7 VOLUNTEERING AND INFORMAL CARE-GIVING IN LATER LIFE AS POLICY PROBLEMS

Abstract
Older persons contribute to welfare when volunteering and providing informal care. Particularly the increasing number of healthy retirees is considered a potential for these activities. Governments could profit from supporting these activities, when trying to activate their citizens and to substitute retrenching welfare states. In reality, however, they are not always supportive. This study uses the concept of policy problems to explain governments’ reservations to intervene. An analysis of policy documents and expert interviews is carried out to describe the situation in Germany and Italy between 1990 and 2008. The results show that the actual situation and path dependencies interact to shape the structure of policy problems. We conclude that increasing potential for volunteering and informal care-giving in later life does not guarantee governmental support. The possibility to draw upon a tradition of support for these activities seems essential.

Introduction
Retirees can increase welfare if they volunteer or provide informal care (Jegermalm & Jeppsson Grassman, 2009). Particularly the healthy life-years after retirement are considered a potential for productivity (Komp, Van Tilburg, & Broese van Groenou, 2009), which recent welfare state reforms have tried to tap (Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijck, & Myles, 2002). When doing so, strengthening opportunities for productive activities beyond paid work seems advantageous. Structural unemployment keeps Continental European labour markets from absorbing more workers and harsh opposition hampers reforms raising the retirement age (Arza & Kohli, 2008). Moreover, recent retirement reforms in Europe affected only few healthy life-years after retirement. The highest retirement age introduced was 67 years (Organisation for Economic- Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006). This is seven years below the healthy life-expectancy of persons aged 65 in 2007 (Eurostat, 2009). Programmes for volunteering and informal care-giving in later life, in contrast, could cover all healthy life-years after retirement without the labour market situation interfering.

Although programmes supporting volunteering and informal care-giving in later life promise welfare gains, they are sparse in welfare states. This is surprising, considering that governments in welfare states should have the increase of welfare as one of their aims (Barr, 2004; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Country-comparisons showed that volunteering in later life is addressed to different degrees (Vellekoop Baldock,

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This has been explained in different ways. First, it has been explained with the potential for volunteering presented by the growing number of healthy retirees (Caro & Bass, 1995; Laslett, 1996). Second, it has been tied to the level of volunteering in later life (Cnaan & Cwikel, 1992). Third, it has been explained with the type of welfare state and the role of volunteering for the state (Hank & Erlinghagen, 2010; Vellekoop Bal-dock, 1999). Informal care-giving in later life, in contrast, is usually not addressed at all. This is explained with informal care-giving taking place within the “invisible” private sphere and commonly being unpaid (Jegermalm & Jeppsson Grassman, 2009; Philip, 2001).

The explanations usually provided, however, cannot fully capture reality. A comparison between Germany and Italy, for example, challenges the explanations provided for volunteering in later life. Individuals within both countries have similar potential for volunteering in later life. This potential can be estimated using the share of healthy retirees without care-giving responsibilities among persons aged 50 to 90. The share was 46 percent in Germany and 47 percent in Italy in 2004 (Komp, Van Tilburg, & Broese van Groenou, 2009). Moreover, both countries have a similar share of volunteers in the population aged 50 years and over. In 2006, this share was 8 percent in Italy and 13 percent in Germany (Hank & Erlinghagen, 2010). Finally, both countries have similar welfare state designs. The German and the Italian welfare state are based on the subsidiarity principle. It implies that citizens are expected to attempt solving problems by themselves, for example through volunteering and informal care-giving. Governments only intervene when all actors at lower levels fail (Sundström et al., 2008). Esping-Andersen (1990) even suggested that both countries represent the same type of welfare state. But despite all these similarities, the governmental support programmes for volunteering in later life differ dramatically between the countries. The German federal government has been supporting older volunteers since the early 1990s. It did so through a series of pilot projects organized in cooperation with the Bundesländer and municipalities (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2006). The Italian government, in contrast, did not introduce a law supporting volunteering in later life until 2008 (the national decreto-legge 112/2008).

The comparison between Germany and Italy suggests that the rationale for governmental support for older volunteers is not completely clear. The present article strives to fill this lacuna by analyzing volunteering in later life as a policy problem. Policy problems are situations that are perceived to benefit from governmental intervention. Identifying a situation as a policy problem is the precondition for governmental intervention to occur. Analyzing a situation as a policy problem, consequently, reveals why it attracts or does not attract the attention of policy makers (Dye, 2008). This article additionally analyzes informal care-giving in later life as a policy problem. We do this because we assume there might also be some overlooked explanations for governmental support for this activity. After all, governmental support for informal care-giving in later life has not yet been explicitly studied. Our knowledge about it is deduced from studies about informal care-giving across all age-groups (e.g. Philip, 2001; Sundström et al., 2008).
In order to explain governmental support for volunteering and informal caregiving in later life, we compare the situation in Germany and in Italy. For each country and each activity, we answer four questions characterising policy problems: (1) Is there political awareness? (2) Do policy-makers see a need for governmental intervention? (3) Do policy-makers see the possibility of governmental intervention? (4) Do policy-makers see a desirability of governmental intervention? Our answers are based on an analysis of policy documents and on expert interviews. In our analysis, we consider the time span between 1990 and 2008. The early 1990s are the starting point because this is when discussions about older persons’ productivity through volunteering and informal care-giving gained ground (e.g. Bass, Caro, & Chen, 1993; Kohli & Künemund, 1996).

A framework for analyzing volunteering and informal care-giving in later life as policy problems

The policy cycle model provides a useful framework for our analysis. It describes policy processes as a sequence of stages. In a first stage, situations are identified as policy problems. They can, then, enter political agendas and be addressed in policies. After policies are evaluated, they might have to be reformulated. This re-starts the policy cycle (Jann & Wegrich, 2007).

The first stage in this model is the identification of policy problems. It deals with the questions whether political actors try to put an issue on the political agenda. If the policy cycle is supposed to start, then an issue needs to attract political awareness in the beginning of this stage (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984). The policy cycle only continues when such awareness has been established. Then, political actors decide whether they see the need, possibility and desirability of political intervention into this issue. The aspects of need, possibility and desirability are closely interconnected, which means that they are probably going to be jointly considered. If all three aspects have been affirmed, then the next stage begins. It is the stage of agenda setting. However, if any of the three aspects is not affirmed, then the policy cycle stops (Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009; Jann & Wegrich, 2007). In the following pages, we discuss the political awareness of volunteering and informal care-giving in later life. Then, we discuss the need, possibility and desirability of political intervention into these two activities.

The simplicity of the policy cycle model proves useful for analyses, though it has also been criticised for oversimplifying reality (Howlett et al., 2009). The criticism is three-fold. First, in reality, the stages of the policy cycle can occur in any order. Second, their content can change over time due to feedback loops (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Howlett et al., 2009). Third, each stage involves multiple actors, which makes its content multi-faceted (Dye, 2008; Howlett et al., 2009). To address these issues, we consider changes over time and the perspectives of various policy actors.
Policy problems

**Political awareness**

Political actors need to be aware of an issue before they can consider governmental intervention. Hogwood and Gunn (1984) differentiated six ways in which such awareness can arise. First, the issue reaches critical proportion. This could, for example, happen when the number of older volunteers and informal care-givers increases. Second, the issue becomes visible in a particular incident. Volunteering, for example, became more visible when the United Nations declared 2001 the International Year of Volunteers (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs, & Hustinx, 2010). Informal care-giving, as another example, became more visible in Germany when a national association of family carers was founded in 2008 (Wir pflegen, 2010). Third, the issue has an emotional quality, which attracts media coverage. This quality could stem from the health benefits gained from volunteering in later life (Li & Ferraro, 2006) or the health strain caused by informal care-giving in later life (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2007). Fourth, the issue promises to have wide impact. Volunteering in later life could have such an impact, because it increases social cohesion (Putnam, 2000). Informal care-giving in later life has such an impact in that it affects whole families (Lashevicz & Keating, 2009). Fifth, the issue tackles questions about the distribution of power in a society. In our case, the questions of the role and power of young older persons needs to be reassessed because of their contribution to welfare (Laslett, 1996). Sixth, the issue is fashionable. Volunteering and informal care-giving in later life could draw this fashionability from discussions about citizens’ responsibilities (Fuller, Kershaw, & Pulkingham, 2008).

**The need for governmental intervention**

Intervention is deemed necessary when a governmentally defined ideal situation is not reached. Governments can view this as a lack of target achievement, which might be corrected through intervention (Dery, 1984). To a lesser degree, situations holding potential for improvement might also be deemed to need governmental intervention (Dery, 2000; Howlett et al., 2009). The improvement could, for example, be older citizens’ increased well-being or cost savings for governments. The potential for improvement, however, creates a less pressing need for intervention than the deviation from an ideal situation does (Dery, 1984; Howlett et al., 2009).

The ideal situation governments describe is usually characterized by an increased level of volunteering and informal care-giving in later life (Hong, Morrow-Howard, Tang, & Hinterlong, 2009; Pavolini & Ranci, 2008). The need for such an increase is explained in three ways. First, the growing number of healthy retirees increases the need for productive roles in old age (Bass et al., 1993; Van der Meer, 2006). Second, ageing populations need additional support, provided by the citizens themselves (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002; Fuller et al., 2008). Third, governments need to contain costs in times of economic crisis. The latter argument assumes that governments cut costs when activating citizens for self-help instead of providing services for them (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002; Fuller et al., 2008; Pierson, 2001).

The discussion on the potential for improvement is diverse. Besides the level of volunteering and informal care-giving in later life, it also covers numerous other
Policy problems

aspects. Those aspects are, inter alia, the tasks carried out and the support and compensation received (Pavolini & Ranci, 2008; Vellekoop Balock, 1999; Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyi, 2007).

The possibility for governmental intervention

Once the need for governmental intervention is established, the possibility to fill this need has to be reviewed. Political actors only need to follow up with policy problems that can be influenced through governmental intervention (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). Existing policies for volunteering and informal care-giving across age-groups might indicate the perceived possibility for intervention into those activities among older persons.

German and Italian governments address volunteering by handling voluntary organizations as possible providers of social and health care services (Ascoli & Ranci, 2002). The Germany Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) moreover initiated several programmes supporting volunteers, inter alia through training (BMFSFJ, 2007, 2008). Comparable initiatives exist at the Länder and local level (BMFSFJ, 2008). In Italy, a national framework law from 1991 (decreto-legge 266/1991) installed regional and local structures (Centri di Servizio per il Volontariato) supporting voluntary associations and provided them with funding (Borzaga, 2004; Ranci & Montagnini, in press).

Policies for informal care-giving differ widely between Germany and Italy. In Germany, mandatory long-term care insurance was introduced in 1995. It provides cash transfers and services to care-receivers and training and social insurance contributions for care-givers (Sozialgesetzbuch XI, 2009). In Italy, the national government as well as some Central and Northern regions and municipalities provide cash benefits to care-receivers (Pavolini & Ranci, 2008). However, these programmes are not coordinated, which creates a geographically diverse situation (Madama & Maino, 2008).

The desirability of governmental intervention

Governmental intervention should not only affect policy problems, it should also lead to an improvement of the situation. Otherwise an intervention seems undesirable and the policy problem might not be further considered (Dery, 1984). A lack of improvement might be due to one of two reasons: opposition to the intervention or the perception that governmental intervention is inept (Bieler, 2003; Vis & Van Kersbergen, 2007).

Striving to activate older persons through governmental intervention might meet opposition. There are normative ideas in Western societies that old age should be free from obligations related to productive activities (Kohli, 1987). Acting against these normative ideas might be perceived as unjust and consequently cause opposition. A loss of votes in upcoming elections could result (Vis & Van Kersbergen, 2007). Moreover, the new cohorts of older persons are often described as active and inter-
ested in political participation (Goerres, 2009; Karisto, 2007). This entails that they are more likely than their predecessors to be found at veto points in political decision making. They, therewith, have better opportunities to stop interventions they disagree with (Kohli, 2008; Vis & Van Kersbergen, 2007).

Governmental intervention into volunteering and informal care-giving in later life might also be considered inept. The perception is particularly likely when it comes to informal care-giving. In Germany and Italy, informal care is the primary responsibility of families, with governments supporting them (Sundström et al., 2008). Direct state intervention could thus be considered an intrusion into privacy. Moreover, governmental intervention is sometimes frowned upon because of its aim. The aim of reducing the need for publicly provided social services, for example, might alienate proponents of strong welfare states (Evers & Strünck, 2002; Pavolini & Ranci, 2008). Neo-liberals, on the other hand, might disapprove of any governmental intervention that advocates the primacy of markets (Bieler, 2003; Esping-Andersen et al., 2002).

**Analysis**

**Data**

We used a mixed methods approach for this study, combining expert interviews with the analysis of policy documents (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). The policy documents include publications of local, regional and national governments and of political parties, from 1990 to 2008. They addressed either older persons, volunteering or informal care. The experts are persons involved in or observing political processes concerning old age, volunteering and informal care-giving: policy makers, policy consultants, researchers and board members of associations for volunteering, informal care and old age. They were active at the local, regional and national level.

The experts and policy documents were chosen as a theoretical sample. Theoretical samples are useful for understanding the arguments and structures connected to a topic. Their basic idea is that data collection and analysis occur in turns. Each step of data collection is designed to answer questions arising from the previous analysis. The sampling ends when interviews and policy documents no longer render additional information (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). The annex contains a detailed description of the sampling process.

All interviews were structured similarly. Initially, we collected information on personal experiences with governmental awareness of and intervention into volunteering and informal care-giving in later life. Then, we confronted the interviewee with the information we had collected until then. Finally, we asked for suggestions on relevant literature, potential interview partners and phenomena we could look into. The literature suggested was also analyzed.

In total, we analyzed six German and six Italian serial publications and interviewed 19 Germans and 11 Italians. All interviews in Germany were conducted in German in face-to-face situations, from April to June 2009. Ten of the interviews in Italy were face-to-face, one used a written questionnaire. They were held in English, German and Italian, during March and April 2009.
Policy problems

Measurements
The political awareness of volunteering and informal care-giving in later life is categorized as “high”, “intermediate” or “low”. “High” describes topics addressed in policy documents and considered relevant by the interviewees. “Intermediate” describes topics either addressed in policy documents or considered relevant by the interviewees. “Low” describes topics neither addressed in policy documents nor considered relevant by the interviewees. The need, possibility and desirability of governmental intervention are each described with the categories “yes” and “no”. “Yes” means that the need respectively possibility respectively desirability of governmental intervention was addressed in the documents or by the interviewees. “No” means that the need respectively possibility respectively desirability was denied in the documents or by the interviewees. The explanations for awareness, need, possibility and desirability were coded as described in the theoretical section (see Table 7.1). We added “other” as a last category, capturing the explanations not identified in previous studies.

Table 7.1: The framework for the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Descriptive categories</th>
<th>Explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political awareness</td>
<td>Low, Intermediate, High</td>
<td>(a) Critical proportion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Visibility in particular incident</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Emotional quality</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Wide impact</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e) Tackles question about distribution of power</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(f) Fashionability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(g) Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for intervention</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
<td>(h) Ideal situation not reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Potential for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(j) Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of intervention</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
<td>(k) Experience with intervention in volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and informal care in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(l) Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirability of intervention</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
<td>(m) Opposition to intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n) Perception: intervention is inept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(o) Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure
We analyzed the information collected from interviews and policy documents in two steps. First, we conducted a qualitative content analysis. This analysis summarizes and structures information based on categories found in the text. Following Mayring (2008), we started by summarizing the interviews and policy documents and then collected additional information to clarify ambiguous passages. Finally, we brought the information from the different interviews and documents together in a single overarching structure. Second, we inserted the results of the qualitative content analysis into
the framework developed from the literature review (see Table 7.1). Changes over time and contradictory information given by different political actors were recorded where they occurred.

**Results**

Volunteering and informal care-giving in later life are structured differently as policy problems. The structure of the policy problems moreover differs between Germany and Italy. Tables 7.2 and 7.3 display those structures and the explanations given. The text below presents the results of the analysis. We start with the results concerning volunteering and then present the ones concerning informal care-giving in later life.

**Volunteering in later life as a policy problem**

The political awareness of volunteering in later life is intermediate to high in Germany and Italy. In both countries, it was high at the national level and intermediate at the local level throughout the whole period of observation. At the regional level it increased from intermediate to high: in Germany in the early 2000s, in Italy around 2008. Where there was an intermediate level of awareness, volunteers were often not divided into age-groups. Additionally, the focus was set on the product of volunteering, not on the volunteers. A report in the bulletin of the Regional Council of Tuscany illustrates the latter. In 1993, the President of the Regional Council of Tuscany, Paolo Benelli, attended a meeting of the regional council of AUSER, an association of older

**Table 7.2: Description of volunteering in later life as a policy problem in Germany and Italy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Intermediate to high</td>
<td>Intermediate to high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
<td>- Critical proportion</td>
<td>- Critical proportion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Visibility in particular incident</td>
<td>- Tackles question about distribution of power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tackles question about distribution of power</td>
<td>- Other: electoral gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Other: personal preferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Need for intervention</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
<td>- Ideal situation not reached</td>
<td>- Potential for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possibility of intervention</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
<td>- Experience with intervention in volunteering</td>
<td>- Experience with intervention in volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desirability of intervention</strong></td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
<td>- Perception: intervention is inept</td>
<td>- Other: Would be mismanagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
volunteers. During this meeting, he underlined the contribution the social services provided by AUSER had to their older users' health and social integration. However, he never mentioned that the persons he addressed, who were providing these services, were older persons themselves (Anonymus, 1993).

The explanations for the level of political awareness differ slightly between Germany and Italy. The central argument, however, is the same: volunteering in later life reached a critical proportion. The new generation of older persons is characterised as active and interested in volunteering, creating the need for new policies. In both countries, this argument was connected to the new distribution of power. In Germany, the high number of older volunteers was seen to strengthen grassroots democracy. Italian interviewees, in contrast, argued that the high number of older volunteers gives them the opportunity to exert influence at veto points, for example in consultation processes. In Germany, a high number of older volunteers were also determined to be a possible replacement for retrenching welfare states. An officer from the Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youths (BMFSFJ), however, stressed that this was not a driving force for the creation of support programmes. It was a mere side-effect. German interviewees also named particular incidents that increased the visibility of volunteering in later life. Mostly, the International Year of Volunteers in 2001 was identified. A former Minister of the BMFSFJ moreover named a series of scientific and popular science publications that had a comparable effect. Finally, one explanation that previous studies had not rendered was given in each country: In Germany, policy makers' personal preferences were named; in Italy, potential electoral gains were given as an explanation.

The need for governmental intervention in volunteering in later life is perceived differently in Germany and Italy. In Germany, there is consensus on the need for governmental intervention. The intervention is supposed to increase volunteering in later life, bringing about an ideal situation which meets older persons' needs. These needs are inter alia the ones for meaningful activities and for social contacts. In Italy, in contrast, opinions differ. Most Italian interviewees considered volunteering common in older persons, rendering governmental intervention obsolete. A political consultant and a regional policy-maker, however, argued that governmental intervention might be needed. Older persons have a high potential for volunteering, which makes them attractive for strategies strengthening the overall level of volunteering.

German and Italian interviewees agreed on the possibility of governmental intervention in volunteering in later life. In Italy, this possibility was asserted with reference to older persons benefiting from support programmes for volunteers in general. In Germany, it was asserted under reference to BMFSFJ projects supporting older volunteers. Those projects showed the possibility for intervention to depend on support from local governments and on an emphasis of possibilities. Where claims instead of possibilities were stressed, opposition arose. This was, for example, the case when the BMFSFJ initiated a campaign featuring an old sofa with sunken cushions and the slogan: “Sie können mehr Spuren hinterlassen als eine Kuhle im Sofa” (You can leave more traces than just an imprint on a sofa cushion). The critical reactions to
this campaign led the government to reassess its possibilities to address older volunteers.

Finally, the desirability of governmental intervention in volunteering in later life was perceived differently in Germany and Italy. In Germany, it was perceived as desirable when benefitting older persons was the goal. These benefits were inter alia improved well-being and an extended social network. Where benefitting the governments was the goal, however, intervention was opposed. Such benefits were for example cost-containment and a reduced need for social service provision. In Italy, in contrast, governmental intervention in volunteering in later life was considered undesirable. As argued by the Italian interviewees, the high number of older volunteers makes support programmes for them obsolete and would result in mismanagement. The interviewees suggested that age groups with few volunteers, especially youths, should be targeted instead.

**Informal care-giving in later life as a policy problem**
The political awareness of informal care-giving in later life is low to intermediate in Germany and Italy. In both countries, it increased from low to intermediate when a long-term care (LTC) insurance was introduced. This occurred in Germany at the national level in 1995 and in the Northern Italian province of Bolzano-Alto Adige in 2007. The introduction of LTC insurance drew attention to informal care and added a new perspective classifying care-givers according to age. However, this perspective never caught on. All interviewees in Germany and Italy initially classified care-givers according to their relation to the care receiver. They, then, estimated the care-givers’ age from this relation. This shift in awareness triggered by the introduction of LTC insurance is an example for visibility gained in a particular incident.

*Table 7.3: Description of informal care-giving in later life as a policy problem in Germany and Italy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Low to intermediate</td>
<td>Low to intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Need for intervention</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possibility of intervention</strong></td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desirability of intervention</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
<td>- Visibility in particular incident</td>
<td>- Potential for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Experience with intervention in informal care</td>
<td>- Experience with intervention in informal care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Perception: intervention is inept</td>
<td>- Perception: intervention is inept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The need for governmental intervention in informal care-giving in later life was denied in Germany and Italy. In both countries it was considered self-evident that persons care for their kin. This task was assumed to be largely unproblematic, in spite of population ageing and increasing female labour force participation. In Italy, informal care-giving in later life was also assumed to be unproblematic, because it rarely occurred. Italian families increasingly freed themselves from their care tasks by employing illegal migrant care workers ("badanti"), interviewees reported.

The possibility of governmental intervention in informal care-giving in later life was assessed slightly differently in Germany and Italy. In both countries, older informal care-givers were assumed to be affected by general intervention in informal care-giving. An officer from the German BMFSFJ stated that older informal care-givers could also be directly supported through statements in public speeches. The Italian interviewees, in contrast, agreed that there was no possibility of directly supporting older informal care-givers. Political support for informal care-givers in Italy is based on financial transfers, which are usually redistributed within the family. Usually, care tasks are also distributed within the family. This makes Italian families a mediating institution between informal care-givers and political support for them.

The desirability of governmental intervention in informal care-giving in later life, finally, was denied in Germany and Italy. In both countries informal care was considered a private issue that is regulated within the family. Governmental intervention would thus be an intrusion into privacy, exceeding governmental responsibilities.

Discussion
This article explains differences in governmental programmes for volunteering and informal care-giving in later life by analyzing them as policy problems. The situation in Germany and Italy between 1990 and 2008 is analyzed, because it challenges the explanations usually given. We found a structure of the policy problems that resembles differences in governmental programmes: there is intermediate to high political awareness of volunteering in later life and governmental intervention in it is supported more strongly in Germany than in Italy; the political awareness of informal care-giving in later life is low to intermediate and there is a general aversion towards governmental intervention in it.

The structure of the policy problems we found supports the general appraisal of the policy cycle model. Events in this model are said to be sequential in theory, but not in practice (Howlett et al., 2009). This corresponds to the rough structure of policy problems suggesting sequentiality, but the detailed structure conflicting with this suggestion. In the rough structure, political awareness is at an equal or higher level than agreement with governmental intervention. The detailed structure, however, shows no pattern of stable or decreasing agreement with the need, possibility and desirability of governmental intervention. We encountered the suggested reasons for this gap between theory and practice when it came to volunteering in later life: Feedback loops influenced the attitude towards intervention in Germany; political actors at different
level were aware of the topic to different degrees (Dye, 2008; Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Howlett et al., 2009).

The structure of the policy problem “volunteering in later life” is largely shaped by characteristics of older volunteers and of policies for volunteering. The increasing number and forthright opinions of today’s older volunteers enhance political awareness. In how far political awareness translates into agreement with governmental intervention, however, depends on policies for volunteering in general. More specifically, it seems to depend on a defined ideal situation regarding (older) volunteers and on experience with support programmes for (older) volunteers. This suggests that governments’ support for volunteering in later life is path dependent: it is likely to occur if a related concept or programme has already been introduced in the past (Kay, 2005).

The policy problem of volunteering in later life moreover highlights the advantage of this analytical perspective over straightforward explanations. It demonstrates that straightforward explanations such as the level of volunteering in later life and welfare policies interact when defining policy problems. In Italy, the high number of older volunteers even produced opposite results within the definition of the policy problem: it increased political awareness, but simultaneously reduced the desirability of governmental intervention. Also this effect only became visible when we framed volunteering in later life as a policy problem.

Structure and explanations of the policy problem “informal caregiving in later life” are similar in Germany and Italy. Common factors are a classification of caregivers by their relation to the care-receiver and an attribution of informal care to the private sphere. Previous studies already described the latter factor (e.g. Jegermalm & Jeppson Grassman, 2009; Sundström et al., 2008). The former factor, however, has to our knowledge not yet been described. Highlighting it, therefore, is a contribution of our study to the scientific discourse.

The country similarity in the structure of the policy problem “informal caregiving in later life” has alternative explanations. It could be due to strong path dependency in similar welfare states. In both countries, for example, increased political awareness coincided with the introduction of LTC insurances. As another example, the perceived role of families hindered governmental intervention. This study cannot determine whether the cause lies in the topic, path dependency or a mixture of both. Further studies will have to provide the answer.

This study raises questions beyond the one about influences on the policy problem “informal caregiving in later life”. First, are there gender-specific consequences of the structures of the policy problems? Previous studies showed gender-differences in older persons’ involvement in volunteering and informal care-giving (e.g. McMunn, Nazroo, Wahrendorf, Breeze, & Zaninotto, 2009). The interviewees sometimes mentioned these gender-differences, but never connected them to their appraisal of governmental intervention. This can lead to unintended gender-specific effects of governmental intervention (Orloff, 1993). Second, how can policy-makers’
personal preferences on governmental intervention in volunteering in later life be explained? Our study added those preferences to the list of explanations found in previous studies. Knowledge about them makes them more predictable and susceptible to lobbying. Third, how strongly did the political actors’ awareness and agreement with governmental intervention change over time? In this study, we analyzed documents and interviewed political actors about the development between 1990 and 2008. Retrospective questions, however, can be misleading. The interviewees might unknowingly adapt their answer to reach greater consistency over time (Van der Vaart, Van der Zouwen, & Dijkstra, 1995). Our results might therefore underestimate changes over time. A future study with interviews at different points of time could investigate this phenomenon.

Summing up, the actual situation and path dependencies interact to shape volunteering and informal care-giving in later life as policy problems. A high number of healthy retirees or older volunteers, therefore, does not guarantee governmental support. Rather, a government’s possibility to draw upon a tradition of support for volunteering and informal care-giving in later life seems indispensable. This tradition does not need to have been built up by the respective government itself, it can also stem from governments at a different level, individual politicians or an international organization such as the United Nations. This suggests that it is partly predetermined whether governments support productive activities in old age, thus seizing the opportunities ageing populations present.

Annex

The steps in the process of theoretical sampling

In a first step, we tested the suitability of the time period we selected (1990-2008). For this purpose, we analyzed manifestoes of German (1961-2005) and Italian (1963-2005) parties competing in national elections. Those manifestoes were retrieved from the Comparative Party Manifestoes Project Data Set. We checked whether the manifestoes mentioned older volunteers or older informal care-givers at least once, at any point in the manifesto. We found that 4 Italian manifestoes (2 from 1994, 2 from 2001) and 10 German manifestoes (1 from 1987, 2 from 1990, 2 from 1998, 3 from 2002, 2 from 2005) mentioned older volunteers. Older informal care-givers were never mentioned. We discussed those results with a researcher specialized in election studies. We concluded that the time period selected should be suitable to cover the bulk of the phenomenon of interest, the perception of volunteering and informal care-giving in later life as policy problems.

In a second step, we collected information on the situation in Italy. We started by analyzing two national texts of law referring to voluntary associations (266/1991 and 328/2000) and national reports on volunteering (from 1998, 2001 and 2006) and on senior citizens (1991-2003). We, then, interviewed two researchers specialized in volunteering in later life and one specialized in old age and informal care-giving. They agreed that there is little awareness of the topic of our study in Italy. We, thus, took a
broader approach and interviewed a researcher specialized in volunteering and informal care-giving in general and another one specialized in volunteering, who also was an assessor (equivalent to a Minister) of the Central Italian province Marche. They stressed the importance of the regional and local level, in particular of the Centri di Servizio per il Volontariato (CVS) and of AUSER, the pensioners’ association of the trade union CGIL, for our question concerning older volunteers. Concerning our question about older informal care-givers, however, they also described a lack of awareness.

We, consequently, tried to get a better grip of the phenomenon of care-giving in later life by speaking to a family sociologist who was specialized in old age, who pointed out the long-term care insurance in the North Italian province Bolzano-Alto Adige. We, therefore, analyzed the social reports (1994-2007) from this province and spoke to the person responsible for older persons in the department for social affairs of this province.

Continuing with our question concerning older volunteers, we firstly analyzed the bulletin (1990-2007) of the regional council of the Central Italian province Tuscany and then interviewed the head of the CSV for Tuscany and Florence (one person) and the head of AUSER for Tuscany and Florence (one person). Both interviewees pointed to structures at the national level, so we interviewed a researcher from the National Centre for Volunteering, a member of the national umbrella organization of AUSER and a researcher specialized in volunteering who also was a member of the Observatory for Volunteering, a group with a consulting function within the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs.

In a third step, we collected information on the situation in Germany. We started by analyzing the law on the long-term care insurance (Sozialgesetzbuch XI) and the national reports on volunteering (1999 and 2004) and on old age (1993, 1998, 2001, 2002 and 2006). We, then, interviewed a researcher specialized in volunteering and informal care-giving. He stressed the relevance of the LTC insurance for our question concerning informal care-giving and pointed to the activities of the federal and some regional governments concerning older volunteers while stressing the heterogeneity at the local level.

To follow up with the question on informal care-giving in later life, we interviewed a researcher specialized in the LTC insurance and to a representative of the national association of informal care-givers. To follow up with the question on volunteering in later life, we spoke to coordinators of two projects for volunteering in later life that were covered in political documents and media, one from the Eastern and one from the Western part of Germany. Moreover, we analyzed the information bulletin of the city council of Frankfurt upon Main (1990-2008), which showed that the discourse on volunteering in later life is strongly attached to the senior councils. We, therefore, spoke to representatives of senior councils at the local, regional, and national level. We added information on the regional level by analyzing the information bulletin on participation of the social ministry of Schleswig-Holstein ("Wir in Schleswig-Holstein", 2004-2008) and by interviewing representatives of two regional projects supporting
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older volunteers: the network for volunteering in Baden-Württemberg and the government-sponsored Hessian agency for volunteering that recently co-founded a regional network for older volunteers. Finally, we added information on the national level in two ways. First, we interviewed researchers who were involved in the implementation of the national pilot projects “Agencies for Senior Citizens”, “Experience for Initiatives” and “Active in Old Age”, as well as representatives of the first two of these projects. Second, we interviewed the officer for senior citizen within the BMFSFJ, a former minister from this ministry, a researcher who is part of an advisory group on old age within this ministry and a researcher who co-authored the latest national report on volunteering. We discussed our questions concerning volunteering and informal caregiving with the first three of those interviewees, with the latter one we only discussed our question concerning volunteering.

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