evaluated. In parliamentary systems, the government (the executive branch) dominates this step. The next stage is adoption, when parliaments debate and decide about specific policy proposals. During the implementation

stage the policy has to be concretized and applied by various levels of the bureaucracy. In an ideal Rational Policy Cycle (RPC), the final stage is an evaluation of the policy (Jann and Wegrich 2003, 75-77).

Stage models have been widely used in the policy sciences. They were developed primarily as normative models, a prescription of how the process should be in order to be effective and efficient. Nevertheless, many authors also applied these models to analyzing the real policymaking processes. This analytic use has been criticized, and it has been argued that “the policy cycle is not really a causal theory since it never identifies a set of causal drivers that govern the process within and across stages” (Sabatier 2007, p. 7). We can overcome the deficits of the stage model if we combine it with a theory of rational action and choice and if we include evidence as the informational basis on which actors decide whether and how to proceed from one stage to the next.

From the RPC we can deduce the following set of expectations about the core actors in each stage and how what kind of evidence is used during the policymaking process. Since stages are the core conceptual element of the RPC, the expectations are structured according to the first three stages.<sup>2</sup>

*Agenda Setting:* Party politicians transform social demands into political demands and force the government to add the goal of gender equity to their agenda. Diagnostic evidence is used to prove the need for gender-oriented policies, by identifying deficits in respect to given goals or by showing gaps between the situation in their own polity compared with other polities.

*Policy Formulation:* The government develops a comprehensive policy program that includes and compares measures for enhancing gender equity. Existing causal evidence is used for the prognosis of benefits and costs of specific policy measures. The core of such an evaluation concerns the efficiency of the proposed measures (through a cost-benefit analysis).

*Policy Adoption:* The parliament decides on the policy program and its specific measures. Diagnostic and prognostic evidence, produced in the earlier stages, is used to justify the positive and negative positions that the parliamentarians take in respect to the proposed measures.

## Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)—developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith during the late 1980s—presumes that policymaking does not take place in accordance with a rational decision-making process with distinct stages, but instead resembles an on-going competition between rivaling coalitions of actors. The ACF is built on a set of assumptions which makes it especially relevant for our purposes: scientific and technical informations play a crucial role in the policy process, and the “belief systems” of political actors are the central factor for explaining policy processes, outcomes, and change (Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen 2009, p. 122). Belief systems shape the behavior of political actors and are therefore seen as crucial for analyzing policymaking. Belief systems are conceptualized as having three layers (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994, p. 180). Deep core beliefs are the innermost layer

<sup>2</sup>We could not follow the policy processes beyond decisionmaking; therefore, our framework does not include implementation and evaluation.



of the belief system. They reflect assumptions about the nature of humans and society (e.g. men and women are equal or they are different) and the hierarchy of ultimate values like freedom and equality (Kübler 2007, p. 225). The next level is made up of policy core beliefs, which are more moderate in scope and span a policy subsystem. Policy core beliefs provide the “glue” that holds together different actors in advocacy coalitions across all formal stages of a policy process. These coalitions consist of actors from the private and public arena and from different levels within the decision-making process. In most policy fields we can observe “progressive” and “conservative” coalitions (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994, p. 180). Policy core beliefs represent a coalition’s basic normative commitments within a policy field and assumptions about the primary causes of problems. In our field, the core beliefs of a progressive coalition are that public policy should actively pursue the goal of gender equity, since established cultures, institutions, and policies are hindrances to this goal. The conservative coalition, in contrast, believes that the public promotion of gender equity is the problem and not the solution. The anti-statist strand in the conservative coalition argues primarily that family issues are a private matter and the state should be kept out. The communitarian line of argument is that the established labor division between men and women corresponds with the culture of the local/national society and provides not only the basis for a functioning family but also for a functioning society.<sup>3</sup> The final layer consists of secondary beliefs. These are

mainly cognitive aspects like assumptions about the seriousness of the problem, but also assumptions about how much a specific measure (e.g., tax deductions or the public promotion of family-external child care) can contribute to reducing the policy problem or to achieving the goals.

To further specify the ACF we exploit the conceptual richness of the ACF literature and choose those features that make sense for us in order to develop an analytical framework that is distinct from the other two. ACF proponents introduce a broad range of possible drivers for policy change. Policy change in a policy subsystem can stem from policy-oriented learning, external shocks, internal subsystem events, or through negotiated agreements (Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen 2009, p. 124). We concentrate on the most important factor for an actor-centered explanatory approach: the role of policy brokers who play a crucial role for adopting new policies (if they take sides and help to overcome the resistance of the conservative coalition) or for forging new compromises between the coalitions. The involvement of powerful political actors who are not strongly committed to the belief system of one of the involved advocacy coalitions (either because the political actor is not normatively motivated, the issue does not touch on his major normative concerns or the actor shows an internal normative split) and see their role as pragmatic doer is an important indicator for the ACF.

From the ACF we can derive the following set of expectations in respect to the major actors and how evidence is used<sup>4</sup> during the policymaking process.

<sup>3</sup> We conceptualize the coalitions and their core policy beliefs very differently than Kübler (2007), since we believe that the main division in respect to family and gender issues is not between a “poverty oriented family policy” and a “gender equality oriented family policy” but between a progressive-transformative position and a conservative-traditional position.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that we use the formulation “is used” for empirical reasons, since we could primarily trace the use of evidence in the argumentation of actors. From a theoretical point of view, this overstates the strategic

*Progressive Coalition:* A progressive coalition is formed and proposes policy measures in order to enhance gender equity. Evidence is used to support the beliefs of the coalition, (a) by indicating that men and women are (recognized as) equal, (b) by signaling that the public promotion of gender equity is (seen as) appropriate and necessary, and (c) by showing that the proposed policy measure is effective in enhancing gender equity and that it is in accordance with other norms and values of the society.

*Conservative Coalition:* A conservative coalition exists and defends or proposes policies that do not stimulate gender equity. Evidence is used to support the beliefs of the coalition, (a) by indicating that men and women are (recognized as) being different/complementary, (b) by questioning the appropriateness of state involvement in family affairs or (c) by showing that the proposed measures are not effective for pursuing gender equity or that they violate other norms and goals.

*Broker:* A broker is a powerful political actor who is not committed to the core (policy) beliefs of the advocacy coalitions and whose major goal is to be perceived as a pragmatic doer. Evidence is used to show that he has contributed to a pragmatic compromise.

## Multiple Streams Approach (MSA)

The Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) emerged in the mid-1980s as an analytical framework for explaining policy processes. The basics of the framework were conceptualized by Kingdon (1995)

and by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) in their garbage model of organizational choice. They argue that the metaphor of a garbage can nicely illustrates the real world of organizational decisionmaking, because it highlights that participants dump largely unrelated problems and solutions into an institutionalized process of decision making, that no specific actor is able to control the process and outcome, and that timing and the way in which seemingly unrelated issues come together and play important roles in explaining the outcome (Zahariadis 2007, 65-67). The MSA states that policy outputs should not be perceived as the results of a rational process of decisionmaking, because they depend heavily on a “complex interaction between problems, solutions, and politics during fleeting open windows of opportunity” (Zahariadis 2008, p. 515).

According to Zahariadis (2007, p. 70), the MSA consists of five conceptual elements: problems, policies, politics, policy windows, and policy entrepreneurs. The “problem stream” is conceptualized as a discursive channel in which various issues or problems (e.g., unemployment, economic competitiveness, environmental degradation, etc.) compete for attention. This channel assures that those issues that gain attention in the public discourse and that are “primed” by the media achieve salience for policymakers, and that they put them on top of their agenda. The “policy stream” is a discursive channel where solutions for policy problems are presented and debated; these solutions compete to win acceptance in policy networks. In the “gender equity stream,” there is a debate whether the provision of infrastructure (e.g., childcare facilities) regulations (e.g., quotas) or economic

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use of evidence. As a normative-cognitive approach, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) assumes that evidence shapes the beliefs of the actors, which means that evidence plays a strong constitutive and not only an instrumental role.

incentives is best for enhancing gender equity. Solutions are not necessarily created to answer a concrete existing problem in a specific situation; in the MSA it is assumed that proponents of specific kinds of solutions like academics or consultants are often searching for or even “inventing” problems (by exaggeration) in order to sell their pet solutions. The “political stream” is a discursive channel in which political actors debate problems and propose specific policies in order to gain (or keep) powerful positions. According to the proponents of the MSA, this stream is influenced by the rhythm of the electoral process in democracies, which can lead to governmental turnovers; but they also include aspects like interest group activity and the “national mood” in this stream (e.g., Blankenau 2001, 38).

The core proposition of the MSA is that policy changes occur when these three streams are joined together at a critical moment of time. These so-called “policy windows” are usually brief and become opened by an event in either the problem or the political stream. Individuals who attempt to couple these three streams are called “policy entrepreneurs.” In contrast to the “brokers” in the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), policy entrepreneurs are not seen as neutral in respect to the policy issue(s) at hand; they are aligned with specific policy solutions and try to connect these solutions to specific problems as soon as a policy window opens.

From the MSA we derive the following expectations for the policymaking process:

*Problem Stream:* A broad set of policy issues compete for public recognition and for being set on the political agenda. These issues are presented as pressing problems that demand urgent public policies for solving/reducing these prob-

lems. Evidence is used to highlight the saliency/priority of these issues for political decisionmakers.

*Policy Stream:* A broad set of policy measures that are supposed to enhance gender equity compete for recognition. Evidence is used for supporting the claim that the proposed measure is successful in enhancing gender equity.

*Politics Stream, Windows of Opportunity:* Law-making procedures are windows of opportunity for political entrepreneurs to connect specific policy measures with salient issues in an innovative way. Evidence is used for bolstering the argument that a gender-relevant policy measure is helpful for addressing the salient issues that dominate the political agenda at that time.

### **First Summary: Policy Theories and the Corresponding Understandings of Evidence**

The following table (Table 1) presents an overview of the three theoretical frameworks. The three frameworks are affiliated with different paradigmatic strands in behavioral and institutional theories. On these bases, we derived divergent types, roles, and functions of evidence within differently conceptualized policy processes. Within the RPC, evidence is seen as an objective informational basis for the rational selection of policy issues and policy measures. From the perspective of the ACF, evidence plays a role in as much as it provides proof for the legitimacy of policy goals and for the appropriateness of specific policy measures. Within the MSA, evidence is introduced as an instrument for generating attention for policy issues, but especially for establishing a connection between a policy measure and a policy issue.

Table 1: Policy theories and the corresponding conceptualization of evidence			
	<b>Rational Policy Cycle (RPC)</b>	<b>Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)</b>	<b>Multiple Streams Approach (MSA)</b>
Core elements	Stages	Advocacy-Coalitions and Broker	Streams and Policy Entrepreneurs
Behavioral theory/ Institutionalism	Rational choice/ economic institutionalism	Normative action/ sociological institutionalism	Rhetorical action/ historical/ discursive institutionalism
General understanding and role of evidence	Evidence as objective informational basis for the rational selection of policy issues and policy measures	Evidence as proof for the legitimacy of policy goals and for the appropriateness of specific policy measures for reaching these goals	Evidence as instrument for generating attention for policy issues (priming) and attention for a connection between policy measures and policy issues (framing)
Functions and examples of corresponding types of evidence	Support for the claim that there is a deficit: - comparisons with given goals - comparisons with others Evidence evaluates the efficiency of measures: - analysis of costs and benefits - comparisons between divergent measures	Support for the claim that specific policy goals are legitimate and socially valued/accepted: - program of elected politicians/parties - constitution Evidence confirms the normative validity and/or effectiveness of a policy measure - analysis of nonviolation of (legal) norms - analysis of goal attainment	Support for the claim that a policy issue is of prior importance: - governmental program - media analysis - population survey Evidence signals a connection between a policy measure and the primer policy issue: - correlational analysis

On a more operational level, we can formulate the differences between the three theoretical approaches as follows: For the RPC, systematically generated knowledge is most useful when it (a) diagnoses a deficit in respect to a given policy goal (gender equity) or (b) predicts the costs and benefits of a proposed policy measure. Within the ACF, expertise is necessary for bolstering claims about (a) the legitimacy or normative acceptance of pursuing gender equity and (b) the suitability or effectiveness of a proposed policy measure for reaching this goal, and for judging whether the measure violates other norms or goals. Within the MSA, systematically generated information is powerful if it bolsters the claim that a policy measure that has been developed for pursuing or fighting gender equity is also useful for addressing a problem in a highly salient policy field.

Within a congruence analysis, we should reflect on the standing of the selected theories within the scientific discourse, in order to generate a reflected basis for the conclusions that we can draw from the empirical analysis (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 169-175, 198-200). Our research project is characterized by the fact that we introduced a plurality of different policy process theories in order to bridge the gap between gender studies and the promoters of evidence-based policymaking. In other words, we combined three different research fields which have hitherto had only minor overlaps. We can assign each of the selected theoretical frameworks a dominant (or at least comparatively strong) position within the three research contexts: The RPC is the predominant approach within the evidence-based policymaking debate, the MSA most closely resembles the dominant con-

structivist approach within gender studies, and the ACF is certainly one of the theoretical frameworks that has attracted the most interest and use within the literature on the policy process. These positions will be taken into account in the final section of the paper, when we reflect on the impact of the study on the theoretical discourse(s).

## Empirical Section

In the following empirical section we first define our understanding of “a case” and explain our case selection strategy and corresponding research goals. Next, we present the main findings of our four case studies. In line with the congruence analysis approach to case studies (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 188-191) for all four cases we traced systematically whether the empirical information agrees with or contradicts the expectations that we derived from our three theoretical approaches. This resulted in an extensive working document,<sup>5</sup> in which we documented not only the findings but also the empirical sources from which we extracted our information. In general, we received our data from official government webpages. Furthermore, we contacted governmental officials and analyzed governmental documents and protocols or recordings of parliamentary proceedings in their archives. Finally, we traced the media coverage of the policy processes. In contrast to the working document, in the following we present only the most important findings: empirical information that provides strong confirmation for the congruence of the case with a theoretical framework or that helps us to discriminate among the theoretical frameworks in their explanatory power for a specific case.

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<sup>5</sup> Supplemental document can be viewed at: [http://www.ipsonet.org/images/Open\\_Access/EPA/Supplement\\_to\\_Blatter\\_et\\_al\\_EPA\\_2015.pdf](http://www.ipsonet.org/images/Open_Access/EPA/Supplement_to_Blatter_et_al_EPA_2015.pdf)

## Case Selection in Accordance with Specific Research Goals

In our study, a “case” is a law-making process that included a gender-relevant policy measure and that ended with a decision in parliament. For practical reasons we started with this endpoint of the policy process in order to identify cases. Nevertheless, as will be explained, we also included law-making processes that failed in parliament and law-making processes that did not improve gender equity. Since process-tracing techniques play an important role in our approach, we had to reflect on a starting point, which we took as the beginning of the policy-process (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p. 123). This is not an easy task, since the divergent policy process theories provide different conceptualizations. In order to identify this for the RPC, we tried to find a moment when a political party placed a social demand on the political agenda or when the law-making process was initiated by a federal framework; in line with the demands of the ACF we covered about a decade in order to capture the formation and transformation of advocacy coalitions and brokers. For the MSA, in contrast, we were looking for rather short periods when gender-relevant policy measures were connected to rather distant policy issues (particularly economic competitiveness).

Within a congruence analysis, the specification and selection of cases is theory-driven. This means that we do not select cases based on the similarity or difference that cases show in respect to specific variables. Instead we select cases by reflecting on their *ex ante* likelihood of being in line with the theoretical frameworks that we apply (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 176, 198-202). This logic was especially important for the selection of the policy fields and

measures. We decided to investigate reform processes in two specific policy fields: law-making processes which were discussed under the heading of “family policy” and focused on the public provision as well as on the standardization and financing of family-external child care facilities; and policymaking processes which focused on the reform of tax laws. In the latter instance we searched for cases in which tax deduction for child care were debated. Since it is very likely that gender equity plays an important role when a reform process is taking place under the heading of family policy, these reforms are most-likely cases for our first-two theoretical frameworks (whereas the RPC assumes that gender equity is a broadly accepted goal, the ACF assumes that it is a controversial goal/norm). In contrast, it is rather unlikely that gender related goals play a pivotal role in tax reforms, since in Switzerland tax policies are dominated by the strong competition between cantons and municipalities for tax payers. In consequence, these reforms are “least-likely cases” for the RPC and the ACF. In contrast, they are the “most-likely cases” for the MSA, since this framework was introduced exactly with the argument that decision-making processes are characterized by contingent and often surprising connections between “problems” and “policy-solutions.”

The next decision was to look at policy processes in these two fields at the cantonal level. There were two reasons for this. First, the cantonal level is the most important level for both of the policy fields that we have chosen. Cantons have important legislative competences in regulating and financing family-external child care facilities, although the final provision is usually in the hands of the municipalities (Kübler 2007, p. 219). Also, in respect to taxes, the cantons are the most important level in the

Swiss federal system (Linder 2010). The decisions that we are interested in—tax deductions for internal or external child care—are made by the cantonal legislative.

Beyond the practical relevance, there was another important reason to look at the cantonal level. The case study that we present here has been embedded in a research project with a multi-method design, and the cantonal level with its many relevant law-making processes allowed for the application of quantitative techniques. The quantitative study investigated 76 reform processes in the fields of social transfer, family, and tax policy in Swiss cantons (2008–2011) in order to find out whether gender equity has been an issue in these reforms, what kind of evidence has been taken up in the reform processes and which socio-economic and institutional factors facilitated the disposability of evidence (Balthasar and Mueller 2014).

For the qualitative study, we drew on the findings of the quantitative study when we further specified and selected our cases. In a first round of case selection we chose two cases (family policy in the canton Freiburg and tax policy in the canton Uri) for which the quantitative study revealed that a lot of evidence had been used and the policy process resulted in enhance gender equity. By selecting cases where we knew in advance that we would find both elements that we are primarily interested in (gender equity and the use of evidence), it was pos-

sible to concentrate on the role and functions of evidence within the policy-process. This is necessary in order to evaluate the usefulness of the theoretical frameworks in understanding and explaining the cases.

In a second round we selected two further cases, albeit with different goals. In the field of family policy we took advantage of an opportunity to get a first answer to the questions of whether and how the use of evidence affects policy outcomes. In its design, the quantitative study could not reveal any systematic connection between the use of evidence and the success of law proposals that enhance gender equity, but it provided us with the necessary data for selecting and comparing two cases which are strongly in line with such an assumption. The quantitative study revealed that a law on family-external childcare facilities that resembled the one in Freiburg failed in the Aargau canton; furthermore, it indicated that the policy-process in the latter case showed the lowest use of evidence within this group of policy reform.<sup>6</sup> By comparing the family policy processes in Freiburg and Aargau, it is possible to get some indication whether there is a causal connection between the use of evidence and gender-enhancing policy outcomes. Please note that with our design we cannot provide an answer to the question of *how much* evidence matters for enhancing gender equity, but it gives us insights into *how* it matters and under what conditions.

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that we did not follow the logic and the advice that is usually given when case studies are conducted after large-N-studies in a multi-method design. Usually, the goal of the case study is to strengthen the internal validity of the findings of the large-N-study by tracing the causal process in cases which support a detected correlation between an independent and a dependent variable (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 209). Our situation has been characterized by the fact that the quantitative study was—by design—not able to reveal any correlation between the use of evidence and a positive (gender equity-enhancing) outcome to the policy process. This means that our case study tries to answer a very different question and represents a “plausibility probe.” The small-N study is the first study that addresses the relationship between the use of evidence and the outcome of the policy process and the generalization of the results within a population of similar cases could/should be tested by a large-N study (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 229-231).

In the field of tax policy the selection of the second case followed a different rationale and we pursued another goal. With the tax reform in the Nidwalden canton, we selected a policy reform that resembled the tax reform in the Uri canton. As in the field of family policy, the second case showed a very different outcome from the first; in the field of tax policy, the reform did not fail, but did lead to an outcome that is counterproductive for enhancing gender equity. Surprisingly, and quite differently from the case in Aargau, the negative outcome in this case was achieved with a comparatively very high use of evidence, according to the quantitative study. A comparison between Uri and Nidwalden allows us to find out whether any of the theoretical frameworks is able to make sense out of a configuration that seems puzzling from the starting point of our investigation: the co-existence of extensive use of evidence with a policy outcome that is counter productive for gender equity.

In the following sections we provide a short history and brief evaluation for each case, as well as an analysis of the policy process and the use of evidence. We first present the two cases which focus on the provision of day care facilities, before moving on to the two which focus on tax reforms.

### **Case 1: The Modification of the Law of Day Care Facilities in the Canton of Fribourg**

*A short history and a brief evaluation of the outcome of the policy process*

**A**t the end of the 1990s, party politicians and parliamentarians put family policy on the political agenda. In 2002, the government of the canton of Fribourg declared that family policy would

be its top priority during the legislation period up to 2006. As a result, it established the Cantonal Commission for a Comprehensive Family Policy (CCCF) in order to elaborate a coherent family policy concept. After two years this commission produced a report which proposed a modification to the existing law concerning family external child care facilities (KKUF 2004). The legislative process for the new law started in May 2007, when the government appointed a new commission to develop a draft law. After a consultation process and parliamentary deliberations, the new law passed the cantonal parliament with a very large majority on the ninth of June 2011.

With the adoption of the new day care law, the canton of Fribourg guarantees the availability of day care places to match existing demands, ensures good child care affordable to all families, and harmonizes and coordinates the supply of day care places. The new law can be interpreted as an important step forward towards gender equity, since the public provision of day care facilities represents the major precondition for the realization of the dual breadwinner/dual caretaker model.

*A policy process in accordance with the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC) facilitates the use of evidence*

**T**he policy process which led to the reform of the family external child-care law corresponds strongly with the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC), and evidence is primarily used as expected by the RPC. Since the quantitative study indicated that the use of evidence in this case was the strongest among the policy processes we studied, we take this finding as initial evidence that the RPC facilitates the use of evidence. The empirical foundations for this conclusion will be provided in the follow-



ing. First, we show that the process corresponds with the main features of the RCP, then we focus on the use of evidence.

In accordance with the assumptions of the RPC, the childcare facilities reform can be easily disentangled in divergent temporal stages and the expected kinds of actors were dominant during these stages. We can detect an agenda-setting stage, during which party politicians demanded that the government set family policy on its agenda.<sup>7</sup> In 1999, two parliamentarians demanded in separate official requests that the government should put family policy on the governmental agenda. That was the case when the government announced in 2002 that family policy would be its top priority over the following years. In line with what we would call a strongly rational policymaking process, we can detect an extensive, two-step stage of policy-formation. First, the government established the Commission for a Comprehensive Family Policy (CCFP) in order to produce a strategic policy program. Afterwards, it set up another commission to formulate the specific draft law for the promotion of family-external child care facilities. Crucially to the placement of gender equity as one of the central goals of the cantonal family policy was that the government asked the cantonal officer for gender mainstreaming to direct the Commission for a Comprehensive Family Policy (CCFP). This decision signaled and secured that gender equity became the core normative point of reference for the following stages. Nevertheless, this crucial decision was complemented by the inclusion of other actors with other preferences and priorities in both commissions. The Cantonal

Commission for a Comprehensive Family Policy included tax experts and representatives of groups, who were more critical to an extension of public day care infrastructure. In the second commission, the formulation of the draft law involved not only the relevant parties and agencies from the cantonal administration, but representative from the municipalities, the employer association, and the day care facilities. The comprehensive inclusion of all concerned interests in an early stage of the policy process had two consequences. First, gender equity stopped being the only goal within the cantonal family policy, meaning that the draft law that the government sent to the parliament was not as consequent and comprehensive as it should have been from a gender equity standpoint. Nevertheless, it ensured that other relevant goals and interests were taken up early on, which we interpret as an indication of rational policymaking. Furthermore, it helped to ensure that no principled opposition emerged, which in turn explains why the formal decisionmaking in the parliament was rather uncontroversial and the law was adopted by 96 to 1 votes, with 2 abstentions. The necessity of the new law and the basic goal of gender equity weren't disputed.

We now turn to the use and function of evidence at the various stages. The two parliamentarians who initiated the policy process did not demand specific measures. Nor did their formal requests contain much evidence. According to our theoretical framework, we expected that they would use evidence to point to existing gaps and deficits in order to force the government to take up the issue. Nevertheless, after the in-

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<sup>7</sup> Please note that the parliamentarians did not refer to the intensive debates that took place over family policy on the federal level throughout the 1990s. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that the white paper on family policy that the Swiss Employer's Association had produced together with Pro Familia in 1990s, played a stimulating role for actors at the cantonal level (Kübler 2007, p. 228).

depth study we would now argue that it was very positive for stimulating a rational policymaking process that the political actors who initiated the policy process just asked the government to provide information instead of using information for themselves. This gives the information a more neutral or objective touch. Furthermore, by just asking the government to get active, without proposing specific measures, it opened up the policy formation process. This allowed the government to take up the issue strategically and comprehensively by setting up the CCCF. The CCCF was asked to write a report to address possible deficits in that policy field. The report contains a broad variety of evidence—inter-cantonal comparisons, statistical indicators and academic and administrative literature—in order to bolster the argument that the current state of affairs in Fribourg is deficient. The rational return-on-investment argument was prominently backed up by evidence. The report points to a study presented at a gender-equality conference, which showed that every financial public investment in day care facilities has a threefold return in terms of tax revenues. This type and manner of evidence use is fully in line with what we expected within a Rational Policy Cycle (RPC), since it focused on the cost-benefit ratio of the recommended policy measure and provided proof for the efficiency of the proposed policy.

Further evidence was used by the second commission, which was set up to formulate the draft law. This commission ordered two studies. The consulting firm INFRAS was charged with calculating the potential need for additional care places. Second, a professor from the University of Fribourg produced a study about the average costs of a day care place in Fribourg. The first study had two functions. First, it indicated that there had indeed been a defi-

cit of child care places in Fribourg. Second, the prognosis served as a foundation for estimating the costs for the canton and the municipalities. The second study focused on the average costs of day care facilities in Fribourg. It compared cost structures in five selected day cares over the canton to discover the main cost factors in such facilities. The conclusion was that the costs of one day of care in Fribourg were considerably lower than in other Swiss cantons. Furthermore, the study showed that day care facilities do not cost more than the other forms of day care, such as in-home day care provision (by nannies). Since the former is pictured as the day care system that guarantees higher quality, the study concludes that family-external day care facilities are the most efficient measure. The second study therefore justified the reform efforts and proved that the proposed measures—public provision and financial support for childcare—were the most efficient measures available.

According to the RPC, we expected that in the policy adoption stage, when the parliament makes the final decision about reform, parliamentarians would justify their statements with reference not only to normative goals but also to the evidence that was introduced or produced in the foregoing stages, but this was not the case. This can be explained by the consensus that existed in respect to the goals and in respect to the proposed measures, meaning there was no need for extensive justifications. But the converse interpretation is also possible: that the evidence used and produced in the policy formation stage fostered a normative consensus in respect to the goal of the law and it introduced sufficient “objective” knowledge about the benefits and costs of the included policy measures to convince the parliamentarians that the proposed law was necessary and efficient.

Nevertheless, we do not want to give the impression that the policy process followed the RPC entirely and that the other two frameworks have nothing to add to this explanation or an understanding of the role of evidence. We have interpreted the compromises that have been made as an indication for a rational policymaking process which started out with “family policy” and not with gender equity as the agenda issue. The fact that the government of the Fribourg canton put the officer for gender mainstreaming in charge for the Cantonal Commission for a Comprehensive Family Policy (CCCF) is a strong indication that the government was committed to the goal of gender equity. Nevertheless, when the government sent the draft law to the parliament, it emphasized other goals—especially economic competitiveness—as rational for the enhanced provision of day care facilities. This feature of the process corresponds much better to the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) and not to the RPC. Nevertheless, since no evidence was provided for the claim that child care facilities indeed strengthen economic competitiveness, the MSF does not help us to unravel the use and functions of evidence in this policy process.

## **Case 2: The Failed Reform of Day Care Provision in the Canton of Aargau**

*A short history and a brief evaluation of the outcome of the policy process*

**I**n the canton of Aargau, attempts to expand family-external child care have been embedded in a much larger, long-standing and strongly ideological struggle over education policy. The provision of day care facilities was one element of a very comprehensive reform proposal that

the cantonal government put to a vote in May 2007. All proposals to reform the education system were defeated at the polls, but the introduction of cantonal day care structures had the most support. Pushed by a parliamentary request of the FDP, the government pursued reforms in the specific fields of family external day care and started to revise the existing law on social security and prevention, which included various elements to support family-external child care provisions. When the government submitted the draft law to the parliament in April 2011 for the first reading, it was approved. Therefore, it came as a big surprise when the parliament dismissed the law in the final reading half a year later, in January 2012. During the second reading, the center-right party FDP introduced a long list of modifications to the draft law in order to reduce public spending. When these modifications were adopted, the Social Democrats decided to reject the watered-down draft law. Since the strongest party faction, the right-wing SVP, had always opposed the reform, the modified draft law was defeated by a margin of 79 to 51 votes in the parliament.

The dismissal of the draft law was the second defeat for the supporters of progressive education-, family- and gender-policy in the canton of Aargau within three years. With the rejection of the proposed reform, the parliament made a statement against any cantonal harmonization in the domain of education and a clear refusal of a more generous financial contribution towards family-external child care facilities. The main elements—guaranteed day care places, the harmonization of standards and the extension of the cantonal financial contribution—correspond widely with those of the care law which was accepted in Fribourg. In consequence, the existing structures remain which stimulate the single breadwinner/single caretaker model.

## **Missing and the Wrong Kind of Evidence for the Progressive Coalition**

**I**n contrast to Fribourg, the policy process in Aargau corresponds not to the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC) but to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). After showing this in more detail, we will highlight what this meant for the use and role of evidence.

In this case we cannot identify clear-cut temporal stages to the policy process; what we see instead is an on-going battle between a progressive and a conservative coalition, in which the progressive coalition is defeated again and again, but starts new reform attempts immediately after each defeat. The formation of the two coalitions was especially strong in the run-up to the voting on the comprehensive education reform. This proposal aimed to modernize the high school and preschool systems, and tried to strengthen family-external day care structures. It was supported by a progressive coalition consisting of left-wing parties, the centrist party, Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei (CVP) and parts of the center-right FDP party, as well as by employees' associations, teachers' and women's associations, and the cantonal executives. The core policy beliefs that held this coalition together were the conviction that education is a public matter and that public education is an important means to serve the goal of (gender) equity/equality. The provision and expansion of day care systems contributes to these goals in two ways: it allows women to participate in the labor market and it is the first step toward equalizing the opportunities for children within the educational system.

The proposed comprehensive education reform stimulated the explicit formation of a conservative counter-coalition. This advocacy coalition consisted of the right-wing

SVP and EDU parties as well as parts of the center-right FDP and CVP parties. But the regional industry and trade associations and the employer association also opposed the proposed comprehensive education reform and later the new law on day care facilities. This coalition's core policy belief was the presupposition that child care and education is a private matter and that the role of the state should be kept as minimal as possible. In consequence, this coalition opposed any public financial support and the introduction of canton-wide standards for family-external child care facilities.

How (and how much) did the advocacy-coalitions make use of evidence, and can we in any relevant way attribute this (non-)use to the failure of the reform proposal? We will address these questions in the following, but in reverse, since we want to start with an argument for the assumption that the use of evidence did indeed matter. It is very plausible that ideational factors like arguments and evidence mattered, because neither the parties that made up the core actors of the progressive coalition (SP/Socialdemocrats and Green Party) nor the core parties of the conservative coalition (SVP/Swiss Peoples Party and EDU/Democratic Federalist Union/ EDU) had a majority, and the centrist parties CVP and FDP did not have a coherent and stable position during the policy process. We find members of both parties in both advocacy-coalitions. And the FDP played a decisive role, both in putting the issue of day care facilities up on the political agenda again after the comprehensive reform proposal was defeated, and in watering down the proposal so much that the Social Democrats refused to support it anymore. This means that neither coalition was so powerful and stable that the outcome was predestined from the beginning and could be explained by the voting power of ideological blocks.

The following findings provide evidence for the assumption that the failure of the progressive coalition can indeed be attributed at least in part to their (non-)use of evidence. The progressive coalition did not apply a lot of evidence, and the evidence it did produce focused on the costs of the proposed measures and not on the need or on the expected benefits. In addition, one of their major claims was not backed up with evidence.

When the progressive coalition tried to reform the social security law with the major aim of promoting family-external child care, there was no systematic attempt to provide information that demonstrated a need for more day care facilities or that the situation was deficient (e.g., through comparisons to other cantons as was the case in Fribourg). The difference between Fribourg and Aargau becomes especially clear when we compare the two tasks that the two cantons gave to the consulting company INFRAS. For the canton of Fribourg, INFRAS had to estimate the demand for new day care places. The canton of Aargau, in contrast, asked INFRAS to calculate the potential costs of the new law for the municipalities. Whereas the first study could be used to bolster the claim that the public policy is currently deficient, the latter primarily provided ammunition for the conservative coalition.

Given that the progressive coalition's success in parliament was dependent on the FDP's votes, and given that the core value of this party is economic liberalism, it comes as no surprise that the members of the progressive coalition tried to sell the public promotion of day care facilities primarily as a contribution to the economic competitiveness of Aargau. By contrast, the goal of (gender) equity played a minor role. Nevertheless, hardly any evidence was provided to bolster the major causal claim of the progressive coalition.

And the conservative coalition seized the opportunity and strongly questioned the claim that day care facilities are a relevant and effective means to attract individual tax payers and investors to the canton.

Finally, we want to reflect on the role of the FDP, the party which played a major role in initiating, but also in torpedoing, the latest reform attempt. The FDP markets itself as a pragmatic "doer" party and therefore, within the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), the FDP would be a typical broker. The parliamentary initiative, through which members of the FDP caucuses asked the government to formulate a draft law for the promotion of day care facilities after the comprehensive educational reform failed, fits perfectly to the purported image and the role of a broker. Even the evidence that the FDP had would perfectly fit our expectations. They knew that forty eight percent of the population were in favor of the cantonal support for family-external day care facilities. This information makes it useful for taking this less-disputed element out of the reform package and promoting it as a first step in a pragmatic reform process.

But the broker interpretation collapses when we look at the behavior of the FDP during the second reading of the draft law. Within the Swiss political system, making many substantial changes in the very last minute does not fit the role of a deal maker party. Here, the advantage of having a plurality of theoretical frameworks shows up. The Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) provides a much better interpretation of the behavior of the FDP caucus members. They did not function as a united and pragmatic broker, but individually as policy entrepreneurs, who connected the proposed policy measure with the "problem of the day." At the beginning, education featured high on the agenda of the "problem stream," but in 2012, the economic crises had reached the

Swiss cantons and cutting costs became the major topic. Therefore, it made perfect sense for the opportunistic FDP to remove all the expensive elements of the draft proposal.

### **Case 3: The Reform of the Cantonal Tax Law in Uri**

*A short history and a brief evaluation of the outcome of the policy process*

In July 2009, the government of the canton of Uri used a federal framework directive to start a comprehensive revision of the tax law with the aim of enhancing the fiscal attractiveness of the canton. During the public consultation process, and especially during the readings of the draft law in parliament, there was strong pressure to complement the proposed tax deductions for family-external childcare with the opportunity to deduct “costs” for family-internal childcare. Nevertheless, the government won clear majorities in the parliament, as well as in the final popular vote for its draft law that allowed only the deduction of all costs for family-external childcare if both parents work. In consequence, the tax law in the canton of Uri stimulates the participation of women in the labor market and is therefore in line with the goal to enhance gender equity.

#### **The Authority of Legal Evidence for Countering the Conservative Coalition**

The main aim in reforming the cantonal tax law was to improve Uri’s fiscal attractiveness for individuals and investors. The government and almost all parties subscribed to this goal. Therefore, we expected that measures which enhance gender equity could only be introduced when they were seen as contributing to this objective, as

envisioned by the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). Indeed, the MSF offers an important insight into the policy outcome. In the governmental statements, as well as in the parliamentary debates, the proposed reform was primarily sold as a means to make Uri more competitive. Furthermore, this link was crucial in order to secure the support of the FDP faction in parliament, since its members accepted the public support for external childcare “without any enthusiasm” (Landrat des Kantons Uri, Verzeichnis der Tonaufnahmen 2010). Nevertheless, core features of the policy process, as well as the kind of evidence that was used, clearly support the interpretation that the tax reform process corresponds much closer to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). Furthermore, this normative-cognitive framework allows us to shed more light on what specifically makes the reference to evidence a powerful tool in public justifications.

The progressive reform proposal drafted by the cantonal government was opposed by a conservative advocacy coalition, which primarily included members of the SVP. In March 2010, two SVP politicians, who are simultaneously members of the cantonal parliament and chief executives in local governments, handed in a formal request in which they demanded that families who do not use family external childcare facilities should also be entitled to deduct childcare costs from their taxes. They claimed that tax deductions for family-internal childcare are necessary in order to avoid discrimination against those families who choose to live the traditional single breadwinner/single caregiver model. Only a few weeks later, the government reacted with a written statement in which they used a lot of evidence in order to reject the conservative politicians’ claim. The swift reaction of the government was possible because the struggle over tax deductions for family-internal childcare has had a

prominent place on the political agenda in Switzerland, especially in the conservative cantons in central Switzerland, since 2008. During that year, the SVP started a popular initiative to introduce tax deductions for family-internal childcare in the neighboring canton of Schwyz. The government of Schwyz blocked the initiative based on an expert report, produced by a tax lawyer and professor at the University of Lucerne. The core argument of the report was that a kind of tax deduction for family-internal childcare already exists, since this childcare work creates a kind of “shadow income” that is not taxed. In consequence, in order to avoid any discrimination among different family models, tax deductions for family-external childcare should be not only unproblematic but actually necessary. The SVP was clearly not convinced and took the issue to the federal level, but they were still unable to secure recognition for their view. The Swiss federal court and the federal government agreed with the tax lawyer. They declared that neither the constitution nor Swiss federal law demanded the introduction of tax deductions for family-internal childcare as a measure against discrimination. In spring 2010, the government of the Uri was able to refer to these decisions and used them as strong evidence for its claim that the conservative advocacy coalition’s demand was unconstitutional. Interestingly, members of the conservative coalition in parliament provided good arguments and also evidence that this interpretation of the expert report and the federal statements does not hold. In parliamentary debates, they argued that their request was different from the one made in Schwyz, since they demanded tax deductions for family-internal *and* family-external childcare. They were able to point to neighboring cantons such as Lucerne, which introduced identical measure without claims of being unconstitutional. The government

representative dismissed this claim and the corresponding evidence by arguing that the parliament is not the appropriate forum for judicial deliberations.

The debates in parliament indicate that many centrist parliamentarians did not really share the policy core belief/position of the government, which defined gender equity in a “transformative way” as the realization of the dual breadwinner/dual caretaker model. Instead, they signaled openness to the conservative coalition’s argument that tax laws should be “neutral” in respect to the divergent family models, implying a necessary introduction of tax deductions for family-external *and* family-internal childcare. Only members of the leftist parties argued that tax deductions for family-internal childcare would provide the wrong incentives for women. But it was not this insight that was taken up by the centrist Christian Democrats (CVP) when they justified their decisive support for the governmental draft law. This party—which has always been the leading party in Uri and in the cantonal government—argued, in line with the role of a typical broker, that measures that are “helpful for all families and that correspond to the constitution” should be taken (translation from Landrat des Kantons Uri 2010). In other words, although the SVP provided evidence that the governmental interpretation of the federal court ruling was not correct, the broker party sided with the progressive coalition in this decision. This is remarkable, since the CVP frequently joins the SVP in their opposition to reforms in the field of education and family policy. One reason why the CVP did not join the SVP in this case was because the SVP initiative would have worsened the fiscal situation in Uri—an aspect that was both the main concern of the CVP in the tax revision process and a widely shared goal among the political parties. This explains why the role of a broker who

pursues the common interest led the CVP to side with the progressive coalition in this specific decision.

Overall, this case neatly demonstrates that, in a policy process that corresponds strongly to the ACF, the most important evidence concerns the interpretation of shared (constitutional) norms. And it makes clear that the power of evidence lies more in the reputation of the evidence producer than in a clear-cut fit between the evidence and the claim that it is supposed to support. By referring to an expert, the federal court and the federal government, the government of Uri was able to sway centrist parliamentarians against a measure that would reduce gender equity, even though these parliamentarians did not really share the governmental understanding of gender equity and despite the fact that evidence from the neighboring cantons undermined the governmental claim that the proposed measure was unconstitutional.

#### **Case 4: The Reform of the Cantonal Tax Law in Nidwalden**

*A short history and a brief evaluation of the outcome of the policy process*

**I**n 2009, the federal framework directive stimulated a similar revision of the tax law in the canton of Nidwalden, and the major goal for the government and for the most important parties was the same as in Uri: to use the revision for strengthening the fiscal attractiveness of the canton. In Nidwalden, the contradiction between the federal goal (tax harmonization) and the goals and actions at the cantonal level is even more striking than in Uri, since right from the beginning, the goal of the cantonal government was to distinguish Nidwalden from other cantons: the slogan which dominated

the policy process was “We want to have unique selling points” in the battle to attract individuals and investments (translation from Landrat des Kantons Nidwalden 2009). Policy entrepreneurs were able to link the introduction of tax deduction for family-internal childcare to this goal, which dominates the “problem stream” in Nidwalden at most times. This link allowed for smooth policy formation and a quick decision-making process. In Nidwalden, this measure did not lead to any significant struggle between progressive and conservative coalitions. This is remarkable, since the reform process in Nidwalden occurred at the same time as the one in Uri. Furthermore, both cantons are close neighbors of Schwyz, and there are intensive intergovernmental networks among these small conservative cantons in central Switzerland. By March 2010, the cantonal parliament had already accepted the tax reform with an overwhelming majority of 51 to 7 votes.

The new tax law provides all families with the opportunity to deduct 3,000 SFr per annum and child from their taxes. Families who have costs for family-external child care can deduct further costs of up to 7,900 SFr. In comparison with the previous situation, when families could deduct 10,000 SFr for family-external childcare, but not for family-internal childcare, this new regulation is clearly a step back in respect to gender equity. It strengthens the traditional family model against the dual breadwinner/dual caretaker model.

#### **The Counterproductive Use of Evidence by Single-Minded Policy Entrepreneurs**

**I**n the parliamentary debates, it became clear that there was an awareness that the new law represented a conservative



move in respect to gender equity. Members of the Green party expressed their worry that the financial support would encourage mothers to stay at home instead of joining the labor market. But in contrast to Uri, the conservative advocacy coalition included not only the SVP, who support the traditional family model, but also the centrist FDP and CVP parties. These parties and the cantonal government highlighted the liberal value of “choice”—insinuating against the evidence produced by the legal expert for the government of Schwyz that tax deductions for family-external and family-internal childcare would represent a neutral stance towards divergent family models. This means that we can also observe elements that correspond to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) within this policy process. Nevertheless, these features are not very strong and they do not correspond to the use of evidence. First, the issue of tax deductions for childcare played a very minor role in both the law reform process and the electoral campaigns which took place in parallel (the members of the cantonal government were newly elected just 10 days before the law was passed in parliament). Second, neither the members of the conservative coalition nor those of the small progressive coalition buttressed their normative statements with evidence. For example, the government simply claimed that the draft law did not violate the constitution without providing any further legal reflections or support. Nobody challenged this claim.

However, the policy process involved the use of a lot of evidence. But this evidence was not geared to indicate any connection between tax deductions and gender equity, but to highlight the unique selling point that the proposed tax deductions would provide Nidwalden in its efforts to market the canton as attractive for families. The government produced inter-cantonal comparisons in or-

der to buttress its claim that the maximum of 10,900 SFr would give Nidwalden the highest tax deductions for childcare in Switzerland. Furthermore, it strengthened its (misleading) claim that all families would profit from the new regulation by calculating that families would pay 450 SFr less in taxes per child and annum on average. The government focused its arguments and use of evidence on the absolute amount of money that families could deduct from their taxes and on the inter-cantonal competition through tax deductions. The consequences of the new law for family models and gender equity, in contrast, were relegated to the sidelines. The success of the government’s framing strategy is demonstrated by the fact that, during the public consultations, the Social Democrats asked (together with the Christian Democrats and the farmer association) the government to increase the amount of money that all families could deduct from 3,000 to 5,000 SFr. In reaction to this, the cantonal administration calculated how such an increase would impact on the tax income of the canton and it became clear how much money the canton was willing to invest in stabilizing traditional family models (almost 3 million SFr per year). The government argued that the canton could not afford to lose another 2 million SFr of taxes and even issued a reminder that each increase in the amount of money that each family can deduct reduces the costs that those who use family-external childcare opportunities can deduct.

This case presents a similar puzzle as we saw in the Uri case. In Uri it is remarkable that the dominant Christian Democrats sided with the progressive advocacy coalition. We explained the CVP’s behavior in the context of an ADF as agreeing with the behavior of a common-sense broker swayed by a government that referred to constitutional norms (especially to authoritative producers/providers of normative evidence) in or-

der to block the demands of the conservative coalition. In Nidwalden, it is the behavior of the FDP, the party that dominates the government, which demands an explanation. After all, a party with as strong a neo-liberal ideology as the FDP in Nidwalden should be aware of the argument that tax deductions for family-internal childcare discourages women to enter the labor market. This leads to labor shortages, which is seen as one of the major limiting factors for economic growth in Switzerland (e.g. Stockar, Marti, and Peter 2009). Nevertheless, tax-ranking lists have become the most important piece of evidence for politicians in (central) Switzerland, where more and more cantons follow the lead of the canton of Zug, which has had tremendous economic success by attracting investors and rich individuals through extremely low taxes. In consequence, the FDP-dominated government acted as a policy entrepreneur and used the conservative demand to support family-internal childcare by introducing another round of tax reductions. The CVP and the SVP, on the other hand, used the tax reform to pursue their conservative family policy. Overall, this case shows strong overlap with the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), but the nature of the “problem stream”—the discourse around the prior policy issues—and what is seen as the “policy stream”—the debate about the right policy measures—differ from actor to actor.

## Summary and Conclusions

**I**n the final section of this paper we provide a brief summary of the theoretical and empirical parts, and we will reflect on the implications of these findings for (a) those who want to promote gender equity, (b) those who believe in evidence-based policymaking, and (c) the scholarly discourse on fruitful and adequate theoretical frame-

works of the policy process.

In the theoretical section of this article, we laid out the potential roles and functions that evidence can play in law-making processes. We have introduced three theoretical frameworks, which not only draw distinct pictures of the policy process but imply different kinds and uses for evidence. If the process corresponds to the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC), evidence should be used to generate objective knowledge of existing deficits in a policy field and about the efficiency of policy measures to reduce these deficits. If it is in line with the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), evidence should shape the policy process as a means for justifying specific policy goals and by indicating the appropriateness and/or effectiveness of policy measures to fulfil these goals. Within a process that resembles the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA), evidence should be used to signal the priority of specific challenges and to bolster the claim that measures drawn from a different policy field help to meet these challenges.

Our four case studies reveal that all three theoretical frameworks are helpful for understanding and explaining the use of evidence within a law-making process. In the canton of Fribourg, a lot of systematically produced information was used to bolster the claims of a deficit and that the proposed measures would efficiently reduce these deficits. The case study also made clear that the extensive use of substantive evidence was complemented by other features of RPC model in order to pave the way towards an outcome that enhanced gender equity: politicians put family and gender issues on the agenda without connecting it with specific goals and measures from the beginning; this allowed the government to pursue a systematic and inclusive policy formation process, which, in turn, led to a broad consensus in the parliament.

In the canton of Aargau, the same policy measure—public provision of day care facilities—faced a very different context when it was introduced into the policy process. The ACF helped us to understand why we could not find any similar use of substantive evidence, since the debate around the public provision of day care facilities was embroiled in a clash between progressive and conservative advocacy coalitions. In part, we could explain the failure of the law proposal through the fact that the progressive coalition did not introduce a lot of evidence and the little evidence they did introduce was of the wrong kind. They neither provided evidence for an existing deficit, nor did they provide any substantive evidence indicating that the promotion of day care facilities would be in line with social values and legal norms. And they hardly delivered any evidence for their main claim, that the existence of day care facilities stimulates economic growth. Despite this, we also showed that the ACF cannot provide the main explanation for the failure of the law proposal. Instead, it is much more in line with the MSA: the FDP, a party that is internally split between those who promote a progressive family model because it contributes to economic growth and those who fight any state involvement (the split runs through most individual members), changes its position in accordance with the problem definition that dominates the public agenda at specific points in time.

Overall, the first-two case studies provide some leverage for the causal claim that evidence matters for the promotion of gender equity. If the right kind of evidence is

embedded in a policy process that is strongly in line with the RPC, such a causal configuration contributes to the promotion of gender equity. A causal configuration that combines context conditions in line with the ACF and the fact that the progressive coalition provided little evidence, all of the wrong sort, explains the failure of a law proposal promoting gender equity.<sup>8</sup>

The two case studies which focus on cantonal tax reforms revealed further insights into the role that specific kinds of evidence can play in policy processes. The first case, Uri, showed clearly the importance of systematically generated information that bolsters claims about the normative appropriateness of specific policy measures. Disputes did not arise from the question of whether the proposed policies contributed effectively and efficiently to specific policy goals (gender equity or fiscal attractiveness), but whether the proposed policies were in line with constitutional norms. This case study highlights the importance of legal advice and the reference to relevant court decisions in situations which are characterized by competing advocacy coalitions. Nevertheless, the case study also reveals that the process of applying constitutional law to specific policy proposals is not only driven by a systematic application of the legal techniques, but open to strategic use. In the case of Uri, a progressively oriented government referred to the authority of legal institutions in order to dismiss evidence-based claims from the conservative coalition. In Nidwalden, by contrast, normative arguments based on the legal advice played no role at all. Instead, neo-liberals and conservatives

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<sup>8</sup> Please note that in the case of the reform process within Aargau, this causal configuration does not resemble a “sufficient condition,” since another factor had been identified as necessary for explaining the result. It is not clear whether the configuration can be assigned the status of a “necessary condition,” since it is very difficult to make a prognosis about the result of a counterfactual case in which the progressive coalition had used much and the right kind of evidence. The FDP might still have switched its position.

produced evidence that bolstered the claim that a reactionary measure in the field of family policy would help the canton to keep its competitive edge in attracting investors and human capital. Since the dominant liberal party, FDP, single-mindedly follows the economic competition frame, not only it sided with those who promote a conservative family policy, and ignored both legal evidence that questioned the normative appropriateness of tax deductions for family-internal child care, but also the evidence produced by economists which pointed to the counterproductive consequences of tax deductions for family-internal child care for the inclusion of women into the labor market, which in turn is a major hindrance for further economic growth.

Given these findings, what conclusions can we draw for those who are interested in promoting gender equity? First and foremost, the proponents of gender equity should recognize that the use of evidence cannot be equated with technocratic cost-benefit analysis. Our approach revealed the broad set of possibilities for using systematically generated substantive knowledge for bolstering claims about the adequacy of certain policy goals and of specific policy measures. Having said this, our first case study showed impressively that the production of rather technocratic kinds of evidence (analysis of existing deficits, prognosis of the demand for day care facilities, and cost-benefit analysis) is indeed very helpful if the goal of stimulating gender equity has been set in such a way that it is kept out of ideological struggles (in that case, primarily by assigning the cantonal officer for gender mainstreaming as the lead agent for the formulation of a comprehensive cantonal family policy). Since these starting conditions are rather rare, other kinds of evidence that play a major role within the ACF and the MSA should be recognized and applied.

Our case studies provide some support for the assumption that, in contexts that are characterized by strong ideological struggles between advocacy coalitions, the establishment of constitutional norms and the use of legal expertise are of crucial importance. In contrast, trying to bolster the claim that measures which enhance gender equality are also good for economic development has been less successful, even with substantial evidence. This can be partly explained because the existing evidence has not been used by the proponents of gender equity (as in Aargau). But another part of the explanation is that not only measures which improve gender equity but also those with negative consequences can be causally linked to economic goals, as the example from Nidwalden shows. Nevertheless, these insights should not be misunderstood. In contexts such as Switzerland, where economic competitiveness is clearly a much more generally accepted policy goal than (gender) equity/equality, a stronger production, dissemination and introduction of systematically generated evidence which bolsters the claim that measures to enhance gender equity have a positive impact on economic growth and competitiveness is certainly a strategy that should not be dismissed but should be pursued in a more systematic manner.

Next we turn to the main lessons learned for those who promote evidence-based policymaking. The main insight for this camp is the same as that formulated for those who promote gender equity: The notion of evidence should not be restricted to systematically generated knowledge about the effectiveness and efficiency of specific policy measures. As has already been emphasized, these kinds of evidence can play productive roles in law-making processes, but it seems that they are used only under specific circumstances. In consequence, those who promote or study

evidence-based policymaking should take into account other kinds of evidence which play different roles in the policy process. If there is a plurality of policy goals which compete for normative dominance or cognitive recognition, systematically generated knowledge serves other functions: proving the legitimacy/normative dominance of disputed policy goals and the appropriateness of policy measures; or generating attention for specific policy goals and connecting policy measures to goals in other policy fields. We did not find much evidence in our case studies for the first steps within the ACF and the MSA (in contrast to evidence that bolsters the claim that there is an objective deficit, which is the functional equivalent of the first step within the Rational Policy Cycle (RPC) model). But this might be because these policy process theories embed policymaking much more within broader processes of social development and political decisionmaking. Due to strongly restricted time and resources, we could only trace these processes in a limited way (e.g. by taking into account the legal expertise that had been produced in the neighboring canton of Schwyz). For example, we could not find any indication for the assumption that we derived from the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) that political actors use systematic knowledge about the current salience of policy issues (either to set their own priorities or to justify these priorities to the public).

We did discover an extensive use of the forms of evidence that we deduced for the second step within the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and the MSA: expertise that indicated the constitutional (in)adequacy of policy measures, and systematic information that showed how a measure relevant to (but not enhancing) gender equity contributes to boosting the economic competitiveness of a canton. With the

introduction of the ACF and the empirical proof that legal expertise about the normative appropriateness of policy measures matters, we provide support for those who do not restrict evidence to causal/prognostic analysis. The introduction of the MSA and a case study that shows how evidence was used to link a policy measure from the field of family/gender policy to the policy goal of enhancing economic competitiveness holds another lesson for the debate on evidence-based policymaking: The quality of evidence need not be very high in order to be useful for strengthening a causal claim. In order to convincingly link a measure to a policy goal, there is neither the need to show that the measure is likely to reach the goal (by predicting its effectiveness), nor that it is an efficient measure (by comparing costs and benefits) or that it is the most effective measure (by comparing divergent policy measures). All that is needed is to show that the measure helps to acquire a pole position in a (self-produced) ranking list!

Finally, we want to reflect on what our study implies for the more academic discourse on the theories of the policy process. First and foremost, we see our study as support for our claim that the existence of a plurality of theoretical frameworks describing the policy process should be seen as an asset, rather than a weakness that has to be overcome by some kind of meta-theoretical synthesis. The existing theoretical plurality has methodological, analytical, and practical advantages. First, in contrast to studies that start with a single theoretical framework, the application of a plurality of theoretical frameworks reduces the dangers of theoretical *a priori* determinism and bias. Second, a plurality of theoretical frameworks not only helps to provide a more nuanced picture of each individual case (as documented in the working document that we pointed to at the beginning of the empirical section) but also

to capture the main aspects and dynamics that characterize the distinct cases (as documented in this article). Third, the plurality of theoretical lenses allows the development of a broad set of potential uses of evidence within specific contexts. For practitioners, this holds two important kinds of insights: it widens the horizon by pointing to new, as yet unrealized potentials; and at the same time it shows that the successful use of divergent kinds of evidence is context dependent.

The second message for the academic discourse is that the policy cycle should not be treated as something that we have fortunately overcome (e.g., Weible 2008, p. 617). Adequately expanded and specified, the rationalistic model of the policy cycle has its merits as both a prescriptive and an analytical tool. We have discovered a case where the political processes and the use of evidence have been very much in line with such a model and that it leads to a positive outcome. Since we discovered a strong congruence between the empirical case and the RPC framework within the field of family policy, where it is much more likely than in the field of tax policy, the impact of the finding on the theoretical discourse is limited (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 198-200). So we do not conclude that the RPC should be reinstated as the dominant theory of the policy process. Nevertheless, we think that it should be accepted as being as fruitful as the other theoretical frameworks that we mentioned in the theoretical part of the article.

The third and final message relates to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), which is certainly one of the most, if not *the* most prominent theoretical framework within the academic field of policy studies. Within this approach, evidence or expertize has primarily been associated with technical or scientific knowledge as the basis for diagnostic or causal claims (e.g., Weible 2008, p. 619). What is puzzling is that legal expertize,

with its potential to bolster claims about the normative appropriateness or constitutional validity of policy measures, has not played a more prominent role within the ACF. As we have shown in one of our case studies, the ability to refer to legal expertize and to court decisions can be of decisive importance in policy processes—even in Switzerland, where courts have a much weaker standing in the political system than countries such as Germany or the United States. In consequence, an approach that indicates an affinity to these classic kinds of advocates in its title should pay more attention to the producers and uses of legal evidence.

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