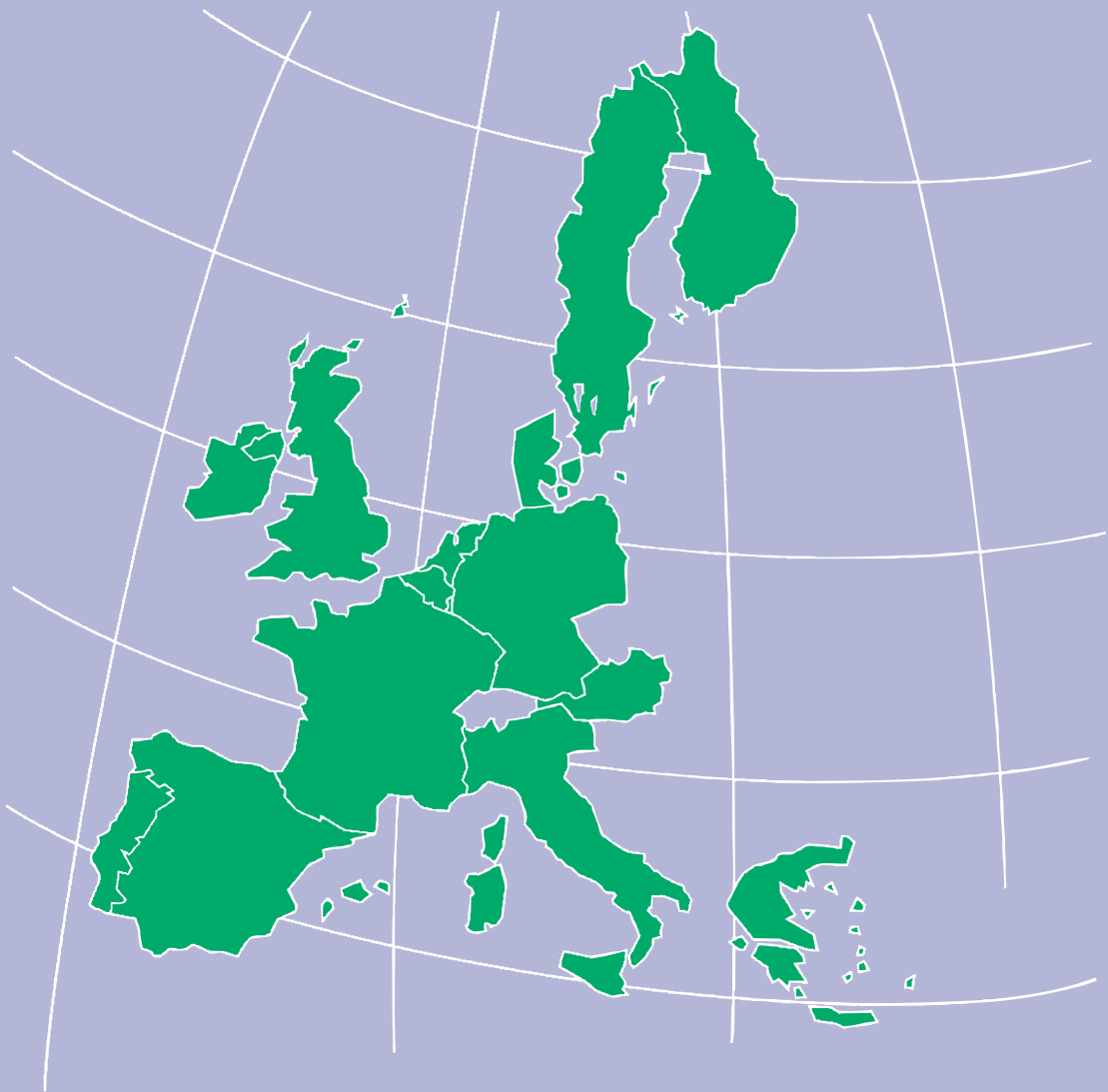


European Observatory on Family Matters
at the Austrian Institute for Family Studies

Family issues between gender and generations

Seminar report

Equality between women and men



Employment & social affairs



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Edited by Sylvia Trnka
Vienna, May 1999

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European Commission
Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs
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Family issues between gender and generations

Helmut Wintersberger

Rationale

The European Observatory on Family Matters was established by the European Commission in 1989 to monitor developments that affect families: family policies, demographic, socio-economic and political changes, and trends in the development of different types of families. All of these have an impact not only on families but on children as well. The Observatory stimulates academic debate on family and childhood issues as well as on related policies. It organises annual seminars of Observatory experts and invited speakers. The 1999 Seminar of the European Observatory on Family Matters focused on family issues between gender and generations. Gender and family issues, generational relations at the level of the family, as well as generational solidarity and conflict, were some of the topics addressed in the discussion. Two reasons were decisive for selecting the main theme:

- During its first year of coordination from Vienna, the Observatory was affiliated with unit D.5 in the European Commission's Employment and Social Affairs DG, responsible for equal opportunities, families and children. The Seminar provided an opportunity for studying similarities and synergies as well as differences and tensions among these political arenas.
- There is ample evidence of seminars and conferences dealing with women's and family issues. There is also a large number of conferences on families and children (e.g. the Conference on Child, the Family and Society organised in Luxembourg in 1991 by the then coordinator of the Observatory under the auspices of Employment and Social Affairs DG and the European Parliament). However, there have not been so many meetings that aim to simultaneously cover the dimensions of gender and generation (or age).

Gender and generational perspectives

While the gender dimension already has a long history in social research and policies, the interest in the generational dimension — as I understand it — and in children as social subjects, is a relatively new phenomenon. Concerning reports on inequalities, for instance, it has become quite customary to not only include the dimensions of income, social class, ethnic origin, etc., but also to focus on gender. The same holds true for the construction of human development indices. However, it has been less common to raise questions about inequalities based on age. Thanks to an increasing network of organisations defending the interests of elderly persons, some steps forward have already been made in this direction. Mainly due to the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this approach has been extended during the last years to also cover children and youth, and consequently childhood or children's policies are being established as a new policy arena.

While gender seems to be a concept not only widely accepted but also sufficiently understood, fewer people understand what the concept of generation actually stands for. One obvious reason for this difference is mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Both gender and generation may be understood as social regulations and cultural patterns with a view to sex (determined by biological criteria) and age (defined by time of birth). These two concepts are unambiguous; in mathematical terms, they constitute homomorphic relations in the sense that one — and only one — sex or age corresponds to each human being. However, there also exist remarkable differences between these two relations. While the range of sex consists of two options only — namely male and female — the range of age is the time continuum. In addition, age changes with time, while sex remains the same forever. Some of the complexities of age also appear at the level of generational relations.

How can we define a generation? First we have to choose appropriate time intervals or to set up other criteria for deciding who belongs to which generation. Secondly, a generation might be defined longitudinally as a cohort (e.g. the war generation) or structurally (e.g. childhood). A similar ambiguity also exists at the level of the family, at least in the English language, where the term 'child' may stand for a person under a certain age (e.g. 18 years) or refer to the kinship relationship between parents and their children. In the following text, it is obvious that different notions of generational relations are used. In the section on generational relations at the family level, the authors define 'generations' predominantly by kinship. In the subsequent section on generational solidarity and conflict, generations are basically understood not in a longitudinal but rather in a structural perspective, in terms of childhood, adulthood and old age.

Family at a multiple intersection point between society and the individual, gender and generations

The programme of the seminar distinguishes between the levels of the family and society. In principle, this distinction applies to both the gender and generational dimensions. While François Höpflinger uses two different terms in the German language (*Beziehungen* for the family level, and *Verhältnisse* for the social level), the term 'relations' denotes both types in English. However, this should not prevent us from perceiving (gender or generational) relations at the levels of the family and of society as distinct, yet interdependent phenomena. Relations between husbands and wives, as well as between parents and children, have clearly to be distinguished from relations between men and women as well as adults and children in a broader sense. However, there are also interdependencies between the two levels; e.g. in the sense that women's and men's strategies within the family are also to be understood in terms of family cultures and power relationships based on gender.

The family is located somewhere in the centre of society below the collective, but above the individual level. In addition, it holds a crucial position at the intersection point of gender and generational lines. We could add the economic and the social as another dimension that somehow is combined in the family. On the whole, it is an interesting and rich, though sometimes also dangerous mix. Depending on one's standpoint, the emphasis can be on the enormous potential of families. It can also be on the dangers and risks to families, often exposed to contradictory developments of individualisation and mass culture as well as conflictual gender and generational relations (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1990). One might also simply consider the family as an analytical model for simulating the complexities of modern and post-modern society in a more easily comprehensible context.

Patriarchal and paternal welfare states

In some papers, the introduction of gender and generational perspectives is linked with the analysis of welfare states. The traditional welfare state originates from the recurrent crises of capitalism and the challenge of the labour movement. Welfare states were not established to fundamentally change the social division of labour; their aim was to distribute income among social classes in a fairer way. Consequently, most welfare-state measures were originally aimed at male workers. Therefore, feminists rightly argued that the welfare state had a gender bias, that men benefited more from the welfare state than women did. Even if different countries developed different approaches, and different models of welfare states are found today, this criticism is still true and a more or less articulate gender bias still exists. The question is to identify the patriarchal nature of the welfare state. The answer offered by Susanne Schunter-Kleemann in this volume once more refers to the social division of labour. However, she goes further to argue that, in the case of gender — differently from

social class — the distribution of unpaid work is the characteristic property that enables a distinction between different (patriarchal) gender modes.

Our next problem is to extend this type of analysis from social class and gender to a generational perspective. Again, the position of generations in the social division of work might be the key. In traditional society, all generations took part in agricultural and domestic work (as soon and as long as they were able to do so). In modern society, we distinguish between persons of employable age (who are explicitly referred to at the aggregate level as the 'active' population) and the rest (i.e. minor and senior citizens, who are more or less seen as economically useless and are therefore considered a burden to society). On the one hand, welfare states have contributed to generational distributive justice by introducing national pension systems, so that seniors today fare much better than 50 years ago. On the other hand, (relative) child poverty has become a widespread phenomenon in modern societies. This is due to the fact that children's predominant activity (school work) does not provide any immediate economic benefit, while the different systems of child and family allowances established in most countries cover only a part of parent's expenditures for children. In conclusion, the position of generations in the division of labour generally brings about different generational modes, so that the particular situation of Western European welfare states is characterised by a paternalistic mode in one way or the other.

The relay of generations: children as innovators

To conceptualise generational relations, François Höpflinger introduces the notion of *Zeitlichkeit* — a term difficult to translate into English. It means generalising the analytical space for studying society by adding the dimension of time; to define age, speed and order in such a generalised space; to allow for synchronising the asynchronic. Though the dimension of time is important, more relevant in my view are the position of generations in the social division of labour and the power derived from this position, as well as the transmission of knowledge between generations. The latter idea was raised by Margaret Mead (1970), who distinguishes three generational modes at the level of parent-child relations: prefigurative, cofigurative and postfigurative generational relations. With postfiguration, the flow is from adults to children; with cofiguration, the flow takes place among peers; and with prefiguration the flow is from children to adults.

Since knowledge and information are connected with both the social division of labour and power relations, it might be possible to generalise Mead's interpretation of parent-child relations to generational relations at the level of society at large. The postfigurative mode of learning was typical for traditional society when children learned the trade from their parents. Skills were transmitted from generation to generation. With the maturation of capitalist society, postfiguration was increasingly replaced by cofiguration. Learning from peers, learning by doing, etc. became more important than traditional learning from parents or teachers. It is more difficult to imagine the emergence of prefiguration in post-modern society, because children's culture — if acknowledged at all — is in an inferior position with regard to the hegemonic culture of adults. Children are seen as imperfect, immature and irresponsible beings. They are to be educated and socialised by adults, and finally they are to be integrated into modern society.

We might, however, approach children's culture from the opposite angle. Contrary to adults, children have outstanding abilities: for instance, in learning languages. This talent becomes visible in migrant families. While the children are able to speak the language of the host country almost without any accent after a few months, this is completely different for parents. Children are usually also better than adults in electronic data processing, computers and modern technologies in general. Therefore, computer illiteracy is more common among the old and adult population than among children.

The idea of children as innovators is not very common. The examples above underline the innovative potential of children (presumably the most neglected aspect of children's contribution to society) as well as their role as stakeholders and representatives of posterior generations; they serve the purpose of facilitating a prefigurative view of the generational relay. In my opinion, furthering such views is also a crucial element in the debate on sustainable development.

Generational ambivalences

Solidarity vs. conflict was another perspective for approaching generational relations (but obviously useful when debating gender as well). This was made explicit in the Seminar programme. In analogy to many emphatic and pessimistic opinions on the family in modern society, research and common sense have also identified a number of positive and negative prejudices on relations between generations. In his paper, which he conceives as a contribution to 'research in the discovery mode', Kurt Lüscher formulates the heuristic hypothesis that intergenerational relations imply and generate ambivalences. On the one hand, "intergenerational relations are endangered on all social levels, the society, organisations, firms and the family"; on the other hand, "these relations are seen as ties that guarantee social integration". Compared to the idealisation of family ties, this 'generational paradox' and the concept of 'generational ambivalence' represent a more realistic view of intergenerational relations.

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Section 1

Generational relations at the family level

Ambivalence: A key concept for the study of intergenerational relations¹

Kurt Lüscher

Introduction

With this audience, I can certainly take for granted an awareness of the multi-faceted relevance of the topic of intergenerational relations in contemporary societies, both in the conduct of everyday life and in politics. We are all aware of an almost overwhelming number of empirical studies, and I think that many of us will agree with the statement formulated by Diane Lye (1996: 76) in her review of recent research: “The most pressing need for future research is the development of new theoretical formulations.” I shall attempt to make a contribution to this effort.

As a starting point, I shall briefly describe the mental image that I summon up when working on the topic. I see before me a graph displaying the population by age and gender, for instance, the population of the European Union or of any of the Member States.

The age-composition of the population is the background of all ways to analyse intergenerational relations, both conceptually and empirically. Generations are conceived of as one or more cohorts which are united by certain experiences, by a specific approach to tasks and by a more or less strict sense of common identity. How many cohorts a generation may include can vary. In any case, the notion of a generation implies a difference to at least one other generation. The most general expression of this is the juxtaposition between the old and the young. At the same time, generations belong to the same overall community, society, or, technically speaking social system, thus they are bound to each other by more or less formalised and institutionalised social relations.

I suggest that it is useful to take the institutionalisation of the *relations* between generations as the point of departure for conceptual and empirical, and also policy-oriented, work on the topic, and I conceive of them as clusters. I have borrowed this term from musicology, where a cluster means the simultaneous sound of a row of tones which contains both harmonies and dissonances.

Intergenerational relations

The most widespread clusters of intergenerational relations in a society are to be found, obviously, in families and other kinship associations. Structurally speaking, this explains their key relevance for the cohesion of a society. There are more reasons that give them special relevance. The number and the composition of familial generational clusters depend on demographic developments in generations involved, such as the increase in life expectancy. In turn, reproductive decisions taken in the privacy of familial intimacy — in their aggregation over the whole population — affect the demographic composition of a society. Concurrently, the organisation of public welfare is linked to the conduct of family tasks and vice versa. These are good reasons to pay special attention to intergenerational relations in *families*, even more so in the light of recent developments (Kohli 1997, 1999).

Of relevance are not only the decline in birth rates and the reduction of family size, but also the fact that because people get older, the common life time of familial generations expands, both for parents

¹ I appreciate the cooperation of James Brice in editorial matters.

and adult children and across three or even four generations. Let me illustrate this with some findings from research conducted at the Konstanz *Society and Family Centre*.

| Common lifetime children–parents | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Cohort of parents 1900 | with fathers | 19 years |
| | with mothers | 45 years |
| Cohort of parents 1940 | with fathers | 45 years |
| | with mothers | 52 years |

Source: Lauterbach (1995)

| What percentage of children has at least one grandfather/grandmother? | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Age group | | ...at birth | ...at the age of 20 |
| Grandfather | before 1890 | 67 | 18 |
| | 1911–1920 | 74 | 46 |
| Grandmother | before 1890 | 80 | 33 |
| | 1911–1920 | 93 | 77 |

Source: Lange/Lauterbach (1998)

Before the background that a large majority of the population still engages in parenthood (although a growing fraction remains childless in many countries), the expanded 'common life time' of familial generations creates a new potential for close intergenerational relations across the life span. Is there also a potential for solidarity between the generations, a potential which can be relied on within and beyond kinship ties, and which can be incorporated in the design of social welfare, especially the care of the elderly? To which extent can we take for granted the transfers across three generations?

Asking the question proclaims a differentiated answer. It is true that the most popular organising framework for understanding family relationships in later life is that which highlights intergenerational *solidarity*. It is rooted in functionalistic theories. A number of prominent researchers responded to Talcott Parsons's (1942, 1949) concern about the isolation of the nuclear family by proposing that extensive family solidarity actually existed (Shanas et al. 1968; Litwak 1965; Sussman 1959). Since the early 1970s, Bengtson and colleagues have continued and expanded this tradition in an influential series of articles and books (Roberts/Richards/Bengtson 1991; Bengtson/Harootyan 1994; Treas/Bengtson 1988). The solidarity perspective has been taken up by other researchers in the United States (Rein 1994; Rossi/Rossi, 1990), and is also a reference point for European authors, although not without critical overtones (Attias-Donfut 1995; Bawin-Legros/Gauthier/Strassen 1995; Coenen-Huther/Kellerhals/von Allmen 1994; Donati 1995; Finch/Mason 1993).

Some scholars have criticised the overly positive and consensual bias of the solidarity perspective. Research within the solidarity framework typically assumes that individuals' personal feelings — such as affection, attraction, and warmth — serve to maintain cohesion in the family system (Sprey 1991). Marshall, Matthews and Rosenthal (1993) note that even the term 'solidarity' indicates an emphasis on consensus. European writers have echoed this sentiment, noting the value-laden origins

of the term in proletarian movements and in religious social doctrine (Kleine 1992; Lüscher 1997). As Roberts et al. (1991: 12) themselves point out, solidarity “has been treated as the engine driving the pursuit of the common good within families”. Negative aspects of family life are typically interpreted in this view as an absence of solidarity. Research in this tradition has tended to emphasise shared values across generations, normative obligations to provide help, and enduring ties between parents and children. Thus, ‘solidarity’ contains normative implications which easily lend themselves to an idealisation as it can be observed in ‘generational rhetoric’.

However, at the same time that scholars in the solidarity tradition have emphasised mutual support and value consensus, another line of research has focused on isolation, caregiver stress, family problems, conflict, and abuse (Marshall et al. 1993). The perception of weakened family ties and abandonment of the elderly also remains strong in popular opinion, and in portrayals of the family in contemporary fiction and theatre. Thus, some scholars, as well as the general public, appear to be unwilling to accept that intergenerational relationships are solidary and characterised by shared values and reciprocal help. As Marshall and colleagues (1993: 47) have succinctly put it, “the substantive preoccupations in gerontology over the past 30 years point to a love-hate relationship with the family”.

I shall argue that the study of parent-child relations in later life must move beyond this ‘love-hate relationship’. The vacillation between images of mistreatment and abandonment, on the one hand, and comforting images of solidarity, on the other, are not two sides of an academic argument that will ultimately be resolved in favour of one viewpoint. Rather, I hold that societies, and the individuals within them, are *ambivalent* about relationships between parents and children in adulthood.² I therefore propose ambivalence as an alternative to both the solidarity and conflict perspectives, as a model for orienting sociological research on intergenerational relations. We can sum up the fundamental point of the present article in the following general heuristic hypothesis:

Intergenerational relations generate ambivalences. That is, the observable forms of intergenerational relations among adults can be socio-scientifically interpreted as the expression of ambivalences, and as efforts to manage and negotiate these fundamental ambivalences.

I intend to lay out, with due brevity, the theoretical foundations of this idea, and I shall then speak of our attempts to operationalise it for research purposes. I shall also comment on its relevance for the analysis of societal intergenerational relations in contemporary societies that are often labelled as ‘post-modern’. This is important because one aspect of these theories are the challenges posed by the awareness of fundamental social differences, such as the difference between gender and, obviously, between generations. Their fundamental relevance is due to the anthropological roots of gender and generation. These differences have to be interpreted again and again during history in connection with the changes in economy, politics and culture, and they also reflect the contradictions that characterise the most recent developments in the processes of modernisation.

Intergenerational differences often also go together with another basic social difference, namely *inequality*. Intergenerational differences are bound to the management of authority and power. They are related to the struggle over resources, knowledge and influence. However, as I shall show, I do not think that intergenerational relations can ultimately be reduced to mere differences in inequality. Yet I think it is appropriate to depart from models which do not imply a pre-established harmony as can be found in some of the functionalistic traditions in the social sciences. What we need is a more differentiated picture of the basic structure of intergenerational relations that is sensitive to conflict and divergences of interests.

² I think it is appropriate to acknowledge that Leopold Rosenmayr, in several of his writings, has referred to ambivalence in connection with intergenerational relationships, yet without suggesting a full conceptualisation. Our approach was developed independent of his publications (see for example Rosenmayr 1983, 1998).

The idea to pay attention to inherent contradictions and polarisation in intergenerational relations has one of its roots in empirical observations. Let me complement the references to the literature, as mentioned before, with just two findings from our current research: In a telephone survey we asked a representative sample of adults in the political unity around Konstanz two questions, namely whether they felt torn into two directions in their relations to the mother and whether the relationship was the way they wished it could be.

Ambivalence and quality of relation to mother (adults age 25–70)

| Relation is ... the way I wish it could be | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|---------|------------------|---------|--------|-----------|
| Feel torn ... in two directions | Always | Almost always | Seldom | Never | % (n) |
| Always | – | – | – | 13 | 1 (2) |
| Almost always | 7 | 12 | 47 | 25 | 18 (55) |
| Seldom | 61 | 73 | 45 | 31 | 65 (198) |
| Never | 32 | 14 | 8 | 31 | 17 (51) |
| % (n) | 14 (44) | 64 (195) | 17 (51) | 5 (16) | 100 (306) |

Significance = .000

Source: Project on intergenerational relationships among adults, telephone survey 1998

Examples of the rising concern for intergenerational differences may also be found in what we have called '*generational rhetoric*', e.g. the style and content of public discourses on generations. We have been looking at this kind of generational rhetoric in non-fiction books. One of its dominant features is the reference to the danger of a 'war between the generations', and recent demographic developments are described as a 'time bomb' (Bräuninger et al. 1998).

The idea of taking inherent contradictions as point of departure has also theoretical roots. One of them can be located in the etymology of the term generation and in its history. As Nash argues, "our most secure standard for defining a generation rests on the Greek root of the word *genos*, whose basic meaning is reflected in the word *genesthai*, to come into existence. ... That moment when a child is born simultaneously produces a new generation separating parent and offspring — *gonos ergo genos* — and the very concept evokes the paradox of an ever shifting threshold in time" (Nash 1978: 1).

Thus generation stands for continuity *and* for beginning. It is used in the context of the family but it also refers to relations of similarity among peers and distinguishes the older from the younger. How this differentiation is socially and culturally achieved and accentuated is one of the themes of Karl Mannheim in his seminal essay *The Problem of Generations* (1952 [1928]). The insight that my identity is similar to that of others because of my age and the attendant personal and social circumstances can be, but need not necessarily be, relevant for my actions. In the potentiality of this awareness we may see a special quality which invites research on intergenerational relations. This also holds for the idea that new life is procreated, and at the same time the individual is assigned a position within an already existing social order, and this order is meant to continue. More evidence from Greek mythology, from Jewish and Christian thoughts as well as from literature up to our present time could easily be mentioned where the idea of inherent tensions, contradictions and difference between the generations is more or less implicit, without explicitly labelling them as ambivalent (see, for example, von Matt 1995).

Ambivalence

What precisely is meant by ambivalence? Indeed, this term is as new as our century, and this is quite amazing given its broad usage in contemporary everyday language. The creator of the term is the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler who introduced it in the diagnosis of schizophrenia (Bleuler 1911). For him, ambivalence of *feelings* was expressed in the statements of the patient who expressed to hate and to love his wife at the same moment. Ambivalences of the *will* could be observed if a patient tried to eat, but was unable to put the spoon into his mouth. Ambivalence of *thought* was expressed if somebody said “I am A and I am not A”.

The reference to the constitution of personal *identity* is of special relevance for our topic. The negative connotation should also be noted. It recedes later in the psychiatric literature, insofar as coping with ambivalence is considered an important achievement of the individual. This is especially the case in psychoanalytically oriented family therapy, and this pragmatic mastering of ambivalences, rather than the diagnosis of pathology, is the meaning that is of interest for generational research.

Freud took the concept from Bleuler and used it with at least *three* different connotations, namely with regard to parent-child-relations, with regard to relations between therapist and patient, and with regard to cultural analysis. Thus the concept is not necessarily limited to merely describing inner psychic attitudes and processes (Otscheret 1988).

In the mid-1960s, a sociological reception was initiated by a group of scholars led by Merton and Barber (1963), L. Coser (1965) and R. L. Coser (1966). They demonstrated the usefulness of the concept for the analysis of social roles and role conflicts, as well as for organisational analysis and the understanding of the dilemmas in the professions, especially those of physicians. In addition, the work of Lewis Coser demonstrates an affinity to conflict theory in sociology. This merits attention, because it indicates that the use of the concept may be bound to paradigmatic choices.

A new interest can be observed in the 1990s, the leading author being Zygmunt Bauman in writings related to postmodernism (e.g. Bauman 1995). Of importance, from a societal perspective, is the analysis of the ambivalent structure of the category of gender in contemporary feminist writings. Similar to the differences between the young and the old, ambivalence is used with reference to a basic condition of human sociability. A very recent reference to the concept of ambivalence is found in Smelser's 1997 ASA presidential address (Smelser 1998). He proposed the reintroduction of the concept as an alternative, or rather as a complement, to those propositions and ideas of social contact which dealt with this under the primacy of rationality and using the postulate of rational choice. Thus he is referring to the paradigmatic relevance of the usage of the concept. Further, and in a way very compatible with our proposal to use the concept in connection with intergenerational relations, he stated: “My general proposition is that dependent situations breed ambivalence, and correspondingly, models of behaviour based on the postulate of ambivalence are the most applicable.” (p. 8)

For research purposes, different notions or types of ambivalence should be distinguished, as proposed for instance by Hajda (1968: 23):

- “*Biological ambivalence* refers to the simultaneous presence of opposing drives or instincts in the human organism.
- *Psychological ambivalence* can be conceived of as an experience of unstable duality of feelings, simultaneous calling forth of counter-emotions, inability to overcome counter-feelings or contradictory evaluation of the same object of attachment.

- *Social or structural ambivalence* is, first, an expression of man's duality as an individual and a social being. Secondly, it is a manifestation of the simultaneous independence and interdependence of social relations, roles and statuses, and the multiple loyalties, conflicts, and cross-pressures thereby created.
- *Cultural ambivalence* represents an inherent tension between the inner experience of attachment to values and an outward expression of this experience in a socially and normatively patterned way..."

Each of these meanings may have some bearing on the 'problem of generations'. Or, to state it from a different angle: In using the concept of ambivalence for the study of intergenerational relations, we may be encouraged or sensitised to view the topic as radiating into different disciplines and even raising issues of epistemological relevance. However, for practical purposes, a precise *definition* is needed, and I suggest we phrase it in the following way:

Definition: We speak of ambivalence in a social science perspective when dilemmas and polarisations of feelings, thoughts, actions and, furthermore, contradictions in social relations and social structures, which are relevant for personal and societal development, are interpreted as being basically irreconcilable.

This definition contains *three key elements*.

- 1) Ambivalences *presuppose contradictions* and *conflicts*. But this is not sufficient. They must be viewed as polarised and *irresolvable*.
- 2) This irresolvability must be *diagnosed* by agents and their interpretations.
- 3) *Agents* of interpretations can be the acting persons themselves, third parties such as therapists, or the bearers of scientific analysis.

With regard to recent theories of action and structuration and the analysis of *agency*, one should add that ambivalences are inherent in social, cultural, and psychological structures; in this way, they can be diagnosed as pre-conditions *ex ante* for action. However, *actions* can also be interpreted as the consequences of dealing with ambivalences. In terms of research, this means that ambivalence can be both a dependent and an independent variable. More precisely, it should be emphasised: ambivalence, as defined here, is a *second order construct* denoting not behaviour as such, but rather the interpretation of relations in social contexts. It is itself the interpretation of an interpretation.

Let us step back and take an intermediate summary. I think several arguments can be put forward to support the general heuristic hypothesis:

- everyday experience (including our personal insights)
- the overall juxtaposition in research findings on the quality of intergenerational relations
- historical developments
- anthropological and linguistic considerations
- theories of temporality and difference

But where do we go from here? How can we put this general ideas to work in research and policy formulations? From my own work in progress, I can offer an attempt to operationalise ambivalence sociologically with the aim of identifying strategies people use to deal with intergenerational ambivalence. This strategies may then be judged as more or less favourable, and thus could be linked to policy formulations. Yet, this is still part of a programme.

Proposal for a heuristic model

Dimensions of intergenerational ambivalence

Before this background, and bearing in mind that the focus is on conceptual work, I would now like to present a model of intergenerational ambivalence which we have developed in connection with an exploratory project on the relationships among adults after divorce.³ It is an attempt to combine the postulate of ambivalence with considerations concerning the two basic dimensions implied in the concept of generation.

a) *The institutional dimension*: Intergenerational relations are imbedded in a family system which is characterised, sociologically speaking, by the structural, procedural, and normative conditions in a society. These institutional conditions shape familial relationships. They create a 'family world' into which the individual is born. Following the premises of a pragmatic-interactionistic or social-constructivistic notion of social institutions, such as stated by Berger and Luckmann (1967: 47–128), these institutional conditions are, on the one hand, reinforced and reproduced by the way people act out their relations. On the other hand, these conditions can also be modified and can lead to innovations.

One can see *reproduction* and *innovation* as the *two poles* of the social field in which the family is realised as an institution. These two poles may be conceived of as referring to *structural ambivalence*, at least from the point of view of the scientific observer. The institutional preconditions are always references for any 'definition of the situation' (W. I. Thomas) in view of concrete actions. Total changes seem unlikely, at least within the span of two or three generations.

I shall *illustrate* this with an example on the societal level. Here, the very term family, regardless of many debates, is not being replaced (although there are some proposals to do so). Rather, new forms of living together are being defined against the background of traditional forms as demonstrated, for instance, by the term 'reconstituted' families. The same is the case on the individual level, where the memory of experiencing a certain type of family and a certain institutionalised notion of family persists over several generations. Take, for example, the case of research on family memory. In this connection, Segalen (1993: 160) speaks of a transmission that refers both to what may be called a pattern of receiving (from one generation) and a pattern of giving (to the other generation).

However, it is neither useful nor appropriate to think that structures and forms can be *completely* reproduced. Such a position is at least not compatible with a sociology that uses actors as subjects (as for instance in Mead's model of personality). Incomplete reproduction is also due to the dependence of the family as an institutional subsystem of society and its connection to its environment.

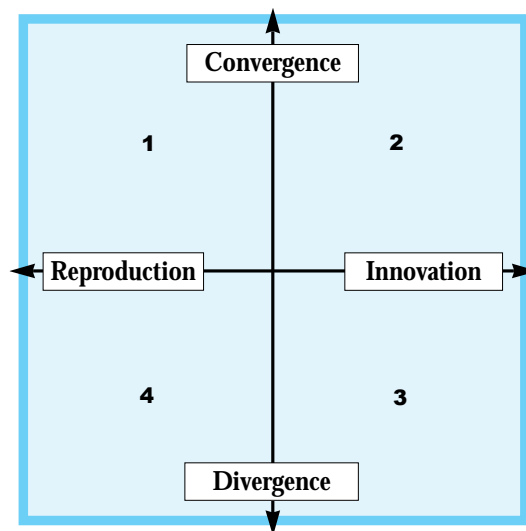
From an institutional point of view, intergenerational relations are thus lived out or shaped in a field between what may be called reproduction and innovation. At least implicitly or latently, this polarity contains ambivalences. It is an empirical question to what extent these ambivalences become explicit because the members of a family are aware of them, or to what extent they are brought to their attention, for instance, in family therapy or in comparison with other families.

b) *The interpersonal, subjective dimensions*: Parents and children and the members of other involved generations share a certain degree of similarity. This can be attributed to biological inheritance. However, any inheritance is incomplete, because individual parents and individual children do not share all genes. The similarity is also reinforced by the intimacy of mutual learning processes. They contain a potential for closeness and subjective identification. At the same time, and especially in growing older, the similarity is also a cause of and reason for distancing. Ultimately, children come

³ The findings of this project and a detailed presentation of the model are provided in Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger (1998).

to have a different personal identity than their parents. This may be attributed to the constitutive difference I have referred to in my exposition of the concept of generations. Consequently, we may postulate an ambivalent polarity also on this intersubjective dimension. It may be characterised by the two terms *convergence* and *divergence*. These terms are general labels which may be specified in connection with specific contexts.

Most studies, e.g. Cohler and Grunebaum (1981), Cohler (1983), juxtapose dependence and independence, however, without separating the institutional and intersubjective dimensions. This implies that these authors assess ambivalence in a way that mingles the personal and institutional components. If one separates these dimensions, a more differentiated picture emerges, as is shown in the following scheme:



This scheme reveals a *heuristic potential*, insofar as it encourages us to look at different *strategies* in dealing with ambivalences, depending on whether the behaviours and actions are closer to one or the other pole on both dimensions. Or to start from the other side: reports on how people shape their intergenerational relations and act as a consequence of their relations can be interpreted as the outcome of leaning more towards one or the other side. Yet the assumption remains that the opposite pole cannot be completely suppressed.

Such a model, and consequently such a research strategy, of qualitative differentiation draws on well-known sociological traditions with theoretically deduced *typologies*. One is reminded of Parsons's pattern variables. There is, however, one important difference. Parsons tried to interpret the decisions of actors in an unequivocal way. He was interested in definitive solutions for dilemmas. My proposition, on the contrary, keeps in mind that the different strategies employed are of a tentative nature. They are rooted in what are ultimately conceived as irresolvable dilemmas. The processual nature of intergenerational relations is kept in mind, because of the temporal connotation implied in the concept of ambivalence.

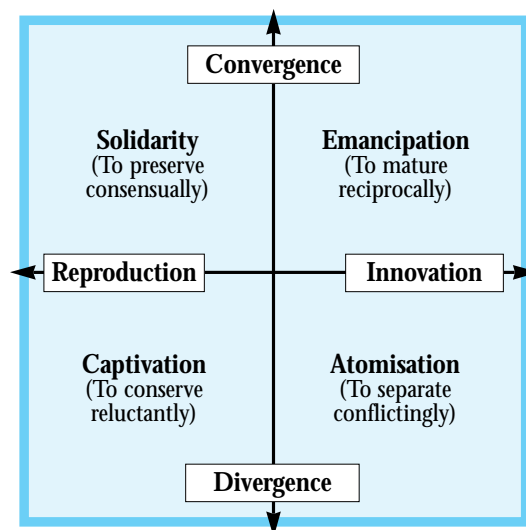
There is also a certain similarity with the Circumplex Model developed by Olson and his collaborators for purposes of family therapy (Olson et al. 1979). However, two reservations apply. Although reference to ambivalence is often made in family therapy, the Olson model does not use this concept. Moreover, the institutional dimension of the family is not taken into account. Time permitting, further typologies could be mentioned, mostly developed through inductive generalisation of empirical data. An example is the already mentioned Geneva study on kin relations, another is a study done in Australia by de Vaus (1994).

In our own work, we have used this schematic typology to interpret data from semi-structured interviews on the reorganisation of parent-adult child-relationships after a divorce either of the parents or the children. Our *procedure* can be summarised as follows: In a first step, we extracted from the responses typical, concrete *definitions of the situation* (or ‘patterns of meaning’) with reference to *specific tasks* such as, for instance, financial transfers, the consequences of a new partnership of a divorced parent or the support given by parents to young divorced fathers. We were able to assign the answers by means of content analysis to the four cells of the model. We then condensed their common content into *maxims*, i.e. general statements concerning typical patterns of actions dealing with ambivalences. Ultimately, we attempted a characterisation on the level we call ‘*the logic of social relations*’. This concept refers to basic modes of sociability defined on the socio-cultural level. On this level, we also took into account the dimensions of influence and power, because they are an integral part of acting out intergenerational relations.

Strategies for coping with intergenerational ambivalence

Still within this exploratory work, we ultimately suggested a general label for the four basic types of strategies for dealing with ambivalences between generations in general. Methodologically, of course, this work relies heavily on linguistic interpretations, and it is open to criticism with regard to its validity. Yet, as said before, to bring ambivalences to light and to describe them appropriately, a certain sensitivity to the ambiguities of everyday language is desirable, or may even be necessary.

As a summary, the scheme can be presented in the following way (the corresponding maxims are given in brackets):



a) I suggest the label *solidarity* for the strategies of dealing with ambivalences when reproduction on the institutional level and convergence on the personal level are in the forefront. By solidarity we mean reliable support and the readiness to make payments or to provide services which are not reciprocated. These relations are shaped by a kind of *authority* that goes beyond the simple exercise of power. It implies (and this is the older meaning of the term authority) that those in power use it in a responsible way, oriented to the best interest of the others. In this sense, authority includes vicarious behaviour under conditions of empathy. If solidarity can be realised in this way, it is a relatively sovereign or confident management of inherently ambivalent tensions. Yet tensions are latently in the background, because the solution of tensions is only pragmatic and not ultimate; it is not an ideal final solution. The corresponding maxim implies to preserve consensually.

I would like to emphasise this point, because it implies that the very notion of solidarity, at least as I understand it here, contains latent or implicit ambivalence. In another discussion of the term, Pillemer and I have shown that enforced or idealised solidarity provokes explicitly ambivalent reactions. We base our statement on a review of the already mentioned work by Cohler and Grunebaum, as well as on work by George (1986) on family care giving, and by Braiker and Kelley (1979) on romantic relationships. Our understanding of solidarity differs from the common use of the term, insofar as we account for fragility, for tentativeness. In other words, in emphasising temporal dimensions, we point to the pragmatic character of solidarity and avoid *normative* idealisation.

b) Opposed to the logic of relations as demonstrated by solidarity are strategies in which the poles of innovation and divergence dominate. One is tempted to speak of individualisation, because the integration of the family does not seem to be guaranteed by institutionalised commitments. The experiences of the history of the relations between individuals loosen the interrelationships even more. Taking into account this twofold decoupling, but bearing in mind that ultimately the relations between parents and children can not be completely dissolved, as these relations remain somehow embedded in institutional settings, I would like to suggest '*atomisation*' as a term. By this we refer to the fragmentation of the unit into its smallest parts, where coherence becomes very loose. In terms of social status, formal equity between the generations dominates. Unforeseen events may provoke tensions, and in this way the latent ambivalences between the generations may actually become virulent. The maxim is to separate conflictually.

c) A third pattern can be identified when a strong orientation towards reproduction remains under the condition of living apart or drifting apart, whereby simultaneously 'divergence' dominates on the subjective dimensions, but emphasis is nevertheless placed on family togetherness. We may observe that one side makes claims on and requests to the others and legitimises them by references to their institutionalised ties. These lead to unstable conditions of subordination and super-ordination, in which moral pressure regulates the exercise of power. In order to characterise this type, one is tempted to refer to a term much used in clinical family therapy, namely enmeshment. However, since this term bears clinical connotations, I prefer to speak of '*captivation*'. This is meant to underline the fact that, as a rule, one generation — very often the parents — refer to the institutionalised order in their attempt to maintain their hold on the other or to bind children morally, although individually they feel quite different, distanced, and even estranged (maxim: to conserve reluctantly).

d) A fourth pattern may be observed when individuals feel close to each other yet do not insist on a reproduction of the institutional arrangements. In contrast, there is a certain openness towards institutional innovations, to the creation of new forms of family life and partnership. To characterise this type of orientation, I suggest the term '*emancipation*', being aware that it includes a broad spectrum of meanings. Basically, the idea is to live out intergenerational relations in such a way that the personal growth and development of all individuals involved are guaranteed without completely giving up the customary bonds. This basic agreement or commitment to personal growth regardless of age and lifestyle creates an integrative, though abstract communality among all the members of the family. The mode of emancipation is a rather sophisticated way of dealing with the ambivalences of intergenerational relations, and most likely requires a permanent negotiation among equals (maxim: to mature reciprocally).

As I stated before, this typology is of an exploratory character, and it serves here to demonstrate the *heuristic* character of the general postulate: Intergenerational relations both imply and generate ambivalences. It is obvious that future work must include the development of research instruments which are more precise and intersubjectively more reliable. Taking into account what has been said with regard to the *methodology* of dealing with ambivalences, multiple procedures seem to be the

most appropriate. Thus, we have developed the following instruments for a new project. They will be used in interviews on intergenerational relations among adults:

- ‘*Ambivalence assessment*’ attempts to define the poles that characterise the dimensions of ambivalences.
- ‘*Ambivalence awareness*’ attempts to capture the awareness of the ambivalence between children and parents.
- ‘*Ambivalence management*’ draws on typical stories and searches for strategies for dealing with ambivalences in everyday life. In our project, we also use an instrument on *societal generational relations*, and one to describe the *socio-ecological contexts*.⁴

In addition, a differentiation of the perspectives of the generations is needed, and ultimately the instruments must be designed to allow for a triangulation of the different approaches. We shall also keep in mind the two-sidedness of agencies in dealing with and living out social relations. I am aware that this task requires developing more differentiated hypotheses, but I hope that I have been able to demonstrate the fruitfulness of the heuristics of the general hypothesis. In this way, it can be seen as a partial answer to Lye’s call for a new theoretical orientation.⁵

Outlook

In my presentation, and especially in its second part, I have paid special attention to the operationalisation of the ambivalence model. This may have created the impression that we are taking a micro-sociological approach. But this is not our orientation. Let me recall what I introduced at the beginning as a major theoretical interest: To formulate a general heuristic hypothesis for the study of intergenerational relations which is rooted in anthropological considerations (or should I say: which explores the anthropological implications contained in many theories in the social sciences, or which are maybe even unavoidable in the social sciences — at least if possible conclusions for the formulation of social policy are kept in mind).

I believe that the concept of ambivalence is a good point of reference, because it avoids normative assumptions and moral idealisations. It points to the pragmatic necessity of searching for strategies shaping intergenerational relations. On a societal level, this implies strategies for their institutionalisation, especially by law and social policies.

Depending on the level of generalisation, our model can be applied on different societal levels for the identification (by means of research) and analysis of (institutionalised strategies) in order to deal with intergenerational ambivalence on the micro, the meso and the macro levels. Of course, given its nature as a heuristic hypothesis (and *not* as an *ontological* statement), the model is open to modification. It may also be adapted for other topics. For instance, I am considering its usefulness for a typology of children’s politics and policies (as part of generational politics and policies).

⁴ The research instruments exist in a German and an English version and are available from the author upon request.

⁵ For an innovative transfer of the concept of ambivalence to the study of grand-parenthood see the contribution by Liselotte Wilk in this volume.

In addition, the focus on ambivalence suggests a certain affinity to *societal analysis* using the attribute 'post-modern' in a sophisticated sense of the word. I would like to emphasise just two interrelated aspects:

- On a universal level, there is a degree of *interdependence and interpenetration* of all domains of societal development previously unknown in human history. This idea is captured in the concept of globalisation and in the idea of a global market place which presupposes an international flow of communication. However, these processes of globalisation also intensify the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in and between different social domains.
- On the level of personal action, more and more people are becoming aware of and experiencing *contradictions and discrepancies* in their daily lives, and all segments or groups of the population are affected: upper, middle and lower classes, the young, the middle-aged and the old, women and men. There is a widespread feeling of insecurity, which expresses itself in anxiety. Hazards and risks seem to be omnipresent. We seem to live in aleatory social structures.

Thus one may state (as an additional general hypothesis): Major cultural and social indicators and their interpretations speak for the hypothesis that societal development in the sense of a continuing differentiation of its traditional institutions can no longer be taken for granted. This is precisely the idea contained in the concept of ambivalence. In that it has been defined as a second-order construct which implies that the awareness of ambivalences is bound to forms of communication and processes of interpretation, we may add:

- 'Post-modern' refers to the obvious changes in the media of *human communication*, and consequently in the role of language as the most general social institution.
- 'Post-modern' stands for the assumption that these changes are fundamental and display new qualities, foremost among them the universal experience and awareness of the unlimited *plurality of ambiguities and polarisations* which at some point become ambivalent. Aleatory conditions become basic to the organisation of social life and of the individual self.
- 'Post-modern' (by its very logic) implies the possibility of a radical denial or refusal of its basic assumptions, e.g. it provokes radical *fundamentalism* and a search for *simplicity and unambiguity*, or it lends itself to an attitude of 'anything goes'. Yet it also provokes a new attention to the anthropological roots of social institutions.

What does this mean for our understanding of intergenerational relations and the proposition concerning the genuine ambivalence of intergenerational relations? Here is a summary of my interpretation:

- Under societal conditions that could be called 'post-modern', a *genuine ambivalence* of intergenerational relations becomes *manifest* in wide segments of the population because traditional ways to deal with this ambivalence no longer work.
- The experience of manifest ambivalence in intergenerational relations goes together with the *problematization* of the *taken for grantedness* of ideas concerning normality, the everyday division of roles, gender relations and notions of personal identity.
- At the same time, the *empirical strategies* used in dealing with intergenerational ambivalences merit *attention*.

To conclude: As I said in my introduction, intergenerational relations refer to basic problems of human sociality. This is why they have always been of great concern to mankind. This implies a special challenge to the social sciences. It is based on the necessity to take into account the relevance of these relations without idealising them. This danger is obvious if one looks at them under the primacy of solidarity. Such a view is blind to the typological plurality of experiences and the possibility of different forms. It also underestimates the tentative character of all practical solutions.

Both in their theoretical arguments and in their empirical findings, societal diagnoses of our time refer to the fragility of interpersonal relations. One encounters a rather contradictory argumentation which I would like to call the '*generational paradox*'. On the one hand, it means that intergenerational relations are endangered on all social levels, the society, organisations, firms and the family. On the other hand, these relations are seen as ties that guarantee social integration.

I would claim that on the level of arguments and language, paradoxes are the equivalent of those contradictions which we refer to as ambivalences in terms of emotions, experiences and social relations. In taking ambivalence as a point of reference for our analysis, we may be able to contribute to a better understanding of the 'problem of generations' in our present times (to paraphrase Karl Mannheim), i.e. in contemporary (post-modern) societies. Such a realistic view and the exploration of possible strategies may also be a more reliable basis for social policies than the idealisation of family ties.

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Intergenerational relationships: Grandparents and grandchildren

Liselotte Wilk

When sociologists discuss about intergenerational relationships, they tend to focus on the parent-child relationship: in particular, on the relationship between parents and their grown-up children, the frequency of their contacts, the quality of their relationship, and the support they give one another. It is only recently that scholars have become increasingly interested in the significance of another form of intergenerational relationship, namely that between the first and the third generation, i.e. between grandparents and grandchildren.

Never before in history have so many people been a grandparent and/or a grandchild for such long periods: 90 percent of all pre-school children in Austria have at least one living grandparent, and 45 percent have four grandparents. Children are on average 11 years old when their grandfather dies, and 23 years old when their grandmother dies. Of all people aged 60 to 74, 62 percent have at least one grandchild (Findl 1993: 330). Increasing life expectancy is the basic prerequisite permitting a growing part of the population to experience being a grandparent for longer and longer periods of time.

This contribution will examine the meaning, arrangement, features and qualities of this relationship. In addition, it will address the opportunities and problems for both grandparents and grandchildren. Nobody will deny that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren has radically changed in the last few decades. This change is interpreted in different ways. Kornhaber and Woodward (1981) deplore the way in which economic development has cut the 'vital connections' (i.e. time and proximity) of a good relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. According to them, grandparents have lost their role as mentor, model and caretaker. Most authors, however, think that this relation is becoming more important. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) argue that the idealised picture of the strong, supportive grandparent of the past is exaggerated and that modern grandparents frequently act as both protectors and reserve supporters of their grandchildren. They also argue that more grandparents than in the past play a key role today. These authors note a shift in the balance from respect towards attachment. The instability of marriages and partnerships has turned grandparents into important representatives of stability and continuity, thus making their relationship with grandchildren more significant than in former times.

To understand the value, structure and quality of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, we have to study the developments in various social fields over the past few decades. Demographic developments — such as increasing life expectancy, declining birth rates, and increasing divorce and remarriage rates — have changed the structure and the dynamics of that relationship. Grandparents have fewer grandchildren, grandchildren have more grandparents, and the relationship often lasts for decades.

On the one hand, technological progress — in particular with regard to obtaining information, communicating and travelling — makes it easier to keep in touch regardless of the distance. On the other hand, new technologies have also fundamentally changed everyday life; children acquire knowledge and skills that older persons normally do not have. Life experience becomes less valuable for mastering life, while such new skills as being able to handle information and communication systems become more important. This not only shifts the balance of competence and knowledge between the younger and the older population, but it also changes their relationship. Grandparents cease to be authorities over and become equal partners with their grandchildren.

The modern welfare system, with its provisions for old age and illness, as well as widespread economic development have made the older generation relatively independent in economic terms. The help grandchildren give to their grandparents, or the financial assistance grandparents give to their grandchildren, are voluntary transfers of resources, even though family solidarity is assigned a high value (Schütze 1983) and grandchildren may feel obligated to help their frail grandparents. The amount of resources invested by either side depends on the quality of the relation and the meaning it has for both parties.

Individualisation, democratisation and especially the fading of traditional 'institutionalised' family roles have given both sides a large amount of freedom in shaping their relationship. In our modern times, neither grandparents nor grandchildren can resort to clearly defined role expectations (Brubaker 1985: 72). Both of them may define their roles themselves and then negotiate with the other side. On the one hand, the lack of established expectations, obligations and rights permits both parties to build their relationship in line with their needs and wishes; on the other hand, it allows each of them to minimise their contact and withdraw from the relationship.

In modern times, children have less material and more emotional value for their parents. This also holds true for grandparents. Sometimes grandchildren are seen as heirs of the family name or property, or as those who hand down the family's traditions and values. But most of all, grandchildren give meaning to their grandparents' lives. They may be the source of new, joyful experiences and make them feel important and loved. Characteristic features of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren are closeness, warmth and affection.

All these trends have influenced the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Nowadays, we find not only several common characteristics but also a wide variety of building patterns.

The majority of grandparents and grandchildren describe their relationship as being close and loving. They are persons mutually important to each other, and especially important interlocutors. They spend their time together with emotionally satisfying activities and give each other emotional and practical support. They meet frequently, though the contacts tend to decrease as the grandchildren grow older.

The variations of the relationship are comprehensively documented in many empirical studies that generally present the grandparents' perspective. One of the best known is that of Cherlin and Furstenberg, done in the USA in 1986, which identifies three main types of grandparenting. Grandparents practising the dominant ('companionate') style describe themselves as playful companions as well as givers and receivers of affection. Some grandparents and grandchildren have but little contact and a ritualistic, purely symbolic relationship ('remote style'). A third group of grandparents has intensive contact with their grandchildren, frequently behaving more as parents than as grandparents ('involved style').

A study recently published in Germany by Herlyn (1998) lists the following five different types of 'grandmotherhood':

- 1) *Responsibility-oriented grandmothers*: Mostly younger, gainfully employed married women who often take care of their grandchildren and want to participate in their lives.
- 2) *Self-determined and very busy grandmothers*: Mostly women with a higher education who are working and married. They enjoy being with their grandchildren, but their own interests have priority over the wishes and demands of their grandchildren.

- 3) *Integrated grandmothers*: Mostly widowed, older women from the lower classes who tend to be passive. They enjoy their grandchildren but do not want to take any responsibility for them.
- 4) *Ambivalent grandmothers*: These women have high professional qualifications and tend to be married. They have scant contact with their grandchildren and do not take care of them at all. They feel responsible for their grandchildren and want to meet them more often, but they find being a grandmother rather exhausting.
- 5) *Relatively independent grandmothers*: These women do not expect anything from their grandchildren and do not feel responsible for them at all. They have only infrequent, purely ritualistic contact.

Some Austrian studies focussing on 'grandfatherhood' also discovered different types of grandfather-grandchildren relationships. The most frequent type was characterised as the 'companionate' type. There is evidence of a pluralisation in the modes of grandparenthood in line with increasing divorce and remarriage rates. After parental divorce, the grandchild-grandparent-relationship may become more important if the grandparents take on more responsibilities and duties in their grandchildren's lives. However, the contact also may be reduced or even interrupted, especially with the grandparent of the non-custodial parent. There are no existing role models for stepgrandparents and/or stepgrandchildren. Culturally, this relationship is totally undefined. It is entirely up to the two parties (and the parents of the children) how they form their relationship.

We can use different theoretical frameworks to understand and explain the common characteristics of the grandparenting relationship and the different ways it is formed in everyday life. On a general level, we may resort to exchange theory and merely see the relation as the exchange of goods and resources of great importance for both parties concerned. We may analyse it from a feminist point of view or with the help of the concepts of solidarity or conflict that continue to be applied to the relationship between parents and children.

In his paper, Kurt Lüscher has impressively demonstrated that ambivalence is an appropriate general framework for analysing intergenerational relationships between parents and their adult children. He has shown that the focal point of interest is the way in which ambivalence is mediated and managed. The concept of ambivalence may also be an appropriate tool for understanding the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. This assumption is supported by a number of empirical findings.

As early as 1986, Cherlin and Furstenberg described the situation of the American grandparent as ambiguous. Modern American grandparents want to be involved in their grandchildren's lives, but not at the cost of their autonomy. The tension between personal autonomy and family ties means that grandparents must try to balance their desire for emotionally satisfying relationships with their grandchildren with their wish to lead independent lives. "The resolution of this tension is the fundamental problem facing American families today" (Cherlin/Furstenberg 1986: 207).

Lüscher has empirically shown how people try to manage the ambivalence in their relationship. If we apply the concept to Herlyn's typology of grandmothers, the different types of behaviour denote different strategies of dealing with ambivalence, i.e. that between family orientation and individualistic orientation, on the one hand, and between closeness and distance, on the other hand. The classification would depend on the behaviour's proximity to one of the two poles: The poles on the institutionalised dimension are constituted by family orientation versus individualistic orientation; the poles on the subject-interactional dimension by closeness versus distance.

In particular, one aspect of the grandparent-grandchild relation seems most likely to generate ambivalence. The life course of grandparents and grandchildren can be characterised as leading in opposite directions. Grandchildren are on their way to mastering the world. They acquire new knowledge and skills, become increasingly independent, are integrated into more and more social fields, and gain a reputation as a professional. Grandparents lose more and more parts of their world. They become disintegrated from professional work and eventually become immobilised. Their skills and knowledge become increasingly useless. They become — at least partly — dependent on the help of others. Grandparents have a long past and a short future. Grandchildren have a short past and a long future. They both have to meet in the present and form their relationship by combining the past and the future in the present. This may be a fundamental difference that cannot be resolved. The concept of ambivalence seems to be appropriate and useful not only for analysing the relationships of the first and second generation in the family, but also for the relation between the first and the third generation. More theoretical and empirical work will be needed. But first and foremost, it will be necessary to study in greater depth how grandchildren experience the relationship and how grandchildren and grandparents try to manage the ambivalence of their relationship over the course of their lives.

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You can't have it all — at least at the same time. Segmentation in the modern life course as a threat to intergenerational communication and solidarity

Peter Cuyvers

Introduction

“Quite clearly, in this age of the ‘me generation’, the individual rather than the family increasingly comes first” (Poppenoe 1993).

If anything is clear, it is the above statement on the causes of the present problems between generations. As many others did in the past and doubtlessly will do in the future, Poppenoe is blaming the present generation for being selfish, neglecting social bonds and ties — in short, for disrupting the good work of hundreds of generations before them. The notion of ‘family decline’ has indeed dominated the debate on the family over the past few decades. However, it is important to note that there are in fact two diametrically opposed views on family decline. Poppenoe’s criticism is directed at a generation whose main representatives have deliberately and consciously promoted family decline as necessary, good and postponed for too long. In a series on the United Nations Year of the Family published in the German weekly *Die Zeit*, Claus Koch stated that the family, along with many other institutions, mainly survived for lack of fantasy. That was why the family looked so pathetic and why one viewed with regret being deserted by one’s friends for it (quoted from Wingen 1999). Koch wrote a preview for the long-expected dissolution of the family. As early as 1960, Cooper predicted the ‘death of the family’ for even more serious and necessary reasons: Families were identified as the root of all evil, producing mentally handicapped if not downright sick individuals (Cooper 1971). The interesting point is that both sides seem to agree that family structures are weakening and that individualism is taking over society. The difference is that rising divorce figures were seen as both the dawn of a new era and as the iceberg that was going to sink the unsinkable cornerstone of society. Both sides agree that developments in the family field will at best (or worst) result in ‘diversity’ or ‘pluralism’ with respect to living arrangements, which in turn makes it virtually impossible for governments to carry out anything resembling a family policy.

I shall start by questioning the basic assumption of family decline and the increasing diversity in living arrangements from a perspective of the life course. In my opinion, life-course analysis shows that the family area has basically remained stable. Subsequently, I shall address a problem underexposed in the recent past due to a strong focus on family decline, i.e. the segmentation of the life course. Based on the situation in the Netherlands, I shall identify six separate phases or stages in the modern life course and compare the situation of individuals passing through these stages. Next, I shall try to link a number of present-day problems in the family field to this segmentation, e.g. postponement of childbirth and decreasing willingness to contribute to pensions for the elderly.

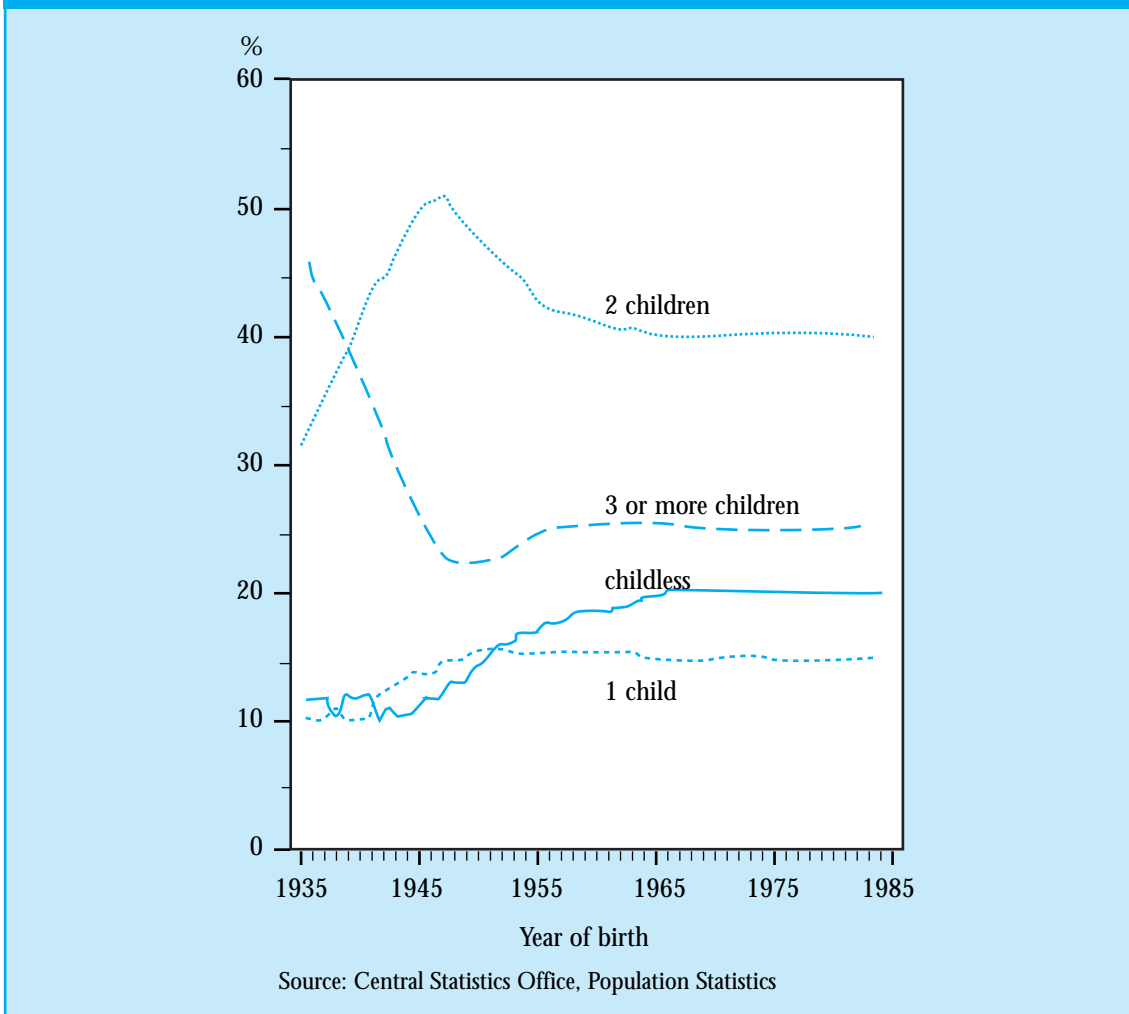
Basic stability in the (modern) life course

The decline or breakdown of the family at the societal level is usually ‘proved’ by summing up a series of demographic developments such as ‘individualisation’ or ‘modernisation.’ These developments are roughly identical in all western societies, with northern Europe as a forerunner. The central issue in these developments is the gradual replacement of marriage by consensual union, single-parent families and stepfamilies, as well as by such alternative living arrangements as same-sex couples. Moreover, birth rates are declining and single-person households are booming. Each of these

developments marks a different aspect of the (supposed) unwillingness of individuals to commit themselves to such stable and long-lasting bonds as marriage and parenthood. The Netherlands are no exception but maintain a somewhat intermediate or ambivalent position (Hantrais 1998).

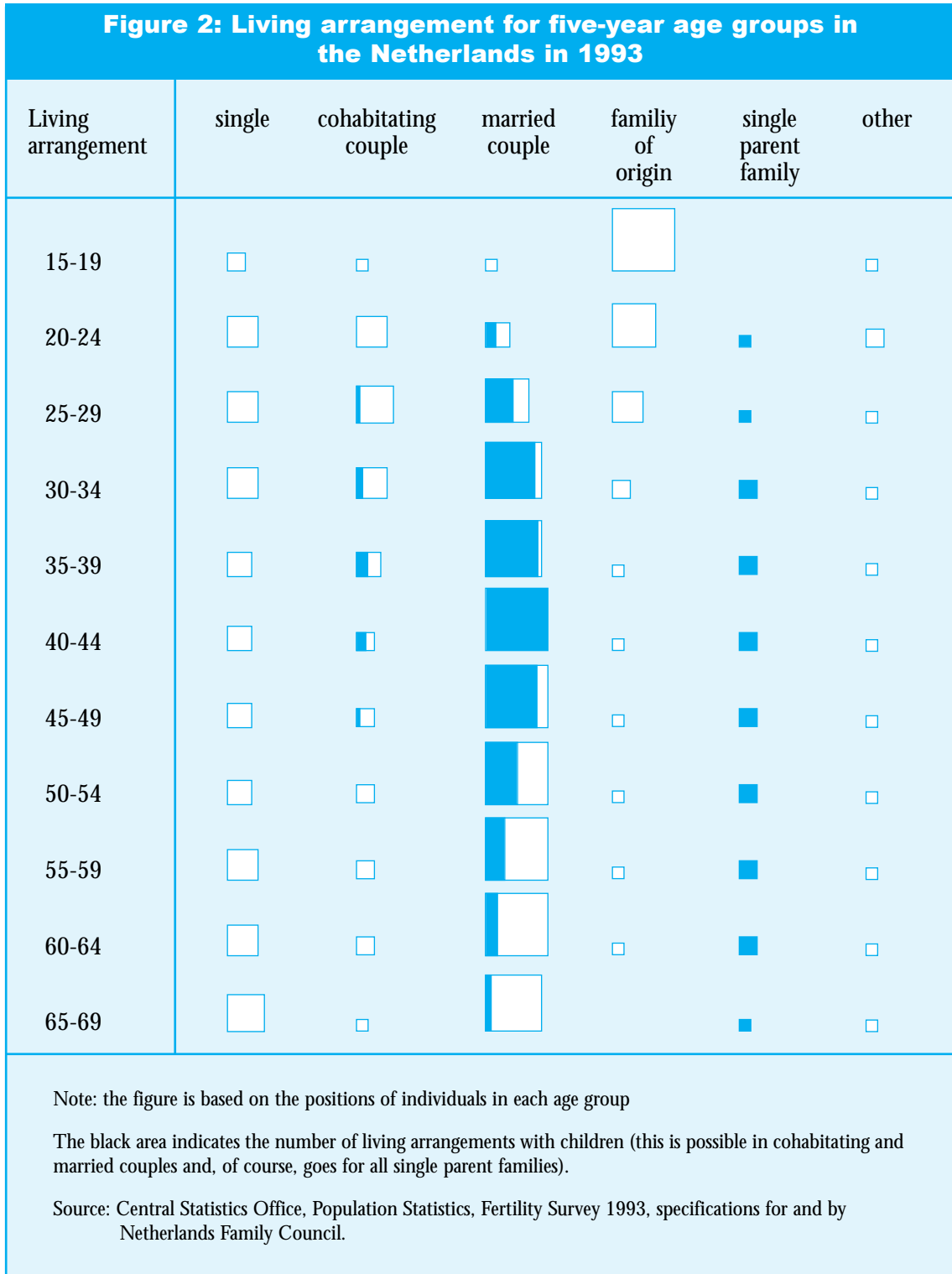
On the one hand, the Netherlands are known to have the most liberal culture with respect to one's choice of living arrangements. Amsterdam is actively promoted as the 'gay capital of the world', an announcement made by the mayor who opened the Gay Games in 1998. At present, three-quarters of the youngest generations live together before marriage and one-third of all children is born out of wedlock. As in other countries, divorce rates went up to one-third at the time more permissive legislation was introduced, and single parenthood is no longer stigmatised by society. The General Assistance Act entitles single parents (mostly mothers) to a family allowance of almost 1,000 EUR per month, thus enabling them to run an independent household. On the other hand, the Netherlands historically lag behind with respect to the gainful employment of women. Though female labour-market participation has reached the average levels prevailing throughout Europe, in the Netherlands most mothers are still housewives. Just as in other countries, leading Dutch politicians recently took up the issue of family decline or 'atomisation', as it was called. Increasing crime rates and problems at school were attributed to parents who were too much involved in their role as consumers and to their being excessively permissive when raising their children.

However, new analyses carried out by the Central Statistics Office in cooperation with the Netherlands Family Council (Latten/Cuyvers 1995; Cuyvers 1996) showed that another process — the 'modernisation of the life course' — was hidden behind these figures. Essentially, this process entails the insertion of two new phases in the traditional life course. The traditional life course consisted of two family-based parts: the family of birth and the family of choice. After a period of formal engagement, people married and moved away from home — though for lack of housing they frequently continued to live at home — and childbirth was expected within a couple of years, if not months. This was followed by old age, which was sometimes intertwined with the gradual emptying of the nest by the children. Many older parents depended on someone staying behind. As Chaplin very impressively showed in his film, in modern times marriage developed from the only gateway to adulthood into the formal affirmation of a personally chosen relationship between two already independent persons. These persons needed more time — as well as trial and error — to find the 'chosen one', but there should be no doubt as to the final result. The average youngster in the Netherlands leaves home at age 22 to live in a one-person household or with a partner. The next years may be called 'the relational playgrounds of modern society' (I say 'may' because, in reality, they can be quite stressful). At present, more than 50 percent of all such arrangements do not work out, and those involved in them certainly experience the break-up of a consensual union as a 'failure'. Stability increases in the next phase: At the moment, the divorce rate fluctuates between one-third and one-quarter of all marriages, with the percentage of dissolution for couples with children at a mere 15 percent. Viewed from the other side, this means that 85 percent of all children in the Netherlands do not experience any change in their family situation but live with their (biological) parents and one or two siblings until they leave the family home. The birth rate may be down to 1.4, but this is mainly due to the fact that 20 percent of all women remain childless (50 percent of them involuntarily). Mothers have an average of more than two children: Approximately 15 percent of all families have one child, most families have two or three children, and some even more, as shown in Figure 1. These figures have been remarkably stable over the past few decades.

Figure 1: Number of children for women in the Netherlands at age 45

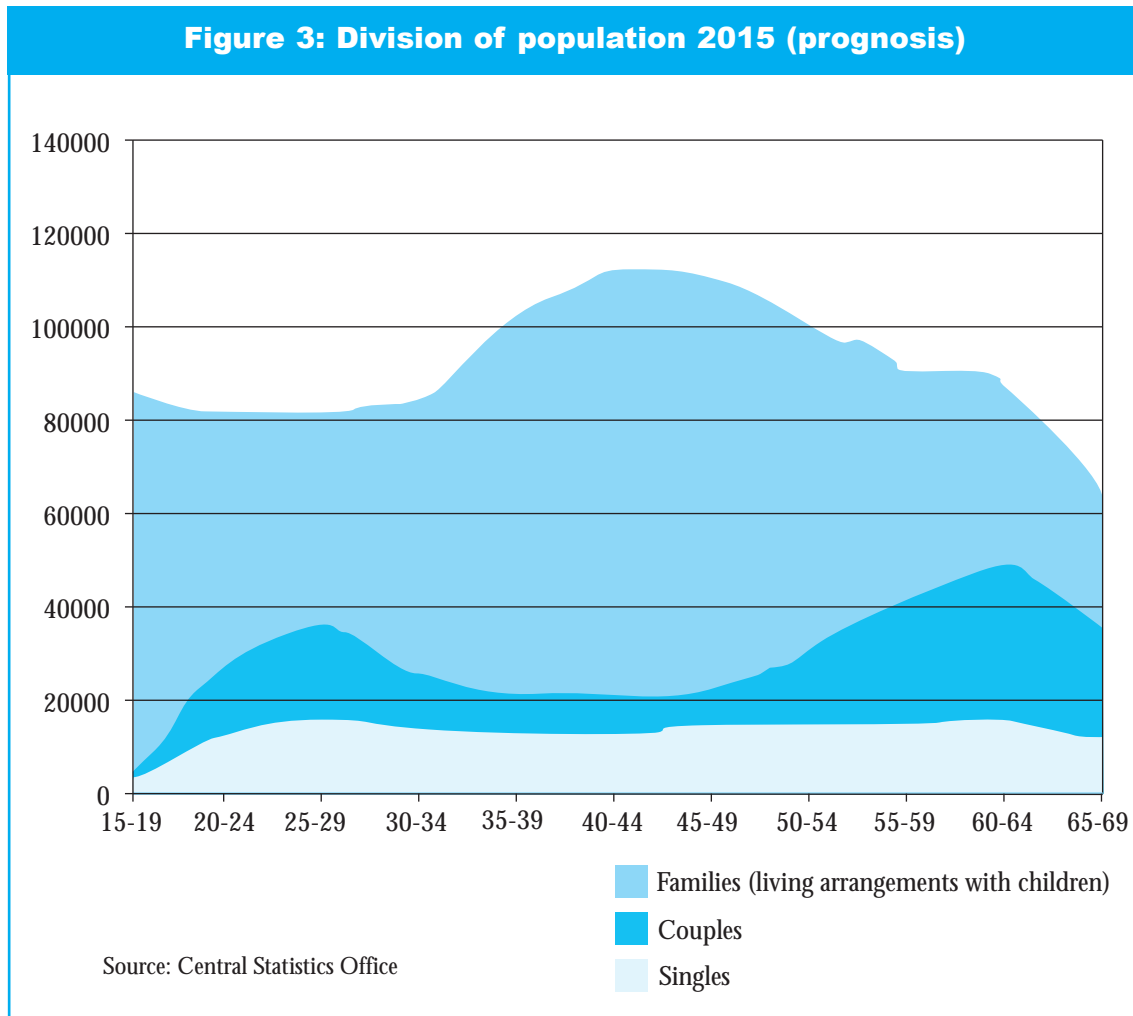
Compared with the past, the main differences are the women's increased age at the birth of the first child (having risen to 30) and the fact that an increasing number of children is born out of wedlock. However, the majority of these 'illegitimate children' is born shortly before their parents get married. Since marriage has lost its function as the gateway to adulthood, it is now embarked upon for two reasons. The first is a 'technical' reason. As partners, and especially as parents, unwed couples face a complex and quite unromantic procedure before they are accorded the legal status achieved by marriage. The second reason is probably the most important, however. Marriage is a strong symbolic gesture, reaffirming two persons' mutual intention to stay together. There should be no doubt that this is the intention of the average Dutch couple. A recent survey showed zero tolerance with respect to sexual contact with people other than the partner. The word 'adultery' is considered old-fashioned and also inappropriate because of the consensual status of most young couples, but 95 percent of all partners say that 'unfaithfulness' would lead to the immediate dissolution of their relationship.

These results indicate that, at least in the Netherlands, the 'breakdown of family/commitment' has no empirical basis. What seems to have happened is that the contract attitude towards marriage has been replaced by a great many couples living together through personal choice. The latter is, in fact, even more strenuous and demanding. As van der Avort (1985) and Straver et al. (1996) demonstrated, many couples describe their relationship as (very) 'interactive'. In any case, the demographic result is quite stable, as is shown in Figure 2 by the division of household types over the life cycle.



As Figure 2 clearly shows, diversity (the ‘playground’) ends at age 30, and the vast majority of the population lives the ‘married-with-children’ life for the next few decades. Of course, the position of any individual does not necessarily have to remain stable; but as was previously noted, the instability rate for the ‘married-with-children’ life is only about 15 percent. Most singles and single-parent families quickly transform themselves back into families: Less than 25 percent remain single (parent) for more than five years. Figure 2 also demonstrates that the booming single rates frequently quoted by the media simply provide an incorrect picture of the real situation. It is quite correct that almost

the majority of households consists of single households, and that families with children are presently a minority. Nevertheless, Figure 2 shows that (i) singles are a minority in terms of persons instead of households, and (ii) this minority is concentrated at the beginning and end of the life cycle. Finally, it can be shown that the ratios for groups of households will remain largely the same, as is depicted in Figure 3.

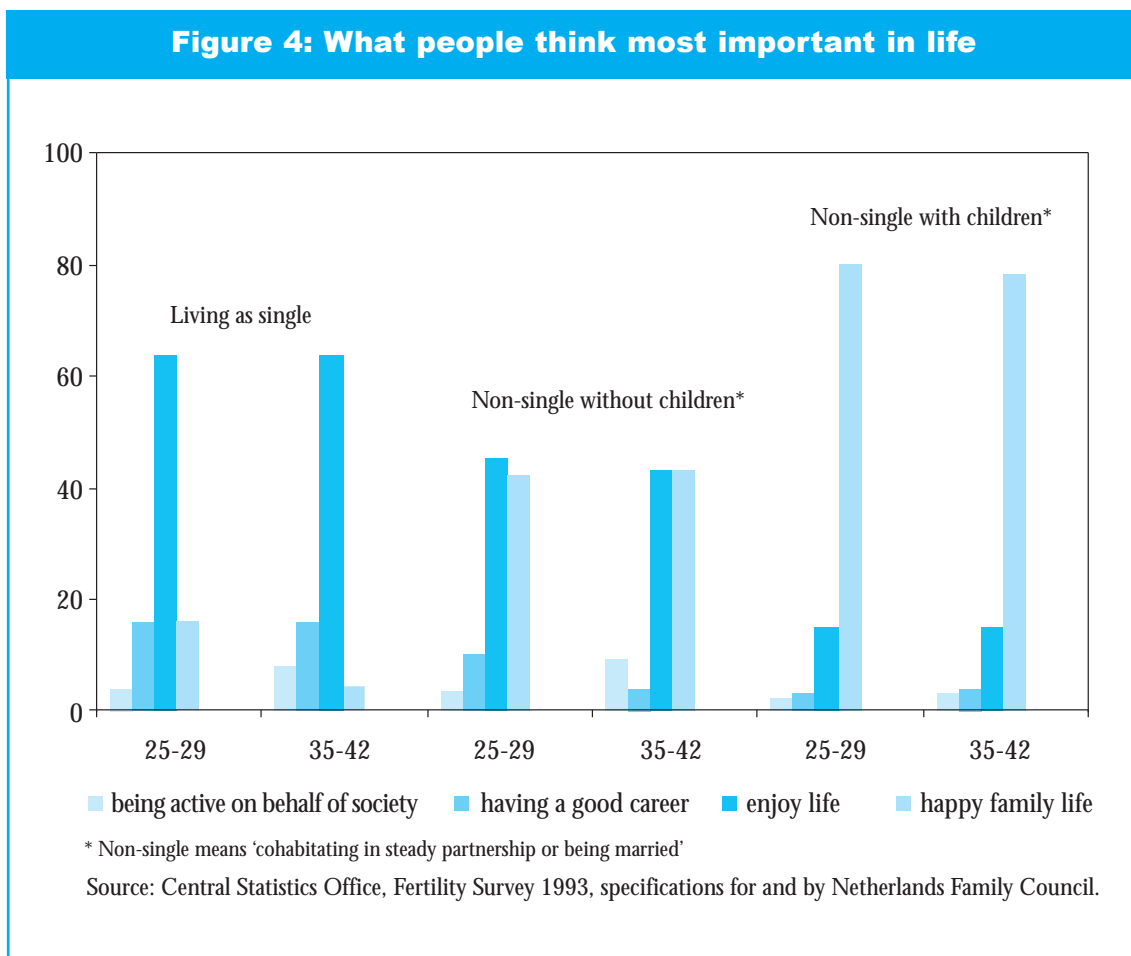


There will be an increase in the number of singles but also a slight increase in the number of families. The most interesting point, however, is the development in the number of couples (without children). This issue is 'masked' by the fact that marriage tends to be used as the key factor in comparisons of household types. However, the modern life course shows that partnership, marriage and parenthood are not the 'triad' they used to be but are becoming separate moments in the life cycle. Therefore, it is useful to distinguish between them, with partnership (cohabitation) and parenthood (family formation in the 'real sense') as significant milestones marking (new) phases in the life course.

Segmentation of the life cycle

In the debate on family decline, participants tend to treat societal development as one phenomenon. They distinguish between, or rather juxtapose, the traditional, social or boring individual and the modern, versatile or egocentric (atomised) citizen. The term 'generation' is often used as a category

to distinguish groups of individuals sharing a number of common experiences and orientations. Seen from the perspective of other (non-sociological) disciplines such as psychology and education, this view neglects an important aspect of human existence. Individuals develop in many ways during their life cycle, not only physically and mentally (from helpless babies into adults) but also as social beings who communicate with others (such as parents and partners). The development entails a number of 'transitions'. Some of them — e.g. walking and talking — develop automatically; others may or may not take place at all. Research shows that transitions in living arrangements may affect people's opinions, as shown in Figure 4.



The point to stress is that the change in attitude from a self-oriented perspective to a family-oriented perspective is not caused by age. The scores for singles or couples do not change as they get older. Moreover, it is quite clear that opinions change gradually, because couples' opinions are exactly in the middle between those of singles and those of parents, once more irrespective of age. It might be argued that people tend to adapt their attitude to their situation — and in the case of couples, to their expected future as parents.

In a tentative analysis of phases within the modern life cycle in the Netherlands, the distinguishing criterion is derived from developmental psychology. In each phase, both material and mental conditions or aspects should be 'restructured', enabling or even forcing the individual to face the outside world and communicate with others in a way different from the one he/she did before the

transition. Since we are discussing the issue of 'family decline', the main criterion is the orientation of individuals towards family life. Finally, it should be mentioned that, in order to be as understandable as possible in different languages and countries, the six phases are described in 'pseudo Latin' terms: *infantia*, *juniora*, *liberia*, *familia*, *consumptia* and *seniora*.

Infantia

Infants totally depend on the way of life and functioning of their families, so there is no dispute about their family orientation.

Juniora

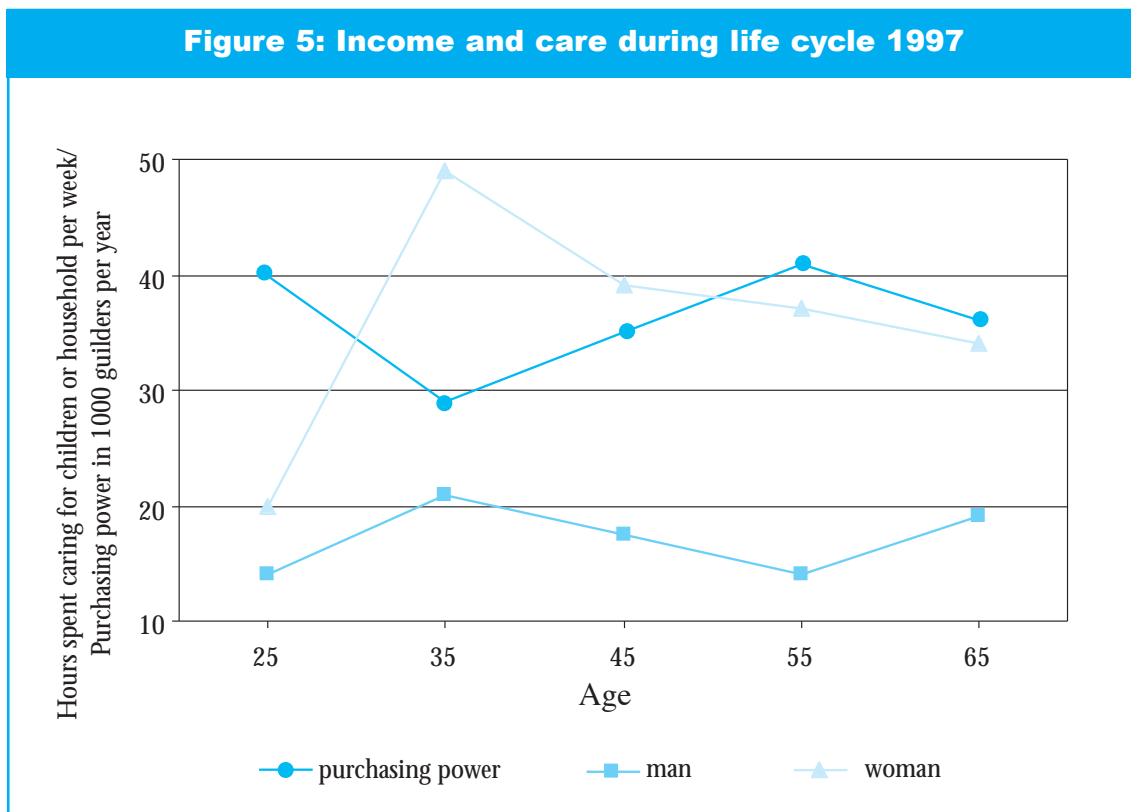
The junior phase represents the period of restricted and symbolic participation in society. It starts at about age 16, when a person reaches the first stages of 'legal adulthood' in most countries (e.g. by being entitled to such things as a driver's license or by signing purchasing contracts without parental consent). Modern western societies are characterised by a lengthy junior phase, as the majority of young people are involved in schooling for quite a long time and therefore need their parents' or other types of support, such as scholarships. It is important to note that the junior phase has a 'split' character in modern western societies. Young people are economically dependent, but socially and relationally able to do all the things that were once prerogatives of the adult population. Only a few restrictions are upheld in connection with how they spend their time and how they behave sexually. In most countries, young people become legally independent at the age of 18. They can vote and be elected and are given most of the luxuries of adulthood without having to earn their own living. (This statement should not be misunderstood as a disapproving moral judgement. It is simply meant to state facts. As the examples of most countries show, most youngsters do very well; only a small minority fails to regulate their new freedoms).

Liberia

The phase called *liberia* in this scheme is quite recent and comes about as a direct consequence of the changed life course outlined above. On average, this 'freedom phase' encompasses five to ten years of complete independence, including economic independence, before the person has to bear the classic responsibilities for partners and/or children. As for partners, this responsibility has almost become obsolete. In all western countries, most young women work after completing their education. Moreover, 'homogamy' keeps increasing, meaning that both partners tend to be at the same educational and professional level, at least when they first meet. *Liberia* therefore means living as a single or, in most cases, with a partner, having one's own income and being able to spend all one's money as one pleases. Consumer research shows, at least for the Netherlands (Grubben 1997), that young couples have a high standard of living, take two or three vacations a year and still manage to save an average of almost 4,000 EUR annually. Of course, these figures vary for different groups. Students, for instance, take up gainful employment much later; but since they also postpone starting a family until their mid-thirties, it takes a few years more until they enter the 'freedom phase'.

Familia

The family phase does not require a lot of explanation, being characterised by a decisive event, i.e. the birth of the first child. In most cases, this birth is planned. When interviewed, most youngsters and couples state that they want to have children; and 80 percent of the women are successful in this respect. Sooner or later, this is the moment when, in terms of both time and money, scarcity enters the life of the majority of citizens. In the Netherlands, just like in many other countries, the number of hours for 'homemaking' (including taking care of the children) rises to an average of more than 40 hours a week, most of which falls on women, as is shown in Figure 5.



The line in the middle stands for a person's economic position. Exactly at the peak of 'caring', we see a serious decline in purchasing power (purchasing power being the net result when gross income plus family allowances, etc., have been lowered to reflect tax deductions and household size). This dip is caused by two factors. Firstly, more persons depend on the same income; secondly, in the Netherlands, most women tend to shorten working hours or completely stop working after the birth of their first or second child. The latter reason definitely reinforces the former. The increase in the male partner's income usually does not compensate for the loss of the woman's earnings. As a consequence, most families in the Netherlands are breadwinner families in the middle of the family phase and have a purchasing power one-quarter to one-third lower than in the liberia period. As in the junior period, it should once again be noted that this is to be seen as a fact and not as a problem per se. The general affluence levels in the Netherlands permit 60 percent of the mothers to stay at home. Besides, everybody knows that children cost a lot of money and does not mind spending it on them.

Consumptia

The term for this phase was chosen in view of the fact that it is turning into the golden age of the life cycle. It is the period of gainful employment at the peak of the male career, supported by the 'comeback' of a lot of women into the labour market and increasingly by pocket-money jobs for youngsters as well. In this phase, the house that most Dutch families bought when they started out — another burden in the initial family phase — incurs relatively few costs or even produces a small amount of equity as a consequence of the booming market. Apart from travelling, most of the consumption in this phase is less conspicuous. Much of it is spent on (pre)pensioning schemes, a lot goes to children and grandchildren, and the rest is often simply saved.

Seniora

The phase of ageing encompasses the period after retirement. Since most employees in the Netherlands receive high pensions, there is no sharp decrease in affluence after age 60 or 65, except

for a minority of people who had many different jobs and did not build up private pensions. Because most women have an interrupted career or none at all, their dependence on the 'breadwinner pension' increases. More serious problems are connected with declining health.

Phases in the life cycle are a very natural and even quite necessary thing. Transitions in personal capacities, cultural orientations and structural conditions make up the very essence of life. All cultures distinguish between juniors and seniors as one of the driving forces of society. As Shaw said, anyone under a certain age who is not a revolutionary has no heart; anyone over a certain age who still is a revolutionary is a fool. In all cultures, there has been a tendency for the old to criticise the young for being disobedient, and for the young to criticise the old for being inflexible and conservative. The question to be asked is whether the greater complexity of the life cycle, as compared to previous periods, has affected the checks and balances between generations.

In the following section, I shall analyse if and to what extent there is a growing imbalance at the cultural and structural levels. I speculate that there is a gradual tendency for the phases to become 'segments', meaning that the cleavages between phases become larger, and that there is a lack of natural communication among the different phases.

Cultural and structural segmentation

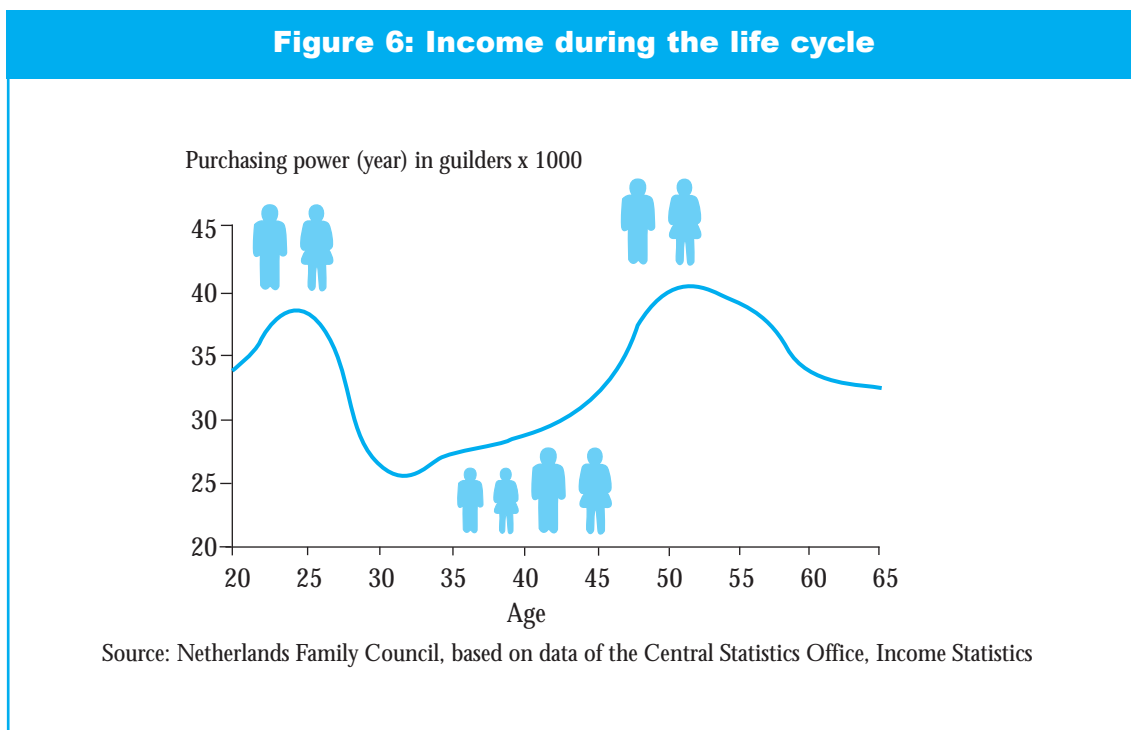
Since culture is quite difficult to measure in an empirically sound way, the 'evidence' in this section is of a circumstantial nature. One cannot fail to notice, however, that growing old has become one of the most dreaded and undesirable things in modern western culture. Paradoxically, the pre-conditions of a long and relatively prosperous old age have never been better. On average, citizens may count on more than ten years of relatively good health and on a relatively good income for which they do not have to work once they have retired. Nevertheless, Plato's praise of old age as the phase in which the joys of the mind (finally) are no longer hampered by the physical needs and urges of the previous periods, would hardly get any adherents nowadays. The same seems to hold true for parenthood, at least in the classical sense of fatherhood and motherhood, i.e. the responsibilities 'a man should take', or the natural experiences 'a women should have'. Modern parenthood is presented as the 'consumption of luck' brought by the perfect baby with the perfect smile in the perfect clothing. There seems to be a strong cultural pressure backing images of youth and success, dividing society into winners and losers. With the media continuously showing career peaks and success stories, one is almost compelled to think that anyone who is not a millionaire or at least has a leased car and mobile phone by age 30 is lagging behind.

However, a simple look at the statistics shows that only a handful of Dutch people become millionaires by age 30 and that less than three percent of all couples can be defined as yuppies who both have a highly-paid job. The vast majority of the population simply works for a living instead of having a career, and does not look like a Spice Girl or a Back Street Boy at all or stand a chance at the Olympics or in Wall Street. In a society proclaiming 'unlimited possibilities' for everyone and associating very strongly a person's position with his or her personal capacities, this might be a bit of a problem for the average guy's or girl's self-image.

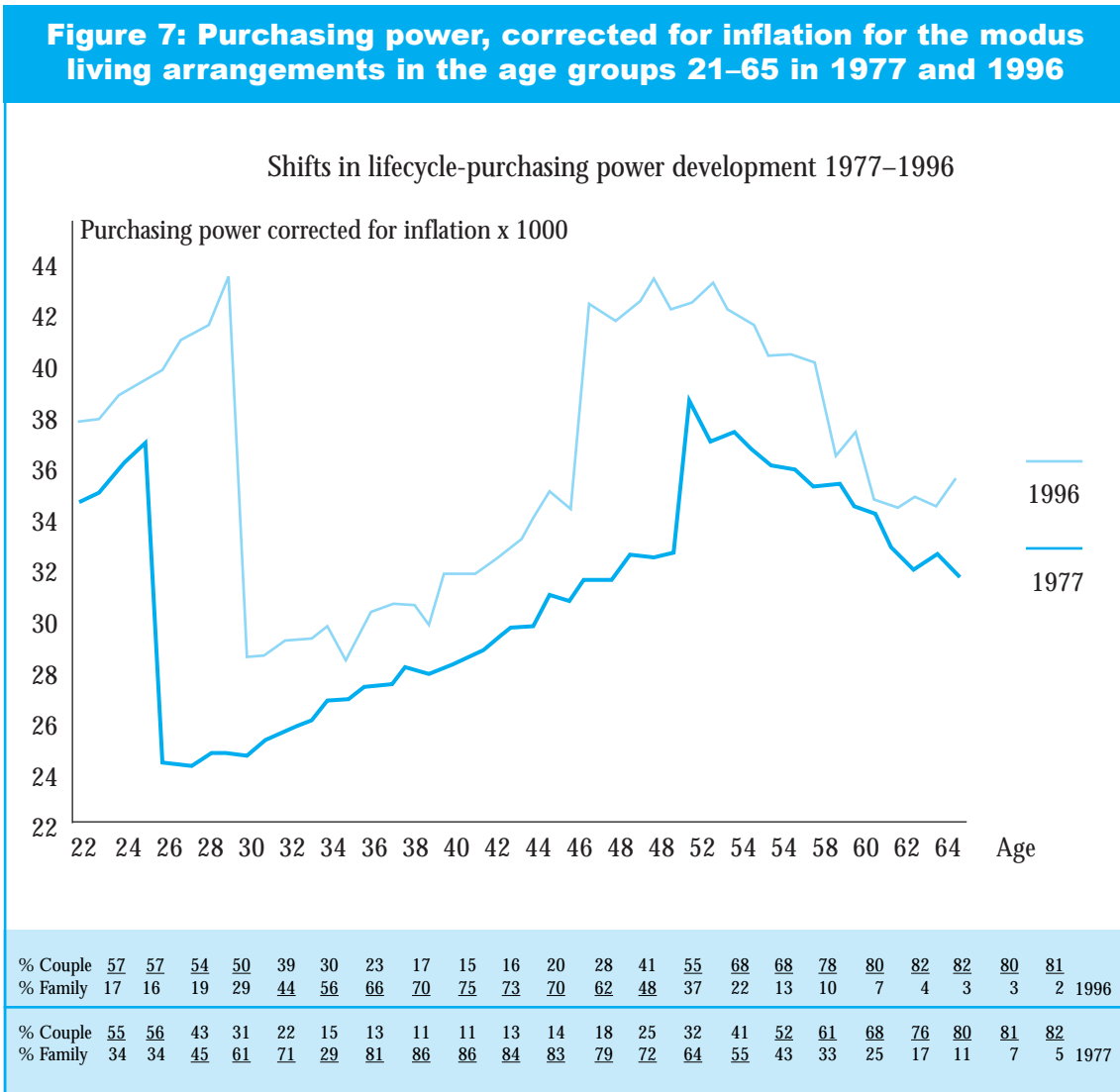
It is quite clear that the phases of juniora, and especially of liberia, have gained what we might call 'cultural dominance' or even 'cultural hegemony'. This is also one of the important issues in the story about the decline of the family mentioned at the beginning of this article, namely the alleged tendency to favour short-term personal success and buying power over long-term, tedious investments in tasks that are supposed to have a more intrinsic value. As was discussed in the previous paragraphs, it is a serious question whether there is indeed such a selfish and individualistic tendency in the population at large. But there can be little doubt about the prevailing image. Once

again, this should not be seen as an attempt to moralise but merely as a statement of fact. We know from previous periods that all kinds of images (Puritanism, Victorian morals) were actively supported by the cream of society, and that some of these images (e.g. patriarchy) were considered natural then even though they are regarded as nonsense now. The same may or may not hold true for the adherence to youth and conspicuous consumption as salvation or — as some call it — ‘the new religion’ brought on by capitalism. The plain and simple fact is that some phases in the modern life cycle correspond better to these images than others, and the family and senior phases certainly lack attraction from this point of view.

As for the material differences between phases in the life cycle, low or at least relatively low consumption — as compared to other phases — has already been mentioned as one of the major characteristics of the family phase. Figure 6 shows that the modern family phase is trapped between the two new phases in which people live as couples without children and in which consumer strength is quite high.



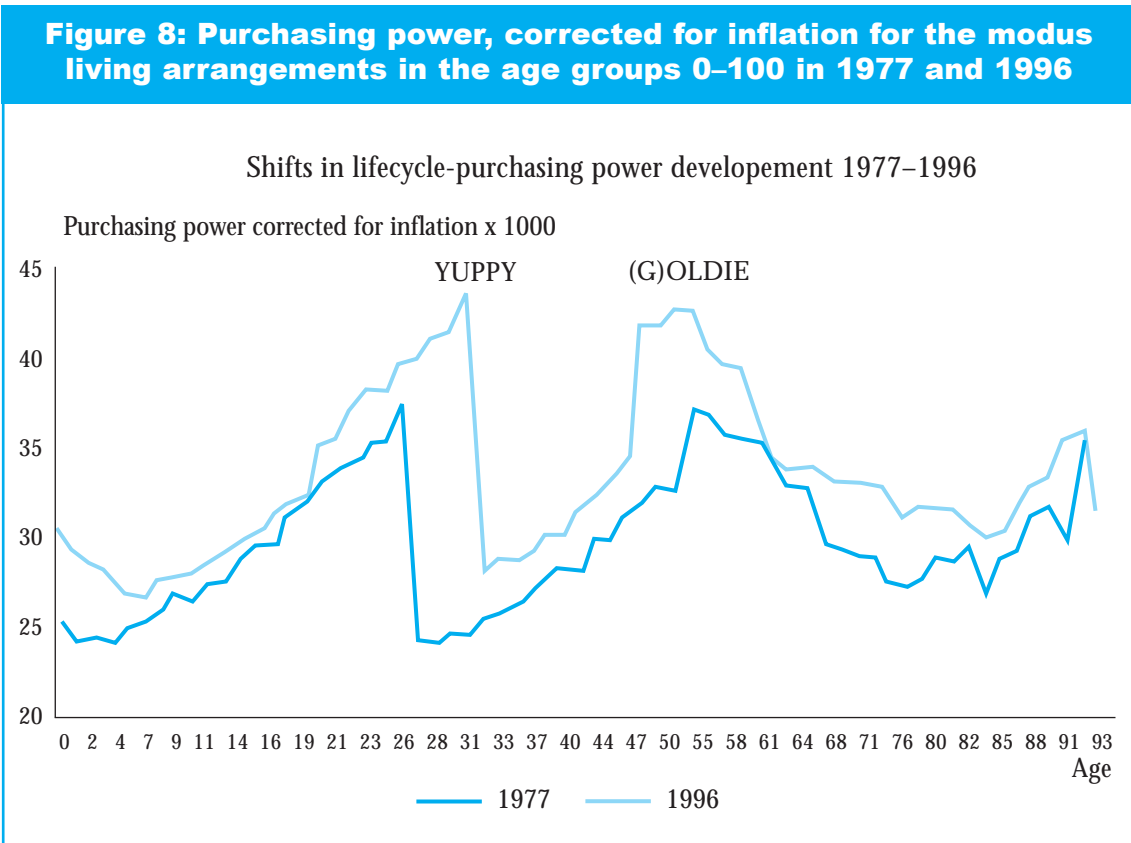
In itself, this roller-coaster ride is not the most surprising thing and does not justify the term ‘segmentation’. Earlier, when most couples married and moved out of the family home, it was also a known fact that the first few years when they started a family were not the easiest. However, Figure 7 shows that the roller-coaster ride has become somewhat steeper and goes further downhill as a consequence of the difference in affluence growth between the different phases.



The data are based on official records for tax registration and were taken from the Income Panel Survey of the Central Statistics Office in the Netherlands. They give the most likely income level (for the average type of living arrangement) for each individual from ages 20 to 65. At age 25, most individuals live as couples without children or as singles; by age 40, three-quarters live as families; and at age 55, 80 percent once more live as couples without children. Compared to 20 years ago, the total family phase is 8 to 10 years shorter. In Figure 7, the curve is more edged than in Figure 6, because the graph attempts to show the difference in position for each age group. In Figure 6, the curves were deliberately smoothed by using the average over a number of years. In reality, passing from one stage to another is by far smoother than suggested by the steep downhill slump in Figure 7.

Figure 7 shows that the moderate rise in the family phase (corrected for inflation) is in sharp contrast with the booming figures in the liberia and consumptia phases. The combination of absence of children and gainful employment of women give childless couples a far more ‘competitive’ position. What we see is not a position in which families are losing ground in an absolute sense but rather in a relative sense. Compared to families in the 1970s, they gained in affluence; but they are in no way able to compete with couples without children.

Finally, Figure 8 shows the same lifetime-income comparison for the entire life cycle. It is clear that the peaks in buying power in the new phases cannot be reached in any other phases. In the age group from 60 to 65, we even see that there has been virtually no increase in affluence; but this might be caused by massive voluntary and involuntary pre-pensioning schemes in the past decades, which entailed a loss of income for those involved. After age 65, there has been an increase in affluence; but the average level of the elderly corresponds to the average level of the family, so the 'dip' at 30 seems to be repeated at 60.



Possible consequences of segmentation

Cultural and material differences between modern and traditional phases in the life cycle are clearly unfavourable for both familia and seniora. Both phases suffer from a decrease in social support concerning their core issues. Being an adult citizen no longer coincides with the stage of building one's own family, and being old is no longer synonymous with being wise and respected. The vast majority of citizens will experience these phases in their own lives; but instead of being desired transitions, building a family or becoming 'inactive' tend to be feared. Both have become synonymous with losing something rather than with gaining anything. Building a family means losing freedom and buying power; retirement might mean freedom but is increasingly associated with isolation and financial hardships as well. Moreover, nowadays such life events as marriage and parenthood are optional for individuals both culturally and technically, thus lessening the acceptance of the 'inevitability' of the life course. The positions that persons hold seem to be self-established and therefore more 'durable' both in the active and passive way. Transitions require more decision-making than they did before.

Family building, for instance, is becoming associated with a sort of 'crossing of the Rubicon'. The dice has been thrown and there is no way back. Knowing this, one can understand the hesitation of

young couples to actively leave the 'playgrounds' of liberia. Now they have to reduce both their freedom and consumer strength, whereas in the 1950s they at least gained freedom by starting their own family. As in most other countries, in the Netherlands there is rising opposition to age discrimination. People no longer accept that they cannot decide for themselves when they want to leave the workforce. Many consider this their 'real existence' and object to being transformed into some sort of 'second-class citizen'.

In the first section, I have shown that there is a strong correlation between people's attitudes and their situations. Independent single adults value independence, family members value family life, and couples hold an intermediate position. It seems likely that the transitions between phases are accompanied by transitions in personal value hierarchies, no matter what mechanism might be responsible for them. The reverse is also true. People in a certain phase are far less likely to appreciate the core aspects of other phases. In a modern life course that lacks automatic transitions and strong incentives to enter the next transition, there might indeed be a cultural segmentation process. People in the next phase are not primarily forerunners whose examples one follows; indeed — and perhaps even mainly — they are seen as less fortunate folks who did not do it quite right. Especially from the viewpoint of young people in the liberia phase, it is quite attractive — and completely in line with the heritage of the 1960s — to think that they will not make the same mistakes and become entangled and trapped like their parents, siblings or friends did. The same holds true for the active members of *consumptia* who have no reason whatsoever to believe that they will ever look like some of the negative prototypes of old age.

Looking at the material aspects of segmentation, it is interesting to see that the prosperous phases — called the DINK ('double income no kids') and GOLDIE ('golden oldie') years — not only suffer from segmentation because of their vast difference from other phases, but also for a much simpler reason. 'Dinks' and 'goldies' generally do not have strong relationships with people in the family and senior phase. Instead, they are related to each other. On average, people have children between the ages of 25 and 35. These children enter the 'dink' phase 20 years later, when their parents are approaching the 'goldie' phase. Once a person is approaching *seniora*, his or her children are most likely to be in the *familia* phase. The structural 'age links' between the phases thus tend to reinforce segmentation. When your time and buying power are at their peak, there is less generational demand for support than when your resources are low.

The cultural and structural conditions adhering to the modern life course seem to have a negative effect on both the willingness and the ability of individual citizens to take on their generational responsibilities. If you have nobody close enough to you to need your (physical or emotional) support, there is no reason whatsoever why you should not spend your money however you like. This situation has a strong element of paradox. When interviewed, most people, at least in the Netherlands, would agree to pay even more taxes and premiums to maintain the social system, while at the same time consumption is booming and there is also a growing uneasiness about the problem of the population ageing. Seeing all these things happening at the same time, one cannot help getting somewhat confused.

Viewing the intergenerational problems of modern society from the perspective of the life course might be a useful tool for politicians who have to cope with this situation. After all, it does not really help to adopt the 'family-decline analysis' and blame either the previous generation or the present egocentric one for being so unhelpful and for consuming too much (in the prosperous phases) or seeking too much help from the state (in the less prosperous phases). There is no way governments could replace the (generational) solidarity of the population, ranging from child care to care for the elderly by relatives.

There might be a way, however, to help those citizens who are not unwilling yet are increasingly unable to do the right thing at the right time. The concept of phasing and segmentation may be a useful tool for analysing the growing structural problems of transfers between generations and age groups — and henceforth, in developing policies to re-establish the generational bonds and support systems at a more abstract level than that of direct support within the family. If we take into account the overall growth of affluence over the past few decades, there should be sufficient resources to generally maintain adequate levels of support for citizens who need it.

However, to accomplish and sustain this level, it might be necessary to influence the balance between the phases, to establish some sort of flexible connections to prevent them from growing too far apart. The bottom line of such a strategy would be the transfer of means from the 'dink' and 'goldie' phases to, for instance, the familia and seniora phases. Political support for such types of actions would depend on two things:

- First, it would depend on the recognition of the fact that it would be very unwise to put too much burden on the family phase and that families should be supported (or even 'compensated') in or for taking care of the next generation.
- Second, political action could also be based on the recognition that one thing is quite unchanged in the modern life course, namely the inevitability of transitions. The 'dinks' and 'goldies' of today are the families and seniors of tomorrow, and it is exactly this kind of insight that comes under pressure from the growing segmentation.

All in all, it would be a good thing if people were simply to become aware that the developments at the family level are a bit more complex than stated in the opening quotation of this article.

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Summary of the discussion in the session on generational relations at the family level

Johannes Pflegerl

Most of the discussion focused on Lüscher's presentation. The participants saw the juxtaposition of the micro and macro levels as problematic, in particular with regard to its political consequences. They felt it entailed a risk: offering politicians on a silver platter the paralysing justification that there is simply no solution to the question of generational conflict. Participants asked whether it made sense to talk about generations on the macro level. Contrary to the micro level, it was extremely difficult to clearly define which group belonged to which generation. Lüscher was therefore asked to specify whether he meant mean age groups or birth cohorts when speaking about generations. There was some uncertainty about the usefulness of the whole concept. How would a family policy relating to the concept of intergenerational relations, as presented here, differ from any other concept dealing with this issue? How could this concept be operational? Moreover, it was argued that the concept would be quite striking on an abstract level but not clear enough on a more detailed level. Lüscher was asked to explain in greater detail those aspects focused on in his studies.

Lüscher had taken the session's aim to be a discussion of the topic's theoretical implications. Had he prepared his paper for a group consisting solely of policy-makers, it would certainly have been different. He agreed that the term 'relations' had indeed many meanings, but that this did not prevent him from using it. Although a good deal of research had already been done on the question of intergenerational relations, his aim was to show what was behind the solidarity debate and to explain what it meant. His concept was aimed at attacking the moralist bias in functionalist theories. When using the term 'solidarity' at the political level, people must be aware of its implications; and to avoid a biased use, to theoretically reflect on it.

Some of the basic strategies presented in Lüscher's model could also be observed in policies for families or children. Lüscher said he was actually working on a model for more different types of childhood policies. Social scientists would have to look for ways that enable a more emancipatory development of the human personality. From a philosophical point of view, human nature prevents us from finding any ultimate answers, yet we have to deal with this problem and to develop pragmatic solutions. In terms of equality and inequality, some solutions were certainly better than others. Lüscher stated that his model contained a positive bias, because the emancipatory model propagated keeping close personal ties and having a rather relativistic view on institutionalised settings. He was convinced that the generation concept could also be used at the macro level. Karl Mannheim had already shown how it could be applied to political generations. It was true that some of the proposed yardsticks were weak, but this also applied to other measurements used in micro sociology.

Regarding the issue of familial generations, Lüscher noted that the term 'generation' had always comprised two basic references, all the way from ancestors to the young within the family. In ancient Greece, any generation was bound to a chronology of societal and generational development. It was a historical measurement, and the two developments were always linked. In modern times, generation has been reflected in demography: The bridging fact has been that demographic developments, as measured by cohorts, have had an influence on the existence of familial generations. However, it is also a fact that familial actions, i.e. decisions and reproduction, produce cohorts. This interlinked generational and the societal perspectives on the family. In terms of basic orientations for education, we have also been able to reasonably distinguish between generations of parents and generations of grandparents.

Contemporary social science has called for a certain ambiguity in facilitating discussion and inviting new thinking. Both the debate on the 'war of the generations' and on solidarity within families suffered from an overidealised image of the family. In this context, Lüscher did not consider the micro-macro juxtaposition to be fruitful for contemporary sociological theory. In his opinion, a theory of institutionalisation had to lead from the micro level to the macro level.

There was, however, some support for Lüscher's view on an indispensable relation between the micro and the macro levels. Participants felt that the familial and societal levels should be differentiated much more than they previously have been distinguished. Limiting the analysis to just one of the two aspects might give rise to two different directions. One could speak about a growing solidarity on the family level, as well as an increasing disparity between generations at the societal level. In terms of historical development, one can see a great deal of ambiguity and ambivalence over time. As a consequence, the theme of the generational contract emerged. Even now, there is no institutionalised responsibility between the different generations. It might be useful to rhetorically distinguish between parents and children, on the one hand, and between adults and children on the other. It still makes sense to speak of solidarity between parents and their own children, but it remains doubtful whether one can speak of solidarity between adults (as a group) and the coming generation.

In his model, Lüscher was encouraged to clearly define and illustrate his way of ascribing persons to certain generations. Lüscher said that the age pyramid only showed cohorts, but it included a definition, namely people being born within a given year. He considered this an artificial segmentation. Arguing in this way, he thought it would also be possible to build an age pyramid in half-year or monthly intervals. Since it was merely a matter of convenience to use the year of birth as a point of reference, one could also take other reference points. The choice of fitting reference points depended on the kind of question one attempted to answer in the research project.

Lüscher said he wanted to establish a family theory on intergenerational relations that could be defined as a conflict theory without Marxism. He did not want to 'buy' some of the implications used in Marxist theories, e.g. offering an ultimate solution; rather, he was more influenced by post-modern theories. Nevertheless, his theory did have political implications. By way of example, he pointed out that politicians sometimes argued that they did not have enough money to finance the three-generation contract at the societal level. For this reason, society had to rely on solidarity resources within families. As a counter-argument, Lüscher underlined that we could not take solidarity within families for granted, because people had to overcome contradictions and conflicts both at the level of emotional tensions and at the level of everyday living conditions. Some of the people involved really suffered from this situation. If the different levels (e.g. the emotional level and the structural level) were related, one might even experience them as ambivalences. This was his motive for searching for arguments to back up his theory, while at the same time seeking a rational legitimisation for a family policy that would take into account both family tasks and achievements. One participant reported a research project involving ten European countries. Two points in time — 1980 and 1990 — were selected to compare two generations, namely mothers in the early empty-nest phase and others upon the birth of their first child. Comparing these generations at two different points in time, one could empirically see how fruitful this approach was.

Once more asked about his definition of ambivalence, and encouraged to explain why familial intergenerational relations were necessarily ambivalent, Lüscher explained that his point of departure was a psychiatric concept. Ambivalence was part of a concept used in the psychological diagnosis of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia was characteristic of human beings unable to have an image of themselves to serve as a reference point for individual actions. From a sociological point of view, ambivalence could be an attribute of the self. Dealing with ambivalence was a way of creating a self that could be used as reference for action. Lüscher argued that he always considered actions to be a

form of social behaviour. His first point of reference is the notion of the self as an actor (cf. G. H. Mead). However, the self is also mirrored in the behaviours of others; so the self is also created by interpersonal relations (cf. E. Goffman). In modern times, we have to bear in mind that personality always develops in interaction. By doing this, Lüscher was taking a concept developed in psychiatry and relating it to a model of the self in which the self is seen as social entity. He also uses it as an element responsible for attitude in relationships.

Lüscher said he had established a link in his concept: If feminist theories are right in claiming that the private was also the political and the social, then we have to search for a concept that establishes this link. One of these concepts is that of relationship, in which the notion of ambivalence is a key factor.

Cuyvers noted that the young Dutch interviewed in the course of his studies tended to define themselves in social concepts. If we have no concept of generations, we shall have to invent one. Just as people tend to express themselves as members of a certain age group or societal group (e.g. as being young), they will refer to themselves from the perspective of their social position or social group. According to Cuyvers, they do not refer to themselves as members of a long-standing generation; and people tend to defend their position. A person at the age of 55 who has a good pension will try to secure this pension and will not look at other age groups.

Regarding Wilk's paper, participants noted that the importance of the middle generation's gender had not been sufficiently addressed. In this case, the sex of the person involved made a great difference in the relationship between the first and third generation, making the gender dimension crucial. Wilk answered that the contact with the mothers' parents was generally closer than contact with the fathers'. Though insignificant in nature, some differences have indeed emerged in her research involving 3,000 children at age 10, while the significant results were related to specific familial situations. First of all, maternal grandparents live for a longer period of time than paternal grandparents. In Wilk's view, the role of women is more important than that of men in intergenerational relations. After a divorce, the mother normally has custody of the children. For this reason, maternal grandmothers very often take on many obligations and duties *vis-à-vis* the children. Nevertheless, Wilk is convinced that the differences between maternal and paternal grandparents are sometimes exaggerated.

Peter Cuyvers' presentation was seen as implicitly distinguishing between disposable and non-disposable income, though it does not specify which type of consumption is meant. Cuyvers explained that all results presented in his paper were calculated on the individual income level. If the income were calculated on the household level, families would have more buying power. However, if calculated on the individual level, one could see that individuals living in a family with children had a low level of buying power.

Section 2

Generational solidarity and conflict

Determinants of low fertility and ageing prospects for Europe

Wolfgang Lutz

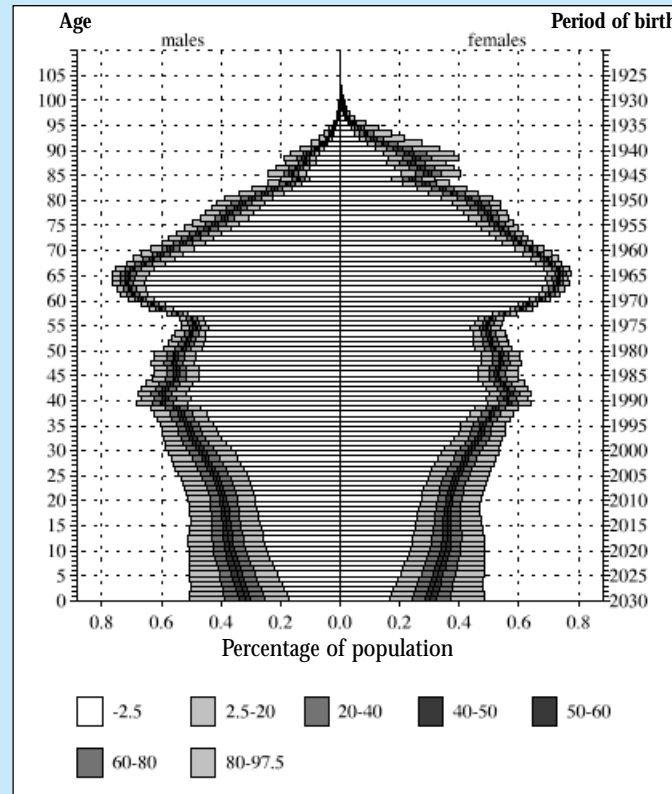
At the moment birth rates in Europe are not just low, they are very low and at levels that were unthinkable a few decades ago. All of the 42 countries of Europe have fertility rates below the so-called replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. And a majority of 24 countries even has fertility levels of 1.5 or below. In these countries, one generation will only be replaced by two-thirds as many people or less.

Together with increases in life expectancy, these low fertility rates cause a significant ageing of the population age structure. This ageing process is already under way but will gain momentum and speed over the coming years. In exact numbers, the population of the European Union ages by 2.5 months every year or by two years per decade — and this trend is likely to continue well into the next century. The proportion of the population below age 20 is likely to decline further from more than 23 percent to 19 percent, while the proportion above age 60 will increase from 21 percent to 34 percent. Simultaneously, the mean age of the European population, presently at around 39 years, is likely to reach 45 years by the year 2030.

Why does the mean age of the population increase less rapidly than the individual age of each one of us, which of course increases by one year per year? The difference between individual ageing and population ageing is that in a population, new members are being added every year at the very youngest age. This is why we speak of population renewal or reproduction; demographers measure reproduction rates as a key to understanding future population dynamics. At the individual level, there is no reproduction; even our own children cannot perpetuate our individual life. On the societal level, it is evident that children guarantee the survival and further evolution of the population.

Moreover, in a population closed to migration, the laws of population dynamics clearly indicate a long-term scenario such as this: If reproduction remains below the so-called replacement level (and life expectancy has an upper limit), that population is going to be heading for significant population ageing followed by population decline and ultimately by extinction. The lower the level of reproduction as measured by fertility rates, the faster this process will come about. However, with possible extinction still centuries away and even significant population declines not yet foreseen for the next half century, the main cause for concern for Europeans over the next few centuries will be population ageing.

This article will address three questions in this context: First, we will study what we can assume today about the future path of population ageing in the European Union. Next, we will focus more specifically on the possible future course of the birth rate, which is the main determinant of population ageing. Finally, we will address the question of whether public policies can possibly influence the course of the birth rate in the future.

Figure 1: Probabilistic population pyramid for Germany, 2030

Future population ageing in the European Union

Like any other population, the European population is not an amorphous and homogeneous mass. It is structured according to several important criteria. In Europe, the first factors that come to mind are usually linguistic, cultural and national divides. We are also accustomed to thinking in terms of place of residence, employment status and social stratification. In addition, we sometimes tend to forget about the two most fundamental structures of any population, namely age and gender. Gender has recently been receiving increasing attention, and most governments as well as the European Commission have created special bodies to promote equal opportunities for women and men. The age dimension has not yet received similar attention, and that is why a number of European-level symposia have recently focused on this issue (among them *A Society for All Ages*, organised by DGV and the Austrian EU Presidency in Vienna in October 1998).

Why should one be interested in age? At the individual level, this sounds like a silly question. Whether you are one year old, 10 years old, 40 years old or 80 years old, age is probably the single most important determinant of how you feel and live, what you do and what you still expect from life. It is directly related to the process of socialisation, the development of skills, body strength, maturity and, last but not least, the remaining average life expectancy. On the level of society, this question is less obvious. Does it make any difference whether half of the population is below age 15, as we see now in some developing countries, or half is above age 40, as we already see in several European countries? It is obvious that it makes a difference in the demand for schools for the young and for homes for the elderly. It is also evident that it significantly affects the balance of payments in a 'pay-as-you-go' pension system in which those who are gainfully employed today pay for those who are now entitled to retirement benefits. It is also expected to have significant implications for

the labour market, and some fear that an older labour force will affect productivity in a negative way. But one may even go beyond economics and speculate about changing cultural preferences and changes in political power due to the changing age composition of those who have the right to vote in elections.

However, before we speculate on the possible consequences of ageing, we need to see how much ageing we have yet to expect in Europe. What can we know today about future demographic trends in Europe, and how certain are these prospects? First, it must be stressed that few other social and economic conditions can be predicted with such precision and under such a long-time horizon, as can demographic trends. This is due to the great inertia of demographic changes. Most of the people that will be living in the year 2015 are already alive today, and we know with high probability what the age structure of the labour force is likely to be in that year.

How to forecast population trends

Future population size and age structures are determined by the present age structure as well as by future trends in the three basic demographic components: fertility (birth rate), mortality (death rate) and migration. Any change in the population must operate through one of these three factors. However, due to the great inertia of population dynamics, even relatively rapid changes in one of these factors may take quite a long time to exert any impact on the total population. If, for instance, smaller and smaller cohorts of women are entering their childbearing age, even a possible increase in the mean number of children per woman may not lead to an increase in the total number of births. Similarly, the baby boom of the 1960s (and not a discontinuity in life expectancy gains) is the main reason why we expect the proportion above age 60 to increase sharply after 2020.

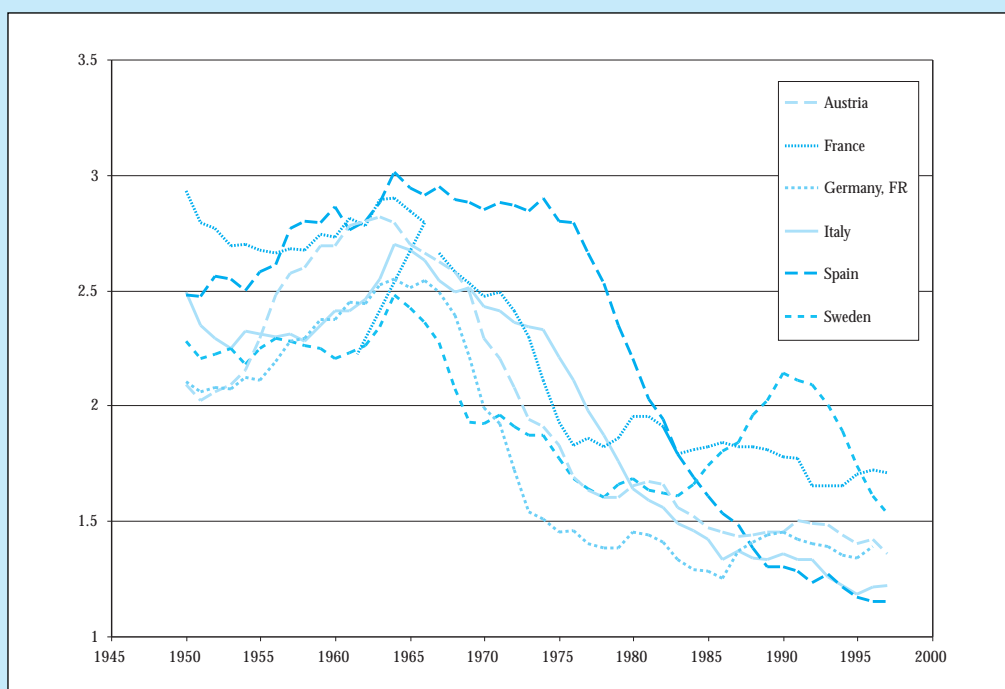
The fact that there are only three factors to be considered in population projection does not necessarily make the task easier, because the projection of each of the factors is difficult and is associated with significant uncertainties. Even the future of *mortality*, which traditionally has been considered the most stable demographic trend with steady improvements over the years, has recently become more uncertain. Over the last 50 years, life expectancy in Western Europe has increased by about 10 years, implying an average gain of two years per decade. Despite this significant gain, which has surpassed all expectations expressed in earlier years, most statistical offices producing projections assume a slowing of improvements over the coming years — and in some cases, even constant life expectancy. Eurostat projects a mid-term gain in life expectancy at birth of about three years over a period of 20 years. Nevertheless, there is increasing scientific uncertainty about limits to human longevity — and consequently, about future gains yet to be expected. As real gains are actually surpassing their expectations — in contrast to the traditionally dominant view that we are already very close to such a limit — projectors constantly have to raise the assumed boundaries. Hence, alternative views suggest that such limits (if they exist at all) might be well above 100 years. This scientific uncertainty about the future trends in old-age mortality also requires some reflection when it comes to population projections.

Fertility is the most influential of the three demographic components covering a longer-time horizon. Changes in fertility not only impact on the number of children but also on that of grandchildren and further generations. For this reason, relatively small changes in fertility may have very significant consequences on future population size and age structure. Despite its significance, we know relatively little about future fertility trends in Europe. European history since the Second World War has not helped us to anticipate any future trends either: During the so-called baby boom of the early 1960s most Western European countries had period fertility rates of above 2.5 children per woman. This was followed by a rapid decline in fertility during the 1970s, bringing the Western European average down to about 1.6. Since then, we have seen diverging trends, typically at levels well below replacement level. The most significant fertility declines were found in the Mediterranean countries, with Italy and Spain having less than 1.2 children per woman. There are also significant regional

differentials within countries. Further uncertainty is caused by the fact that it is not clear to what degree these trends are caused by 'timing' changes, i.e. a postponement of births, and how accurately they reflect the lifetime fertility of younger generations of European women (see box on cohort and period fertility). There is no clear scientific paradigm to adequately anticipate future reproductive behaviour. To capture these trends, scientists have suggested the notion of a 'second demographic transition'; but it does not project where and when the endpoint of this transition will be reached.

Cohort and period fertility

There are two ways to measure the level of a population's fertility. The first method refers to cohorts, i.e. groups of women born in the same year who have already completed their reproductive career. These rates can be measured empirically and do not include an estimate component. The disadvantage of this method is that one must wait until these women reach age 40–45. For this reason, the data are of historical interest only, as most births happened around 20 years earlier. The second method measures period fertility and gives up-to-date information. In this case, all age-specific fertility rates observed in one year (e.g. in 1998) are added up. The resulting total fertility rate (TFR) gives the mean number of children of a hypothetical group of women who experience the age-specific fertility rates as measured in 1998 throughout their lives. The graph shows the trends in these periodic rates in selected countries.



The two different ways of measuring fertility may lead to somewhat different interpretations of the recent declines in birth rates. The most recent cohort fertility measures refer to cohorts born before 1955, who had most of their children in the 1970s. These figures are somewhat higher than the period rates for the 1990s. The drawback of period rates is that they exaggerate short-term fluctuations and changes in the age pattern of fertility: An increase in the mean age of childbearing by just 0.1 years (corresponding to a postponement by one year of ten percent of the women) leads to a ten percent decline in the period fertility rate in that year. Since the mean age of childbearing is on the rise in most European countries, the currently very low period rates may be partly explained by this phenomenon.

For this reason, again, population projections need to reflect the uncertainty through a range of fertility assumptions.

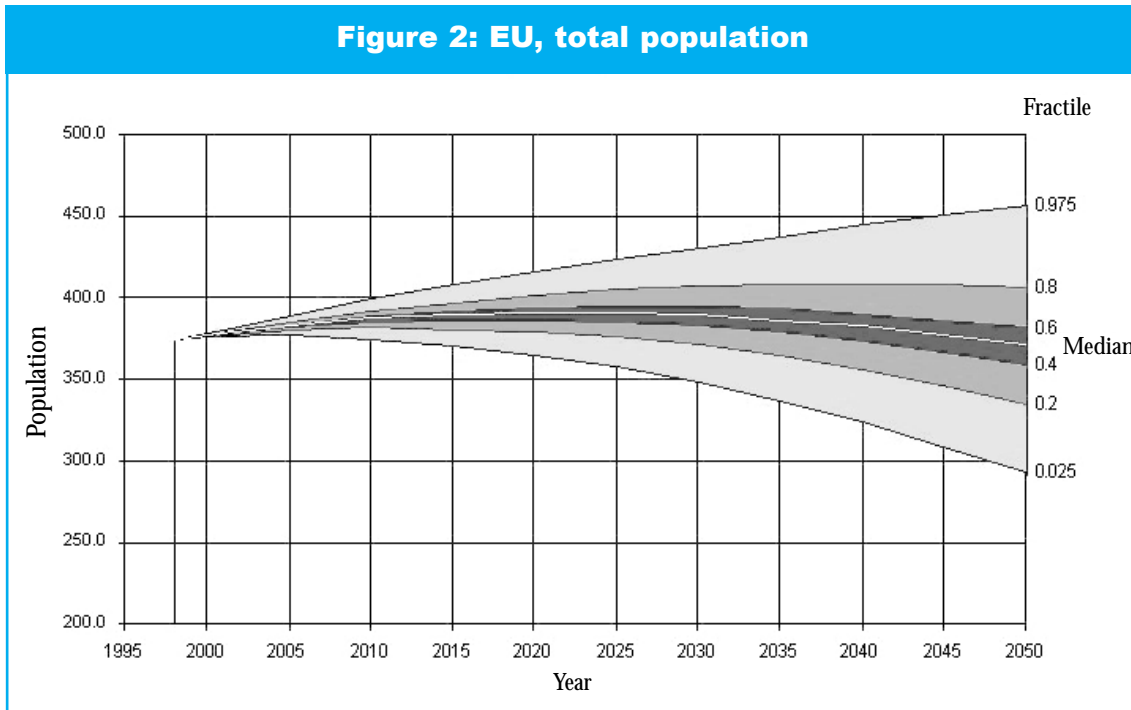
Migration is the most volatile of the three demographic components. The number of people entering or leaving a country can change from one year to the next due to political events or the enforcement of new legislation. The past 10 years have witnessed great ups and downs in European migration levels. The problem with projecting migration trends is not only the intrinsic difficulty of foreseeing such political events, but also the fact that net migration is the result of two partly independent streams (migration in and migration out). Both of these depend on the conditions in the sending as well as in the receiving countries. In this respect, projections can do little more than demonstrate the impacts of alternative net-migration scenarios.

Probabilistic population projections for the European Union

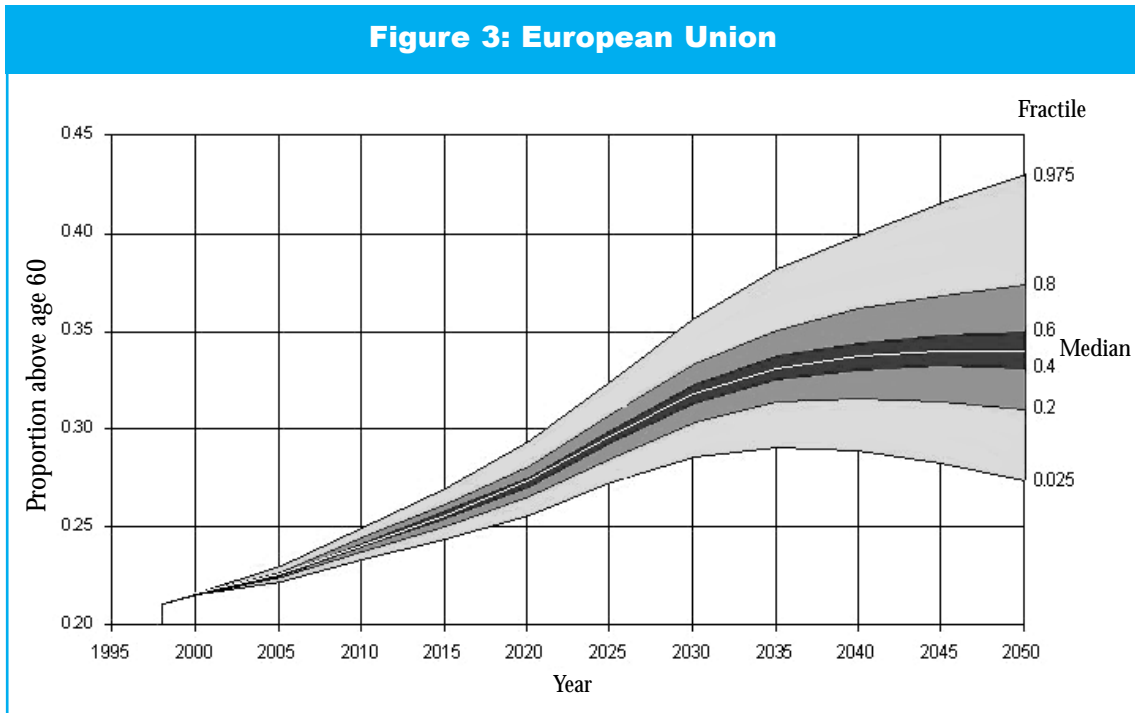
Policies to manage the future and meet the demographic challenges require the best available information about future trends. The standard way to project the future population path and the one considered most likely by experts is a well-established methodology: the so-called 'cohort component method'. The more difficult issue is how to deal with uncertainty in future demographic trends. As indicated above, there are significant uncertainties associated with all three components, i.e. fertility, mortality and migration. The usual way is to produce different scenarios or variants that combine alternative fertility, mortality and migration assumptions. Here, though, the users of projections are not informed of the likelihood of the different scenarios: whether they are very unlikely 'horror scenarios' that may immediately be dismissed, or whether they are highly realistic trends that should be taken seriously. Only probabilistic projections can answer these questions.

At IIASA, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria, expert-based probabilistic projections are a rather recent methodological development. Such projections for the European Union were published for the first time only recently. Substantively, they are largely based on the assumptions produced by Eurostat. Indeed, the median is identical to its baseline scenario. What is new, are the quantitative uncertainty intervals surrounding the median. Since the methodology is extensively documented elsewhere, we will directly go to the results.

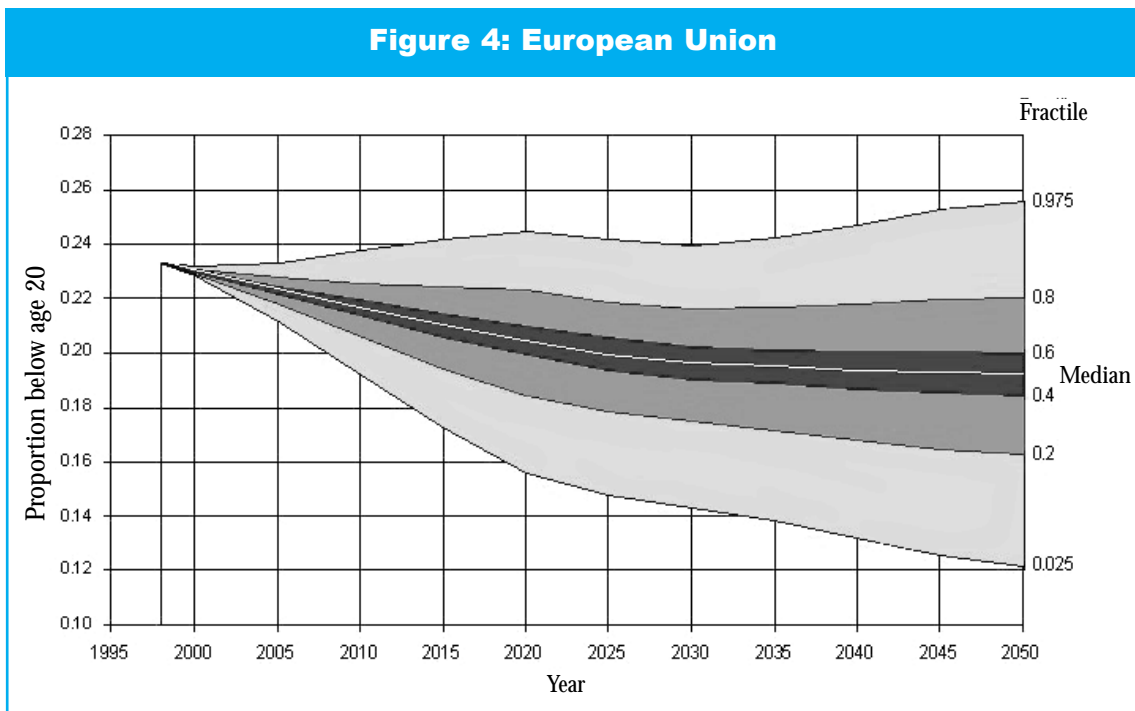
Figure 2 shows the probabilistic projections for the total population of the current 15 Member States of the European Union up to 2050. The median of these projections shows a slight increase from the current 375 million inhabitants of the EU to slightly above 380 million in 2015, followed by a moderate decrease to 345 million by 2050. The figure also shows the fractiles of the estimated uncertainty distribution. The black area shows the inner 20 percent, while the dark shaded area shows the inner 60 percent. Here, the margin of uncertainty is still rather small: For example, 60 percent of all cases will fall into a range of about 5 million more or less than the median by 2015. In addition, even the interval containing 95 percent of the assumed future trends is less than 15 million (or 4 percent) higher or lower than the median. Of course, by the middle of the next century, the trumpet will have opened further, and the 95 percent in 2050 will increase from 300 million to 413 million.



Very different from this rather unexciting chart of the total population size is the one corresponding to the proportion above age 60 (Figure 3). Here, the uncertainty is not whether it will go up or down, but by how much the proportion of older people will increase. Presently, 21 percent of Europe's population is above age 60. This proportion will certainly increase over the coming decades because the increase is already pre-programmed in today's age structure. By 2015, even the 95-percent interval shows a very narrow range of between 24 percent and 26 percent, with the median at 25 percent. Still, the range of uncertainty in 2030 is remarkably narrow, with 95 percent of all future paths ranging between 29 percent and 33 percent. In other words, it can be projected with virtual certainty that the proportion of the European population above age 60 will increase from its present 21 percent by 8 to 12 percentage points or to about 1.5 times its current level. This is a very significant increase by any standard. Furthermore, the novel aspect of these probabilistic projections is that they cannot be simply dismissed as 'horror scenarios' of unknown probability. This increase is virtually certain up to 2030. Thereafter, the range of uncertainty opens up more quickly because the influence of the already-given age structure of today gradually diminishes and uncertainties related to future fertility, mortality and migration gain importance.



The expected proportion of the population below age 20 (Figure 4) is expected to further decline over the coming decades, but this does not directly mirror the proportion of the elderly. For the younger population, the range of uncertainty opens up much more quickly. Future fertility rates yet uncertain exert a strong and direct impact, while the influence of the already-existing age structure is less decisive. Nevertheless, with a probability of more than 85 percent, it remains clear that the proportion of children and teenagers in Europe will surely decline. In the median term, it is expected to decline from the present 23 percent to less than 20 percent; but in more extreme cases, it could sink to below 15 percent.

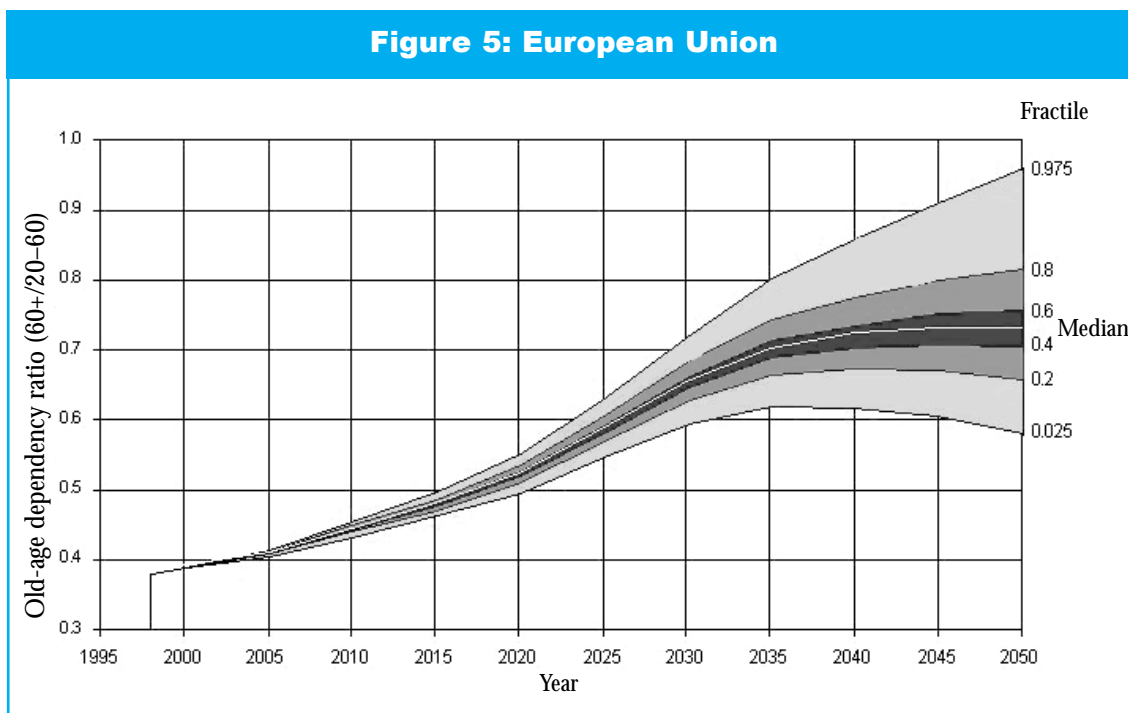


In combination, both of these trends result in a significant and virtually certain increase in the mean age of the European population from the present 39.3 years to between 44 and 47 years by 2030, and even to between 42 and 52 years by 2050. The median is expected to eventually increase to around 46 years. It is important to note that these data not only reflect the increasing number of older people and the shrinking number of children, but that they also indicate significant changes in the age pattern of the working population. The average age for this group currently stands at 20–64 years but is also expected to increase from 40.5 years to 43 years as early as 2020. Expressed in yet a different way, the proportion of working persons aged 50–60 will increase significantly, while the younger members of the work force aged 20–29 will decline drastically. This is likely to have significant implications for the labour market, as will be discussed later.

Another significant challenge will be faced by pension systems based on the transfer across different age groups. Figure 5 plots the so-called ‘old-age dependency ratio’, which is commonly defined as the population above age 60 divided by the population aged 20–60. Although this does not reflect the true ratio of beneficiaries to contributors in the social security system, it still strongly indicates the underlying demographic dynamics. This ratio is presently around 38 percent, which means that there are presently still almost three working-age persons for every person above age 60. By 2040, this ratio is likely to almost double to more than 70 percent. Already by 2018, there will only be two working-age people for every single person above age 60. This will clearly require significant adjustments in the current pension systems that are, of course, based on many more parameters than the demographic ratios. Being aware of the fact that the issue of pensions is very complex and very sensitive, I only want to make clear two points from a strictly demographic perspective:

- It is irresponsible to limit the time horizon of any policy reform to 2015 or even 2010, because we already know that an even more significant increase will come thereafter: the one associated with the retirement of the baby-boom generation.
- Current probabilistic projections show that the range of uncertainty over the coming decades is amazingly small, which implies that there are good hard data even for longer-term reforms. In this context, politicians cannot blame scientists for giving them only ambiguous and uncertain information, though they can rightly do so on various other issues.

Probabilistic population projections provide policy-makers with essential information about probable future trends on which to base their policies. In the case of policies aimed primarily at adjustment, this information is also sufficient. If the probabilistic information on trends is combined with a cost function (e.g. how much a one-percent increase in the old-age dependency ratio would cost the social security system), this can serve as a basis for cost-benefit analysis of social security reforms and numerous other important policy issues.



If politicians, however, aim at influencing the trends themselves, they need additional information on the relative impact of certain changes in each of the three determinants of population change on different indicators of population ageing. Such questions cannot be answered by probabilistic projections but only by a set of alternative scenarios in which one of the three components — fertility, mortality and migration — changes, while the two other components follow their most likely path *vis-à-vis* population size and structure. Such an analysis was conducted for Western Europe (Lutz 1996) by using high and low assumptions for each component that are assumed to capture approximately 90 percent of possible future paths. Six such alternative scenarios have been defined (two for each component) and compared to the most likely scenario. The results show that all three factors have significant independent effects on both population size and on the proportion above age 60. While fertility is most important for population size and ageing, migration is more important than mortality for size, though not for ageing.

More specifically, with respect to the proportion of the population above age 60, this analysis indicates that migration has the lowest impact of the assumed alternative ranges (all of which have approximately equal probability). It should reflect a change of about two percentage points in 2050, followed by mortality with six percentage points and fertility with almost 12. This has important implications for possible policies aimed at slowing growth in elderly proportion.

Migration is an unlikely candidate to remedy the presumed ageing problem, for several reasons. These include aspects of cultural homogeneity, etc. Here, it has been shown that quantitatively massive immigration also does not make much difference in terms of long-term population ageing (assuming that migrants immediately adopt European fertility levels). By 2050, an annual migration gain of one million would increase the total population of Western Europe by 13 percent (505 millions) as opposed to a three percent decline (433 millions) in the case of no migration. However, it would only reduce the increase in the proportion above age 60 from 17.8 percentage points to 15.7 percentage points. The main reason for this weak effect is that migrants also get older and join the population above age 60 (unless they return to their country of origin).

Slower improvements in mortality conditions, and especially in life expectancy in old age, would have a three-times-stronger effect on the proportion above age 60 than would massive immigration.

Yet it is a very unlikely candidate for intentional government policies. In fact, political changes, such as the recent changes in Eastern Europe, did indeed induce changes of stagnating mortality improvements; but these were clearly undesired side effects of other intentions. Although 'mortality policy' is a difficult topic for public consideration, the question of the speed of future mortality declines at old age cannot be entirely off limits if significant public expenditures are attached to it. It should be possible to at least discuss the question of whether the money used to artificially extend the life of a gravely ill, very old person in Europe should not rather be spent on saving a large number of young lives in some poorer countries. But here, we certainly do not want to talk about 'mortality policy.'

This leaves fertility as the only serious candidate for possible government policies to impact on the demographic ageing trend. But before we can assess the possible impact of direct or indirect government policies we must have a more comprehensive picture about the overall determinants of future fertility trends in low fertility countries.

What determines future fertility levels?

Fertility levels in most European countries have reached historical lows during the 1990s. In a majority of EU Member States, period fertility levels are around two-thirds of replacement level — or even lower. Whether this is only a temporary phenomenon caused by a delay of childbearing to higher ages, a new steady state (see box on cohort and period fertility) or whether fertility might even continue to decline further, is an open question. There is no consensus among scientists, and the answers given to this question depend on the specific approach taken. However, an account of the forces that drive future fertility levels in countries already having below-replacement fertility, is a prerequisite for determining at which points possible national policies could potentially be effective and have an impact on the path of future fertility trends. For this reason, it seems desirable to summarise the most important arguments from the literature that suggest either further fertility declines or recoveries. The following list of these arguments, which go in both directions, does not try to be exhaustive but only illustrates some of the main points.

Arguments suggesting a further decline in fertility

Trend towards individualisation

According to the sociological theories of Durkheim (1902) and Tönnies (1887), the process of 'modernisation' is characterised by a transition from 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) to 'society' (*Gesellschaft*). While 'community' refers to a living arrangement that is lasting and complete under a relatively stable structure, 'society' means a mere proximity of persons who are independent of one another and who live within relatively open structures. In this process of transition, an increasing number of needs once met by the family are taken over by anonymous institutions. This means an increase in equality and personal freedom, but also an increase of individualism and a weakening of interpersonal bonds.

With respect to the future of the family, Hoffmann-Nowotny (1987) assumes that the trend of increasing differentiation, as well as multiple and partial integration will continue, especially for women. From a sociological point of view, he concludes that there is little reason to believe that the family as we know it can and will survive as the mainstream model for future living patterns. This view is not too different from the notion of a 'second demographic transition' put forward by Lestaege (1983) and van de Kaa (1987) to characterise a new phase of demographic behaviour that expresses itself through lower marriage propensities, higher instability of unions, an increase in extramarital fertility, and lower total fertility.

Another psychological aspect of this supposed trend towards individualisation is that men and women are increasingly reluctant to make decisions that have long-term consequences and clearly limit their future freedom of choice. The decision to have a child predetermines many choices for the following two decades and makes second thoughts impossible once the child has been born. If the trend towards greater mobility in all aspects of life continues, this might well mean fewer responsible men and women daring to become parents.

There is little empirical basis to evaluate the validity of these hypotheses for the future, but they seem to be powerful arguments and plausible explanations of recent trends. If this trend develops to an extreme in the future, it might well happen that counter-forces will be mobilised to compensate some of its negative aspects. However, a return to traditional patterns of 'community' with their restrictions on individual freedom is very unlikely. Most of the following arguments are related to this general 'continued modernisation' argument.

Economic independence of women

One recent trend that has often been singled out as a dominant feature of societal change is the increasing economic independence of women. Female labour-force participation has been steadily increasing over recent decades in virtually all industrialised countries. The increase has been strongest in Scandinavia, where labour-force participation is almost universal among adult women below age 50; but female activity rates in North America are not much lower. In Italy, female labour-force participation increased by more than one-third in the 1980s. This fundamental change in the economic activity of women is obviously connected to changing reproductive patterns. The increasing economic independence of women also tends to result in a postponement of marriage, which is typically associated with lower fertility.

One must be cautious, however, in singling out female economic activity as a major determinant of declining fertility. It may also be that the desired lower number of children motivates women not to stay at home but rather to enter the labour force, or there may be another driving force behind both trends. The latter possibility is supported by evidence from several countries that are experiencing improvements in fertility rates, despite very high and still-increasing female labour-force participation. The key question in this multifaceted issue seems to be how women can combine parenthood with participation in the labour market. This may be a decisive question in determining future European birth rates. Nevertheless — even with flexible regulations and good child-care systems — working women, on average, will not have very large families.

Instable partnerships

As described above, marital stability has been declining in all industrialised countries. Part of the reason for this phenomenon clearly lies in the increasing economic independence of women. Women are no longer economically forced to stay in an unsatisfactory union if they earn an independent income. Other reasons may be found in the general increase in mobility in modern industrialised societies and in a decreasing threshold in the level of dissatisfaction necessary to attempt to change conditions. Whatever the social and psychological reasons may be, the chances of a young couple staying together for 20 years — the minimum time required to raise a child — are slimmer nowadays than they were in the past.

Increasing evidence from empirical studies (Kiernan 1992) shows that the separation of parents actually does more harm to children than had been assumed. Such harm is measured by studying a child's social behaviour, intellectual performance, and feeling of happiness and security. Thus, responsible prospective parents may decide not to have children if they have doubts about the stability of their partnership. This may be a very important factor in the decisions of couples in consensual unions, which seem to be much less stable than marital unions (Prinz 1995).

One possible counter-argument would be that remarriage (or the formation of new non-marital unions) might actually be an incentive to have an additional child to strengthen the relationship with a new partner. Empirical analysis from Finland on data cross-classified by marital status and number of children (see Lutz 1993) shows that a slight effect of this kind does indeed exist though it does not have a significant impact on total fertility.

Consumerism and use of time

Commentators often mention the increase in consumerism as a basic underlying cause for the recent fertility decline. The argument is that people would rather invest in pleasures for themselves than in children. They would rather buy a new car than have another child; they would rather spend their time watching TV than changing nappies. Children are considered work and not fun. As pointed out by Keyfitz (1991), couples in earlier times had to work harder and invest longer hours in earning a living, yet they still found time to have many children. The extra leisure time couples have today is not spent on that. Having children is defined as work, and therefore one talks about opportunity costs. In the words of Keyfitz (1991: 239), "no one complains about the opportunity cost of having sex. Thus to talk about the opportunity cost of children indeed highlights the problem of non-childbearing." He suggests thinking of a work-fun continuum and trying to move childbearing towards the 'fun end' of that continuum.

Whether childbearing and, especially, childrearing will become favoured leisure-time activities of men and women will depend on the trade-offs between fun and burden. Some European cities already have more dogs than children. Obviously, in these areas the work-fun balance is more favourable for pets. They require less commitment and, in the worst case, can always be given away. This argument clearly suggests that, unless the burden of having children is diminished or the rewards from having children are enhanced, the balance will continue to be negative for childbearing.

Improving contraception

The final argument in this series is less concerned with changing values but is at a more technical level. It is an empirical fact that a significant number of pregnancies are unplanned in all industrialised societies. Demographers often distinguish between timing failure (early pregnancy) and quantum failure (unwanted pregnancy). Both could be reduced by a more efficient use of contraceptives. For the latter, this would clearly imply lower fertility; for the former, it would theoretically have no effect on fertility. In practice, one can assume that a certain number of the births categorised as timing failures may not have been realised at a later point in time because of changing living conditions such as disruption of a union, a more demanding job, or physiological reasons. With respect to unwanted pregnancies, Westoff et al. (1987) estimate that, for a number of low-fertility countries, completely efficient contraception would bring down fertility rates by slightly less than 10 percent, and also significantly lower the number of abortions.

Currently, we are still far from a perfect contraceptive that requires no effort to use and has no negative side effects. An increasing number of women report being tired of using the pill, yet because of its irreversibility sterilisation is not acceptable to all men and women (especially in continental Europe). New empirical data suggest that the number of risk-takers or couples practising less reliable natural methods may have increased because of higher awareness of the side effects of the pill. A hypothetical perfect contraceptive without any side effects, which is taken once and then requires some reverse action for a woman to become pregnant, certainly would change the situation. This hypothetical contraceptive would clearly inhibit unplanned pregnancies which currently are still quite numerous. It will make quite a difference for future fertility levels whether one must go the doctor to have a child or not to have a child as is the case these days.

Arguments suggesting an increase in fertility

The homeostasis argument

The usual interpretation of the demographic transition theory is that an initial equilibrium between high birth rates and high death rates is disturbed by declining mortality, which in turn triggers a fertility decline that brings birth and death rates back to an equilibrium at low levels. However, history has shown that fertility declines, with all their irregularities and national particularities, generally do not stop at replacement level but continue to further decline. The homeostasis argument stresses that this is simply an overprojection that will be reversed after some inevitable societal adjustments. This has been most explicitly expressed by Vishnevsky (1991), who does not see fertility levels as the sum of individual behaviour but rather as one aspect in the evolution of a system determining behaviour. He believes that the development of the demographic system is directed by a goal inherently its own. In the process of self-organisation, the system aims at self-maintenance and survival. For human beings at a certain stage of evolution, it is assumed that a new and higher goal will appear that goes beyond pure population survival — namely that of maintaining homeostasis in the population's reproduction, even in the face of considerable fluctuations in external conditions (see Vishnevsky 1991: 265).

It has not yet been possible to empirically test this hypothesis. Trends such as the recent fertility increase in Sweden — a country considered to be a forerunner regarding many other social changes — may be taken as evidence by those who support it. However, the hypothesis is not specific enough to be tested (e.g. it does not state how much fertility should increase over a given period). Since studies have not addressed the mechanisms and motivations that induce couples to have more children, it remains largely a philosophical argument. Nevertheless, this hypothesis seems worth considering at this general level, despite the fact that it is highly controversial. For example, authors such as Westoff (1991) criticise the assumption of a 'magnetic force' creating a pull towards replacement.

Fertility cycles

It is safe to assume that cycles result either from the timing of fertility within cohorts or from intergenerational differences in the fertility quantum. While the issue of period versus cohort fertility has already been discussed above, here we shall focus on the second type, longer-term cycles. The argument says that the fertility level of the parents' generation is a determinant in their children's reproductive behaviour. Best known in this context is Easterlin's relative income hypothesis (Easterlin 1980). In short, it assumes that fertility is determined by income relative to aspirations, with cohort size determining income. Generation one has low relative income and low fertility. Generation two grows up with low aspirations for wealth but finds advantages in labour-market conditions because of few competitors, hence having high relative income and high fertility. Generation three is large and has high aspirations resulting in low relative income and low fertility. Empirically, this model fits nicely into the US baby boom in the 1960s and the subsequent fertility decline. Nevertheless, this is not a complete cycle, as a new baby boom has failed to materialise. For other countries, the historical long-term cycle argument is even less applicable. There are also a number of conceptual problems, such as the fact that fertility within a generation is unevenly distributed among families. Some families have many children, others only one (see discussion in Lutz 1989). Besides, women have children at different ages, which soon smoothes out any cycles based on intergenerational dynamics. However, even if this assumed mechanism is not a dominating factor for fertility trends, it may play some role.

National identity and ethnic rivalry

National identity may have an important influence on individual reproductive behaviour. Fears related to the ethnic composition of the population and 'in group-out group' feelings can be powerful emotional forces that may directly influence fertility. Examples of this may be found in

Israel, Northern Ireland, and the Baltic states (before 1991). In these areas, there is clear rivalry between two groups of the population that may be engaged in trying to outnumber each other. This rivalry may be an important reason why fertility levels are higher in these countries than in other countries under similar socio-economic conditions. One possible hypothesis is that, through international migration, such rivalry may also affect other industrialised countries. However, there are strong counter-examples: French-speaking Canadians, non-Hispanic Californians, or Germans living in cities with many Turks, where ethnic-linguistic rivalry is carried out by means other than reproductive behaviour.

A final argument assumes that, in addition to all the other factors mentioned, government policies can make a difference in increasing fertility levels in countries where fertility is very low. The empirical evidence on this question is still unclear and, since the question is likely to gain more importance in the future if fertility rates remain at low levels, it seems worthwhile to devote more systematic attention to these issues.

Can government policies influence fertility and should they do so?

Potential government policies influencing the number of children have been a highly controversial topic in Europe since the 1930s, when — induced by the low birth rates of many European countries following the world economic crisis — the issue was broadly discussed all over Europe. At that time, the debate was very much phrased in nationalist and eugenic terms. The results of these concerns, however, differed dramatically among European countries. In Sweden, for instance — although pronatalist policies had been considered a real option — such policies were soon turned into welfare policies. Nazi Germany, on the other hand, made the “breeding of true Germans” a national priority and introduced significant insensitive structures (though more moral than economic), including the infamous mother award. After the Second World War the issue became a non-topic in most European countries, except for France where child-support schemes have had a clear pronatalist intention by focusing more strongly on large families. The post-war baby boom, which peaked in most European countries in the early 1960s, also brought period fertility rates well above replacement level — thereby moving public attention away from fertility to family welfare issues.

Until now, in virtually all Member States of the EU, child-support schemes and family benefits are seen primarily as an instrument of social policy to ameliorate the tight economic conditions of younger families — especially if they have a larger number of children. Some policies, such as the payment in Ireland of a higher rate of child benefits for third and subsequent children, could be interpreted in a pronatalistic way; yet even these are explicitly intended for social-policy reasons and to assist poorer families. Increasingly, family policies have also become an instrument of women's policies by focusing on female employment and the compatibility of work and family. Since the 1970s, two main features of this trend have been the expansion of paid maternity leave and the provision of public childcare in most European countries (Gauthier 1996).

Following the significant fertility declines in many European countries during the early 1970s, a debate concerning low fertility has come up again and some scientific studies have focused on the possible effectiveness of state intervention. Generally, however, these studies have failed to detect any measurable effect of government policies. It has also been concluded that the more significant determinants of fertility lie in areas beyond the reach of the state, such as individual religiosity or partner relationships (Höhn 1991). Together with the clear political emphasis on welfare policies, this has resulted in fewer discussions on pronatalist policies over the past 15 to 30 years.

On the empirical side, there are only a few clear cases from socialist countries. One example are the 1976 pronatalistic measures taken in East Germany, estimated to have increased fertility by about 20

percent (see Büttner/Lutz 1990), partly due to the fact that having a child was the only way for young men and women to get an apartment of their own. Yet this only worked in the absence of an open housing market. Other examples from East Europe before the transition relate to changes in access to abortion or family planning that did indeed result in short-term fertility responses.

However, with many of these studies there is a difficult methodological problem based on the temporal correlation between policy measures and fertility rates: Sudden policy changes are rare and, in addition to the policy, many other fertility determinants might be changing. This makes it difficult to pin down the specific contribution of the policy change. Only when a sharp timing of the policy and the response is possible do such associations become rather unambiguous. An example of a negative association of this sort could be observed in Austria. As part of the budget consolidation in late 1996, a long-established cash payment of ATS 15,000 (EUR 1,090) granted at each birth was abolished as of January 1997. This was extensively covered in the media in late 1996. Monthly birth rates in 1997 remained at their previous average level (TFR around 1.4) until August or September; in October 1997 they fell by about 10 percent and have remained at that lower level ever since (most recent data for mid-1998). Although there seems to be little doubt about this particular timing, it is of course unclear whether this will be a temporary or a lasting effect.

The most comprehensive study on the impact of financial benefits for families in western Europe was recently published by Gauthier and Hatzius (1997). It is based on econometric time-series methods applied to 22 industrialised countries for the period from 1970 to 1990. It indicates that a 25-percent increase in family allowances would increase fertility by four percent or by an average of 0.07 children per woman. The authors call it a modest but statistically significant effect. Given the present restricted budgetary situations of most industrialised countries, it seems rather unlikely that financial incentives of sufficient magnitude can be provided to once again raise fertility to replacement level, but finances might be less important than other non-monetary incentives (see box on a view to Asia).

A view to Asia: Singapore family policies

After two decades of family policy aiming at lower fertility — the “stop at two” policy — Singapore took a rather sharp turn in the mid-1980s and announced in 1987, “Have three or more, if you can afford it”. At that point, the total fertility rate had fallen to 1.62. The main concerns were with population ageing in general, and the fact that especially the better-educated women had fewer children. The latter was assumed to have negative impacts on human capital formation and the abilities of future generations as children of educated mothers tend to have a better education. After some controversy, the benefits were not only granted to educated but to all women. They comprised (a) financial incentives, including tax rebates, for third and fourth children; (b) child-care subsidies and other measures to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family; and (c) priority in the allocation of new homes. These measures were accompanied by a presumably rather effective image campaign on childbearing.

In the next three years, the fertility rate increased by 15 percent. The increase was particularly pronounced for third births, which almost doubled between 1986 and 1990. Recently, the government has launched a new campaign to lower the mean age at marriage. It remains to be seen whether these measures will be equally successful.

At the level of public concern about low fertility, we seem to be reaching a new phase. For many European countries, period fertility has been below replacement level for a quarter of a century now, and expectations that it might recover by itself are diminishing. It is not even clear whether we have already reached the bottom of the curve (see box on how low fertility can go). Moreover, migration

— which has always been in the back of the political mind as a possible remedy against too-rapid ageing — seems to be less of a viable option these days, when immigration policies are tending to become much more restrictive. Finally, the expected discontinuity and associated serious problems in the pension system expected to occur with the retirement of the baby-boom generation is only two or three decades away, and preventive measures must be taken soon.

How low can fertility go?

In demography, there is a body of literature discussing what is the maximum fertility that can be achieved in a population. The highest levels observed were 10.9 children per woman for the Hutterite community in the US (marriages from 1921–1930) and 10.8 for Canadians in the 18th century. On the national level, the highest fertility reported by the UN was 8.5 for Rwanda in 1975–1980, with many other African countries having rates above 8.0 during this period.

In 1998, the Italian demographer Antonio Golini published an article on how low fertility can go in a population. Besides giving some of the lowest total fertility rates observed (e.g. 0.77 for Eastern Germany in 1994, or 0.80 for the Italian province of Ferrara), he also calculates a total fertility rate of 0.72 by combining the lowest age-specific fertility rates observed between 1990 and 1995 in national populations. With respect to cohort fertility, he simulates a case in which 20–30 percent of all women remain childless and the rest has just one child. These data are not dissimilar to recent conditions in some provinces of northern Italy. This results in 0.70 to 0.80 children as the lower boundary for cohort fertility. Whether such low levels will actually be reached at a national level, and whether they are sustainable in the longer run in terms of their social and economic implications, are of course different questions.

At the European level, the issue of population ageing is now widely discussed. A series of high-level conferences, as well as extensive media coverage, have once more focused the public awareness on this issue. At present, Greece is the EU Member State with the most pronounced concern about low fertility. The concern about low and further-decreasing fertility seems to go across the entire political spectrum, which may also have to do with the strong and rapidly growing population of the neighbouring country. In Greece, pronatalistic policies are considered to be the only option having both direct and indirect effects on family size. During the 1980s, there was no clear correlation at the European level between the level of fertility in a country and its concern about low fertility (France was the country most concerned, despite relatively high fertility). However, now such a correlation seems to prevail. In the UK, Ireland and the Nordic countries, where fertility is relatively high, concern seems to be the lowest; whereas in southern Europe, where fertility is at very low levels, concern seems to be rapidly increasing.

Given the likely resurgence of the question, scientists in the field of family studies need to be prepared to assist in the public debate, and possibly to contribute to a less confused discussion of the ideologically still very loaded issue. It seems useful to distinguish between two fundamentally different questions that are often mixed in the discussion:

- 1) Can public policies influence fertility levels, and what kinds of measures tend to have what kinds of effects under different conditions?
- 2) If yes, are such policy measures desirable under different criteria of social equity, gender and intergenerational equity, as well as with respect to the human-rights view according to which the decision to have children is largely considered a private matter?

Both questions have not yet found sufficient answers in Europe. The first question is of an empirical and scientific nature and needs increased attention by European scholars specialising on family, population and public policy. The second question is largely a political issue that will have to be discussed extensively at different political levels. However, a rational discussion about the second question will depend on the kind of answer that scientists give to the first question, as well as on how scientists assess the expected consequences of continued low fertility. Scientists should get to work quickly to be able to present some evidence when the political question will inevitably heat up.

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Money is not enough

Sirpa Taskinen

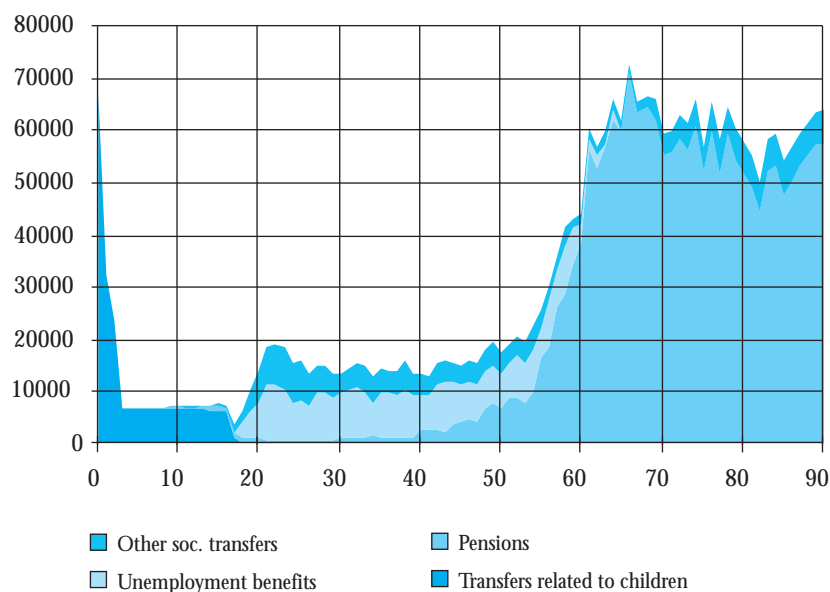
In his paper, Wolfgang Lutz discussed three major factors of population dynamics: migration, mortality and fertility. I shall leave aside migration here by stating that, if the only problem were the number of people, there would be no problem at all. We would only need to open the borders of our countries and there would be enough people from the rest of the world to move in. However, a more complicated question is how to keep Europe European according to all the myriad meanings of the word.

Mortality is another factor in population dynamics. In Europe, we no longer have to be overly concerned about the mortality of children and youngsters, and the death rates of middle-aged persons have also diminished. The most sensitive issue is the longevity of older people. Even abortions are easier to discuss; nobody would disagree that there should be fewer.

The public position on lengthening people's life span is quite ambiguous: On the one hand, it is very much appreciated; on the other hand, the ageing population is seen as a burden to the economy. Moreover, pensions make up a huge proportion of social transfers.

In Finland, you can see at a glance where the real social costs are when social transfers *per capita* are broken down by age (Figure 1). Transfers related to children are most prevalent during the first few years of their life. At young adulthood and middle age (until age 55), the volume of transfers tends to flatten out. The most typical transfers in this period are unemployment benefits. Above the age of 55, early retirement schemes begin to take effect; and from the age of 60, old-age pensions constitute the bulk of all social transfers. One would assume that, in such a situation, governments would do their utmost to keep people working. However, due to high unemployment rates, there seems to be a tendency to pension off those working now in order to create jobs for the younger generation; and this is a rather costly measure.

Figure 1: Social transfers by age in 1993 in Finland, FIM per capita



Source: Vanne, R. (1996): Transfers between generations, a quantitative framework. Paper presented at the symposium Population Ageing in Europe: Issues and Policies. Brussels, 25–26 October 1996.

The problem is that life in terms of population productivity has not developed in line with the lengthening of life in general. Quite on the contrary: People tend to retire progressively earlier. Is it possible to simultaneously lengthen the people's productive phase and/or enlarge the labour force? Should young people start working earlier, or should government take measures to raise the age of eligibility for old-age pensions? Should the reserve of housewives be encouraged to enter the labour market? Or should the government encourage families to have more and more children by providing additional financial benefits?

Before going on to the third factor of population dynamics, i.e. fertility, I want to stress that the basic problem is not the quantity of the population *per se*. Only a short while ago, all European countries had considerably smaller populations than they do today; and there was nothing to worry about as long as the reproductive rate was high. Nowadays, some areas in Europe are overcrowded anyway, not to speak of the global situation. Why, then, should we worry about fertility?

The basic problem is to maintain the social system rather than any absolute number of people. In order to retain some balance between the productive and the non-productive members of the population, the age structure should not change too quickly or too massively. An age cohort that is much larger or much smaller than the previous one has a great impact on many functions in society, ranging from service delivery in hospitals, to kindergartens and schools, to the labour market and the pension system.

It may be an unnecessary question to ask if government policies should try to influence fertility, when it seems obvious that they do anyhow, one way or the other. What needs to be discussed is how and by what means society should intrude into the private sphere of families in the sensitive area of reproduction.

In his paper, Wolfgang Lutz lists several factors that might be relevant for fertility. I have drafted a reproductive behaviour theory that I would like to discuss here. As I see it, fertility depends on many different aspects. Reproductive behaviour is neither entirely rational nor entirely irrational. If the family or the individual has a choice, I argue that the reproductive behaviour of a given subgroup or individual is related to the image these people have of giving birth. The factors affecting the formation of this image are as follows:

- The biological urge for reproduction vs. the availability of contraceptives.
- The psychological meaning of regeneration vs. other motives in life (e.g. freedom or reducing the total population of the planet).
- The values of the subgroup/society (e.g. whether it is 'fashionable' to have children).
- Support and services from the family (family members or extended family) and from society.

An example of the values of society at large is the recent baby boom in Sweden and, to a lesser degree, in Finland. Analyses have shown that this boom is partly due to the birth of a third child to well-to-do-families when their first two children are already in their teens. For the entire family, this latecomer or 'evening-star' tends to be 'apple of their eye'. Women's magazines have comprehensively described the rewarding experiences of families with such children. Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that it has become fashionable to have such a baby.

In Finland, the increase of benefits did have a short-term positive effect on fertility. However, it did not last for more than three or four years. People quickly become accustomed to benefits and the psychological attraction subsequently wears off. This does not mean that economic support does not

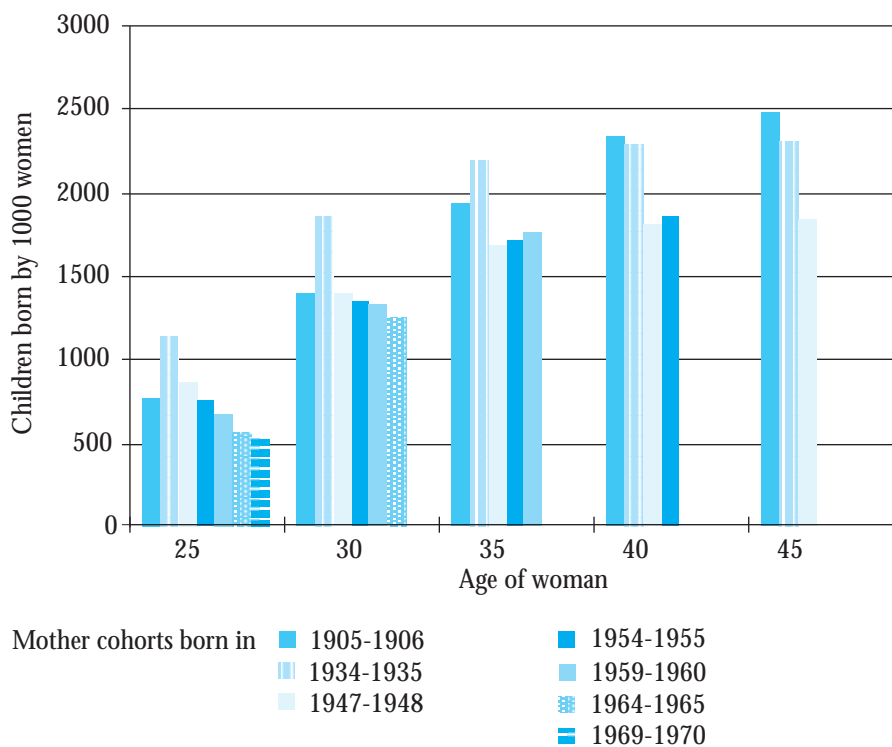
affect fertility — quite the opposite is true — but the reduction of benefits does have a greater negative impact. The recent high unemployment rate has also diminished the willingness of young couples to have a child.

However, money alone is not enough. If there are no contraceptives, children will be born in spite of poverty. In some situations, it is considered patriotic to have a large family. After the Second World War, the Population League in Finland launched a slogan to have four children: “One for the father, one for the mother, one for the fatherland and one for reserve.” Indeed, there were many four-children families in post-war Finland.

Unlike benefits, day-care facilities seem to have a continuous positive effect on fertility. As we know, even nowadays the first child is often not planned, but the second child probably is. If the experiences with day-care services for the firstborn are bad, a young couple will think twice before having another child.

Figure 2 compares different age cohorts of Finnish women according to the number of children. Three cohorts in the figure have already terminated their reproductive phase, i.e. those born in 1905–1906, 1934–1935 and 1947–1948. Interestingly, the oldest cohort started having children later than the other two but in the end had more children. Although it is obvious that the younger cohorts will not have as many children as their mothers, many questions still remain open for analysis by future researchers.

Figure 2: Number of children by cohorts of Finnish women, accumulation by age



Source: Reilu ja rohkea — vastuun ja osaamisen Suomi. Valtioneuvoston tulevaisuusselonteko Eduskunnalle, osa II (The futuribles report by the Finnish government). In: Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 1997/2.

One should realise that even large families do not solve the population problem. An old study of mine showed that, from the third child onwards, children run a higher risk of needing psychological help than children in one- or two-child families. We should not only consider the economic but also psychological and social resources necessary to raise a child. Unwanted children tend to have an unhappy life. Nobody gains from a continuing rise in birth rates when promulgated at any cost.

A childhood perspective applied to Wolfgang Lutz's paper

Jens Qvortrup

Wolfgang Lutz's comprehensive and systematic account of a complicated issue has greatly facilitated my task as discussant. What particularly struck me is that the article describes a problem, a solution and a measure:

- the *problem of ageing*, be it economic, political or cultural;
- the *solution in terms of raising fertility* as the most sensible way as opposed to the possible results of manipulating migration and mortality;
- *government intervention as the most preferable measure* of those mentioned in Lutz's paper.

Lutz aptly sums up these points with two questions:

- Can public policies influence fertility levels, and what kinds of measures tend to have what kinds of effects under different conditions?
- If yes, are such policy measures desirable under different criteria of social equity, gender and intergenerational equity, as well as with respect to the human-rights view according to which the decision to have children is largely considered a private matter?

I would like to present my comments in six propositions:

Proposition 1

Women and men want (or can be persuaded to have) more children provided certain barriers are removed. The validity of this assumption remains to be proved, but some Eurobarometer polls indicate that, on average, every second woman wants another child.¹ This would suffice to bring European fertility rates close to the reproduction level. Lutz listed some of the barriers, and I would add another two: (i) The relative deprivation of families with children as compared with families without children, as well as the relative deprivation of children compared to other age groups; and (ii) the privatisation of families.

Regarding the first barrier, evidence abounds that disposable income per person is clearly lower in families with children as opposed to families without children.² As far as intergenerational gaps are concerned, a number of studies³ clearly show that middle-aged and even elderly people tend to be

¹ Eurobarometer, 32 1990, p. 11.

² Wintersberger, H. (1994): Costs and Benefits — The Economics of Childhood. In: Qvortrup, J. et al.: Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics. Vienna & Aldershot: European Centre/Avebury. pp. 213-248.

³ Sgritta, G. B. (1999): Inconsistencies: Childhood on the Economic and Political Agenda. In: Mouritsen, F. & Qvortrup, J. (eds.): Childhood and Children's Culture. Odense: Odense University Press (forthcoming). Preston, S. H. (1984): Children and the Elderly: Divergent Paths for America's Dependents. In: Demography, 21 (4). pp. 435-457. Thomson, D. (1996): Selfish Generations? How Welfare States Grow Old. Cambridge: The White Horse Press. Rainwater, L. & Smeeding, T. M. (1995): Doing Poorly: The Real Income of American Children in a Comparative Perspective. Luxembourg Income Study, Working Paper No. 127.

better off than children (and their parents). Parents or prospective parents are certainly aware of these income disparities. In my view, as well as in that of many others, they are among the most important reasons for the almost century-long decrease in fertility levels. In the Singapore example, Lutz refers to child-care policies and housing schemes as non-monetary incentives. I would also define them as material incentives, since they help parents earn money and improve their quality of life through housing.

Proposition 2

Our modern system financially rewards childless people. Adults with just one child or none at all are favoured both during working age and in old age. I would argue that, given the ethos of modernity, *parents behave highly rationally by not producing more children than they believe they can afford or find time to raise*. Any other behaviour would jeopardise the welfare of the family and the wellbeing of the children. The corollary of this is summarised in my third proposition.

Proposition 3

In order to remove these disincentives with the goal of raising the fertility level, *having children must become a rational choice from a material point of view*. This rationality is likely to be achieved if per-person income disparities are equalised — not only between families with children and families without children, but also between generations.

Proposition 4

Childbearing and childrearing are rational only if they are compatible with the prevailing economy. To regain compatibility, obstacles must be removed. To this effect, it is important to re-establish incentives where they seem to have been lost. Fertility will only rise if children are perceived as useful both in the here and now and in the future both as labour force and old-age insurance. In the eyes of parents, these two incentives have disappeared in the wake of modernity:

- With the introduction of compulsory schooling, children's obligatory activities were colonised by the state and turned into a benefit to society as a whole, while parents were left with the expenses of child-rearing.
- Security in old age was individualised and made largely dependent on a person's achievement in the labour market.

As described by Caldwell, we have reached a situation where the flow of wealth has turned from being in favour of the parental and grand-parental generations to favouring children. This has caused parents to reconsider having children and, finally, to reduce the number of children.⁴

The situation can also be seen as resulting from the privatisation of the family, a sacrosanct ideology. I agree that it is a blessing as long as we talk about parents' moral and existential responsibilities towards children. However, I believe that burdening parents with the more or less exclusive financial responsibility for children is not only wrong; indeed, it is fatal to our system and must be considered one of the main reasons for the present demographic impasse.

In my view, there is no reason why Caldwell's theory about the flow of wealth should not apply to modern economies. It can be argued that the present flow still favours older persons. Nothing has changed regarding the fact that children are immanently useful to society and that the elderly must be provided for by subsequent generations. These facts must be made transparent to parents and lead to policies establishing more equality between families with and without children, as well as more intergenerational equality.

⁴ Caldwell, J. C. (1982): *Theory of Fertility Decline*. Academic Press: London.

One of the problems is the present blindness of society to the fact that both parents and children contribute massively to human capital formation in material terms. Although it is sometimes mentioned that parents play an important role in this respect (for instance, in the *Fifth German Family Report*⁵), the compensations they receive from the state in no way suffice to put them on an equal footing with childless couples. Children continue to be seen as an expense or, at best, as an investment — even though the aforementioned report states that educational investments cannot be counted as a contribution to families but rather are comparable to an investment in social infrastructure. Proposals to approach children's schoolwork as useful, both for children themselves and for society at large, have so far only been theoretical ventures.⁶ In the future, the issue should be considered appropriate for human-capital theoreticians.

In terms of its reproductive behaviour, the family is typically not seen as a part of the social fabric but rather as a private unit that may or may not produce children, for reasons that have nothing to do with the modalities of modern economy as such. Pronatalism is seen as an encroachment on the privacy of the family. Therefore, the polity is reluctant to make any suggestions to this effect. One consequence of this privacy is that both the state and, in particular, the private sector can legitimately remain passive *vis-à-vis* the family unless children are severely endangered.

Proposition 5

We must make sure that children are considered a part of the social fabric by obliging society at large to provide for them. We have come to establish a duty-free liberalism⁷ in which parents and their children are expected to provide and are providing services to society at large. Their services are currently being offered not only to those with few children but also to the public in general — as well as to the trades and businesses that profit from receiving a well-brought-up, educated labour force — more or less free of charge. The *Fifth Germany Family Report* states that parents themselves are in charge of 90 percent of all expenses related to raising children, while the state provides for a mere 10 percent.

Proposition 6

The state should ensure, by whatever means, that families with children are compensated in such a way that their material standard of living is equal to that of families without children. This may be our best — and perhaps our only — chance for families to produce a sufficient number of children not only to re-establish the demographic balance but also to create a labour force large enough to secure old-age pensions.

Is this realistic? Does it violate other rights and equities, as Lutz asks? The question of realism may be relevant for the moment, but I believe that what is realistic is a relative question. If our societies face a dangerous demographic predicament — as Lutz has shown could be the case — dramatic solutions might well be considered in order to save us from a worse scenario.

I believe that intergenerational equity is enhanced and that parents' rights to decide are not violated as long as it is up to them to accept incentives. I also think that neither society's interests nor the interests of the business community are impaired by asking them to contribute to children. On the

⁵ Bundesministerium für Familie und Senioren (ed.) (1994): *Familie und Familienpolitik im geeinten Deutschland — Zukunft des Humanvermögens. Fünfter Familienbericht*. Bonn.

⁶ Qvortrup, J. (1995): *From Useful to Useful: The Historical Continuity of Children's Constructive Participation*.

In: Ambert, A.-M. (ed.): *Sociological Studies of Children*, Vol. 7. Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press. pp. 49–76.

Qvortrup, J. (2000): *Verkennung und Kolonisierung der Schularbeit von Kindern: Ursachen und Folgen*. In: Hengst, H. & Zeiher, H. (eds.): *Arbeit der Kinder*. Juventa: Weinheim (forthcoming).

⁷ See O'Neill, J. (1994): *The Missing Child in Liberal Theory: Towards a Covenant Theory of Family, Community, Welfare and the Civic State*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

contrary! The main question seems to be gender equity, because increases in fertility will entail risks for mothers in that they may have to sacrifice their participation in the labour market. A larger intergenerational equality must therefore go hand in hand with an increased gender equality. In this respect, it will be important to think in terms of appropriate balances between support for families and support for children, both in cash and in kind. Full and free pre-school provision may be one way to go about it, though it seems highly unlikely and not attractive at all right now. However, faced with much more dangerous options, it may well become common practice within a few decades.

Summary of the discussion in the session on generational solidarity and conflict

Martin Spielauer

Because the low fertility rates observed in the European Union are the driving force in the current population dynamics of an ageing European society, most of the discussion focused on the causes of low fertility and on policies that might increase fertility. Nevertheless, participants agreed that a mere increase in fertility would not solve all the current problems and that our social system needs to be changed in a much broader sense, especially with regard to the organisation of labour markets, pension funds and ways to ensure income.

Especially in the case of pension funds, mortality is much more important than fertility rates. Increased life expectancy and rising health-care standards place social security systems under a great deal of stress. The last years of life are the most costly — a fact that cannot be changed by a rise in fertility. As the proportion of older people increases dramatically, it should not be forgotten that these people also contribute to society. Considered as particularly problematic was the common way of fighting unemployment by lowering retirement ages, since higher life expectancy and better health in higher age brackets would rather suggest a prolongation of the active period. When modifying the pension system — and especially when switching from the contribution system to the formation of coverage capital — it will be important to ensure a fair and even distribution of the burdens and benefits of such changes. Because labour-intensive health-care services cannot increase their productivity beyond certain limits, they will be facing an additional challenge. If current standards are to be maintained, one-third of the working population will be required to act as caregivers in the future. That this would actually be the case was considered quite unrealistic.

Is increased immigration a possible 'quick fix' to the problems arising from current demographic changes? If the problem were the size of the population alone, then immigration could be a solution. However, because the demographic balance was identified as the main problem not only in the papers but also in the discussion, immigration was seen in a much more differentiated way. It was pointed out that Europeans had shown that they did not like immigrants, and contemplating immigration as a quick solution of the problems faced by European societies was considered as the latest example of imperialistic thinking.

Regarding low fertility rates, the discussion initially centred on the rationality argument presented by Jens Qvortrup. In a historic view, the costs of raising children have been increasingly privatised, while the benefits have been socialised. In both an intergenerational and intragenerational perspective, this has led to an increasing polarisation between people who have children and people who do not. In order to increase fertility, economic restrictions will have to be removed, from both the value-oriented and the purpose-oriented point of view. The lesson to be learned from the baby boom is that fertility is not only determined by current problems but also by expectations and projections. In this context, the importance of the labour market was stressed in various ways, ranging from the necessity to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life to new forms of assuring income other than through paid work. From the gender perspective, it was stated that the modernisation of family life was essential, because women had changed but men had not. Regarding the job market, there should be no difference between the risks associated with employing a woman and employing a man. As determinants for the first and subsequent children do differ, it remained unresolved to which the extent policies should concentrate on the decision to have and the timing of the first child, versus incentives for larger families. Recent increases in fertility in Scandinavian

countries were due to second and third children. In France, higher fertility can be observed in regions offering a wider range of services. Regarding benefits, there is an asymmetry. It was repeatedly stated that an increase in benefits had positive effects on fertility, but any reduction had a much greater negative impact. Very often, security in its broadest sense is more important than cash benefits. Not only family benefits but all policies — from the tax system to housing policy — affect fertility. As recent questionnaires show, most young people report that they want to have two children. In real life, this plan is often not carried out or is postponed for various reasons. Many of the causes are associated with risks, and in some cases the plan may be postponed for such a long time that it becomes impossible to implement at all.

The discussion also addressed psychological reasons for low fertility. These ranged from perceived density (Europe is considered to be already crowded, as opposed to the ‘fill-the-space motive’ in the USA or, to some extent, in Scandinavia) to the high standards and expectations assigned to parenthood that additionally scare people off as partnerships become increasingly fragile.

Section 3

Gender and family issues

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy for modernising gender relations?

Susanne Schunter-Kleemann

The Communication of the European Commission of February 1996 entitled *Incorporation of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities* advocates the principle of gender mainstreaming as an innovative maxim of action for all Community authorities. In mainstreaming, “the concern is not only to give women better access to Community programmes but also and above all to mobilise the legal machinery, the financial resources and the analytical and mediating capacities of the Community” (European Commission Communication 1996).

Gender mainstreaming constitutes a third distinct approach towards gender in European policies. In the 1970s, preference was initially given to the equal-treatment model, and the nine sex-equality directives are based on this approach. In the 1980s, the limits of the formal equal-treatment legislation became obvious, and ‘positive action’ was introduced. The overall approach was that the difficulties women face in competing equally with men on the labour market could be remedied by a combination of legislation and affirmative action aimed at addressing the specific needs of women. The new mainstreaming approach has shifted the focus from women as a group with ‘additional’ needs to the more complex patterns of relations between the sexes.

Who are the actors and promoters of the gender mainstreaming strategy? Is mainstreaming an administrative approach elaborated by the European Commission? Or is it a bottom-up strategy influenced by feminist demands from the Nordic Countries to which the Community had to respond after the accession of Sweden and Finland? Pádraig Flynn, EU Commissioner in charge of Employment and Social Affairs at that time, said the new mainstreaming approach “is recognition of the fact that, in spite of women’s increasing presence in the labour market, the differences between men and women in terms of employment opportunities, pay and working conditions remain substantial, and in some cases are worsening” (Women of Europe Newsletter 78/1998: 1).

A number of European Parliamentary (EP) Committees have adopted resolutions on the gender-mainstreaming approach. These emphasise and promote a wide scope of mainstreaming, both as an analytical concept and as a binding concept, for Community authorities and administrative bodies of the Member States in matters related to hiring personnel and distributing funds. “Mainstreaming means that the promotion of equal rights for both genders is clearly seen to be integrated into all political fields and programmes at all administrative levels. The preparation of all proposals, plans and programmes in general and sectoral policy must also thus include a separate analysis of the effects on both genders of the decisions planned before those decisions are finalized” (Comments of the EP Committee for Social Affairs on the Commission’s *Incorporating Equal Opportunities — Mainstreaming*, 24 July 1996; appendix to Kokkola Report of the European Parliament 1997: 20).

According to the views of the European Parliament’s Committee on Women’s Rights, a realistic concept of gender equality should not be limited to the scope of the Community’s social and employment policy. It also requires new ideas and a reorientation of policy approaches which, at first sight, seem to have no connection with gender equality issues. Policies on technology, research, agriculture, infrastructure, law, asylum, the internal market, the environment and transportation are just a few examples.

An analysis recently carried out by the Committee on Women's Rights revealed that the Commission, the Council of Ministers, and Member States have disregarded the mainstreaming principle in nearly all central programmes structuring future EU policies (cf. European Parliament: Committee on Women's Rights 1997). This applies to the Agenda 2000, the Fifth Framework Programme for Research and Technology, the 1998 budget, the future cooperation on development between the EU and ACP States, the Luxembourg employment guidelines, etc. Likewise, the national employment plans implementing EU guidelines are but modest and not very developed in this respect. It seems that the mainstreaming principle has been a promise and a byword that has remained unfulfilled by the Council of Ministers as well as by many of the Commission's Directorates General (cf. Schunter-Kleemann 1998).

This paper focuses on the philosophical and political background of the three approaches to equal opportunity developed and propagated by the decision-making bodies of the European Union. It evaluates the strengths and the deficiencies of the mainstreaming policy with respect to the modernisation of gender relations and their implicit consequences for family life.

Conceptual weaknesses of EU equal-opportunity policies

In my view, a market-oriented, limited understanding of gender equality seems to prevail in the decision-making bodies of the Community. On the one hand, the power centres of the EU (Council, Commission and European Court of Justice) adhere to an understanding of equal opportunity that is restricted in two ways: Questions of equal opportunity only have a chance of being dealt with if they are (1) closely related to employment and (2) thought to contribute to safeguarding fair competition in the common market. On the other hand, the Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights has developed increasingly sophisticated ideas about women's subordination and has, in its statements, emphasised the interrelationship and overlaying of public and private mechanisms responsible for creating disadvantage. It has demanded an expansion of the legal agenda to include family affairs, domestic violence and issues of structural violence (Europäisches Parlament 1988; Women of Europe Newsletter 69/1991: 7–8; Women of Europe Newsletter 26/1992: 2–3).

Family-work divide wrong

European decision-making bodies have insisted on a concept of equal opportunities that exclusively refers to the world of paid work. Accordingly, the Community's legal competencies are limited to activities related to equal treatment of the working population. They address neither equality in general nor the division of work in the family or other family matters.

It comes as no surprise that the European Court of Justice has repeatedly emphasised the limitations of its mandate on problems of discrimination in working life¹ (cf. Hofmann Decision 1984 et al.). A sharp distinction between the world of gainful employment and private life is essential in Community social law. It exclusively deals with issues related to the world of work, and therefore is 'economic' social law. The equal-treatment strategy is divided; the insight of the European Women's Movement that the private is political has not been acted upon. The unequal balance of power between the genders in the 'private' sphere (inequalities in responsibilities and duties; unequal distribution of work) remains beyond the scope of supranational regulation, although it is closely

¹ Dealing with gender-specific maternal leave, the ECJ stated in 1984 that "it was not the job of the court to settle questions concerned with the organisation of the family or to alter the division of responsibility between the parents" (Hofmann v. Barmer Ersatzkasse, Case 184/ 83 ECR 3047, 1984).

interwoven with the unequal power relations between the sexes in both the economic and political spheres.

This also explains why only parts of the comprehensive equality of treatment programme called for by the European Parliament in the 1970s and 1980s have been approved by the Council of Ministers. Some draft directives with direct implications for families were transformed into weaker recommendations, e.g. those on child care (1990) and minimum income (1991). Some proposals were rejected outright, e.g. those on equal treatment in taxation (1988) and the social security of family members (1987) (regarding family allowances, widow/ers' pensions, retirement age). The draft directive on atypical employment was not considered to be a gender-equality issue, although the regulations would mainly have affected women in most Member States. All these regulations belong to the interface of employment and family life and fundamentally affect the social security of women and their families. With regard to equal-treatment policies in the EU, four Community Directives were adopted in the 1990s on protective legislation for working mothers (1992), parental leave (1996), reversal of the burden of proof (1997) and part-time work (1997). However, a closer look at their successes and failures might also reveal that all four of them are deficient in their regulatory scope and innovative impetus. In a number of areas, they lag behind the guaranteed level of security of Member States as expressed in the statements of the EP (Schunter-Kleemann 1997: 60ff).

We may conclude that the limited market approach of the EU equal-treatment policy remains blind to the great variety of barriers created by family duties against the flexibility and mobility of women as wage earners. It ignores the fact that the two genders have different duties and restrictions in the domestic sphere. As a result, there is not even equality regarding their initial position *vis-à-vis* access to the labour market. Private life is considered irrelevant to 'fair' competition and in a 'free' market and is therefore excluded from the scope of equal-opportunity policy. Women's unpaid work continues to be a 'secret' resource; and the functional context of civil society, based on the complementarity of the private and the public, remains hidden.

Modernised role models for women — An individualised concept of emancipation

The conceptual weaknesses of the nine equal-treatment directives approved so far are obvious. The idea of women's economic equality derived from the economic liberal tradition is fundamental to European equal-opportunity policy. This version of egalitarian liberalism implies that dependency results by choice from the interactions of free individuals. The classical hypothetical model of the rationally calculating *homo economicus* was updated and extended to the female gender. Correspondingly, the rights promised the individual woman in the equal-rights directives are conceived in their structure as *individual* "rights of access to the market and to market activity". They imply a fundamentally modernised role model for women. The idea of the woman as a homemaker is laid aside. The model is the woman who is her own 'person'. As a free, autonomous citizen she should respond to the 'challenges of the market'. She should leave behind the protected world of private life, emerge from 'paternalistic guardianship' and measure her powers with those of a man in free competition.

In this respect, the concept is based on women catching up with men; it is an individualised concept of emancipation. The individual woman should make herself fit for the market by means of better qualifications and investing in her human capital. This noble competitive struggle recommended to the female sex simply disregards the fact that women are already defined as losers before the competition has begun. In its non-discussion of inequalities in one's starting position, the situation has remained unchanged since the historical beginnings of the formation of liberal doctrine. The harmonious, liberal, ideal type of market already ignores classes and is blind to power structures.

Differently positioned genders and the presence of dependent children and elderly are taken into account to an even lesser extent. In focusing on how much access the mobile and flexible individual has to the labour market, one unintended effect of EU equal-treatment strategy may be the erosion of family bonds. Instead of stabilising family conditions — as is often claimed — it could contribute to crisis within the family.

Positive action

As mentioned above, the EU bodies adopted a second concept of equal opportunity in the 1980s, namely positive action. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

While equal treatment seeks to treat people in the same way, positive action is an approach that recognises difference. This strategy allows affirmative-action programmes for “those who start the race with differing and/or unequal abilities”. Positive action attempts to address the disadvantage that women experience because they are different from men. The *historic discrimination of women as a group* is taken into account and the less favoured group is treated better in an effort to facilitate its catching up (Walby 1998: 5). The NOW-initiative promoted by the Commission's DG V is one example of a positive-action programme. Additional funds are reserved for special groups of women (e.g. long-term unemployed, lone mothers) lacking means and opportunities. The training projects take into account the women's current situation and hence respond better to their needs regarding child care, family-friendly working hours, or confidence-building. Positive-action projects include training courses designed to attract women into new technologies, senior management and other typically male areas of work. People are not treated in the same way but equally.

A potential weakness of positive action may be that training courses for women are often based on a deficiency model. They can sometimes be geared to helping women become surrogate men. Teresa Rees, who evaluated some European training programmes preparing women in middle management for senior management positions, presented some illustrative examples that may explain the androcentric bias. She found that one course included a module on how to develop a ‘killer instinct’; another course used war films with a cruel but fair squadron leader as role model for the prospective women managers (Rees 1998: 59). Naturally, such positive-action projects reinforce behavioural patterns that put women at a disadvantage.

The major weakness of positive action seems to be that EU projects often tend to be small, piecemeal and precariously funded. EU authorities have not accepted the fact that women's starting inequality can only be abolished if their preferential treatment is based on a comprehensive set of actions involving direct intervention through welfare policies. The systems and structures that produce and reproduce the discrimination experienced by women remain unchallenged.

In the last few years, there has been a growing debate that, in its training programmes, the Social Fund should no longer address women as a special-needs group. There is pressure that positive action be less frequently utilised as a strategy because it is too costly. Specific actions (e.g. strict quotas) were declared as being on the borderline of legality. Given the fiscal pressure and budgetary restrictions imposed by the EMU and Stability Pact, as well as the growing distributional conflicts between Member States in connection with the Agenda 2000, prospects are slim for EU positive-action programmes. Despite their ability to build bridges and facilitate transitions between domestic activities and gainful employment, it is doubtful that such programmes will receive the necessary attention in the next decade. The promotion of gender mainstreaming is to be seen in this context, because it eliminates financial obligations and burdens for the EU bodies.

Strengths and weaknesses of the gender mainstreaming strategy

Just like positive action, mainstreaming admits that there are *differences* between men and women. Instead of trying to change women, mainstreaming tries to change the systems and structures that disadvantage them. It seeks to *transform organisations* and *procedures* to allow women and men to participate on an equal footing. In this respect, it is based on the philosophy of difference. Rather than simply seeking to accommodate difference — as positive action does — it sees difference as a benefit. In this respect, the mainstreaming strategy offers more strength than either equal treatment or positive action.

As with equal-treatment strategies, a major weakness of mainstreaming seems to be that strategies draw upon a liberal equal-rights tradition. They are more concerned with *equality in process* than with equality of outcome. They focus more on equal treatment than on *equal results* (Walby 1998: 6). Even if the field of policy were considerably extended and could reach beyond the narrow topics of employment and vocational training, many urgent problems of female subordination and oppression (such as gender-based violence, poverty, prostitution, abuse and traffic in women) would neither be addressed nor made subject to EU action. In this sense, the concept reproduces the wrong family-work, public-private divide. Finally, mainstreaming is not a symmetrical concept. It still focuses on women rather than on both genders. It does not stress men's duties and responsibilities in family life, nor does it question the traditional division of work within the family. Compared to equal treatment, the regulatory power of the mainstreaming approach is weak. It permits extremely different interpretations of the material and financial scope of the mainstreaming strategy.

However, there is a noticeable difference with regard to the authorship of this equal-opportunity approach. The European Court of Justice is no longer the driving force. In a time of disappointment about the low impact of the equal-treatment approach and the modest effectiveness of positive action, gender mainstreaming allowed the Commission to enter unclaimed territory in an effort to expand its competencies and constituency.

In my view, the greatest strength of mainstreaming is that it offers more opportunities to groups of women in the Member States at all levels of decision making. The approach is less geared to legal experts (judges and lawyers) or to labour-market experts and training bodies. Rather, it facilitates the mobilisation of women's groups and NGOs. Compared to positive action, it could therefore develop more strongly into a consensus-inducing mechanism.

Yet mainstreaming obviously is also a highly contentious issue, not only in many of the Commission's Directorates General but also in the administrative bodies of Member States. It calls for the application of equal opportunity in a much wider field of policy in its intent to alter both the decision-making and power structures in the Union's boards, as well as in national public administration. Moreover, there will be open or hidden resistance from 'good ol' boys' networks, because they fear that the implementation of the mainstreaming strategy will not only be extremely costly but could also result in a redistribution of financial resources to women. When evaluating the long-term potential and prospects of the mainstreaming strategy, it is obvious that the dictates of a competitive austerity policy — as enshrined in the EMU and the Stability Act — have established major institutional barriers against mainstreaming. Having lost their problem-solving competence and bound to financial restrictions, it seems that the EU authorities are prepared to delegate specific welfare tasks to private women's groups and feminist NGOs — tasks that were formerly seen as clear obligations of the welfare state. As a new participatory approach, mainstreaming could be used to mobilise local resources to compensate for the lack of EU and government funds.

In essence, it is the aim of all three concepts of the European equal-opportunity policy to better utilise the economic potential of women in global competition. In this respect, they contribute to

the “modernisation of the patriarchal power relationship”. All three approaches fit a liberal agenda; and they may be more ‘market-making’ than ‘market-correcting’. However, the ‘women’s question’ remains unsolved because it has only been tackled in a half-hearted and economics-driven manner. Family support used to be considered an important public business when building the post-war interventionist welfare systems. It seems that family support and equal-opportunity policies could become the victims of financial policy when rebuilding the welfare state into a neoliberal competitive community.

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Family and fiscal policy in Belgium

Wilfried Dumon

Taxes on income and family policy

Two systems

In the European Union, there are two distinct systems of taxation. One of them is based on individual taxation and thus does not incorporate the family dimension. Examples can be found in the Netherlands and in most Scandinavian countries. Yet the system hardly exists in its pure form (cf. married men's allowance in the UK). It tends to be presented as having an 'emancipatory effect', since it provides incentives for women — in their roles as wives or mothers — to enter the labour market. I shall not deal with this system in greater detail but shall only refer to it insofar as it is applied in Belgium.

The other system takes into account the family dimension in matters related to taxes. However, the two methods used in the European Union are quite different.

First, there is the so-called 'splitting for tax purposes'. In principle, it means that the total income of all family members is added up and then divided by the number of members in the family. Adults (husband/wife) count for a full part; and children, half. In this way, the tax is being imposed not on the total family income but on each of the partial sums. In any system of progressive taxation, this yields considerable tax advantages for large families, who indeed benefit most from this system. Moreover, it has a greater and added effect in the higher income brackets. The most elaborate form is used in France (and to some extent in Germany). France, Belgium and Luxembourg can be characterised as pioneers and architects of a 'European' family policy based on direct economic support for families.

The second method is based on accumulating the income of all family members and then taking into account the family dimension: tax reduction or tax exemption according to the partner system (married versus cohabitation) or the parental system (children to be cared for). As the two family systems characterised as 'partner' and 'parental' are currently at the core of the socio-political debate in Belgium, they shall constitute the focus of my deliberations.

Before going into detail, I would like to make two preliminary remarks. First, Belgium may be a good example for two reasons: It has average scores for most of its demographic parameters (fertility, divorce rate, etc.), and the Belgians are masters in the art of compromise. Learning about Belgium is learning about Europe and about handling problems, coping with conflicting demands, conflicting situations, and different interests and opinions. Secondly, the Belgian tax system combines elements of both individual taxation and the splitting system. The former is used in order to accommodate dual-earner or dual-income families; the latter, for single-income families.

The partner system

Elements of individual taxation

Until the great tax reform in 1988, the income of family members was accumulated and the tax was calculated on the basis of the family's income. This was seen as fair and family-friendly. It was considered to be just because it was built on the principle that the strongest shoulder should bear the greatest burden. It was based on a family model of the father as breadwinner, and the mother as housewife. It was family-friendly because it allowed deductions for children.

Due to pressures caused by changes in the organisation of families (division of labour within and outside the family) as well as emancipatory movements (equal opportunity according to gender), elements of individual taxation were introduced in 1988 by way of 'decumulation'. The Belgian system represents a modified version of the individual taxation system. Since 1990 (i.e. on income for 1989), the income of two-earner families has been taxed separately, i.e. each income is taxed individually. All ceilings that existed prior to 1988 have burst. The measure is beneficial and works to the advantage of two-income families (by definition), but even more so to high-income dual-earner families. It is considered family-friendly insofar as it eliminates the discrimination between marriage and cohabitation, at least regarding taxes. Under the previous system, married couples were penalised by having their incomes added up, while cohabiting couples were taxed as individuals. As a result, the new system had the full support of feminist pressure groups, and there was no opposition and even some support from family organisations.

Elements of the splitting system

The splitting system was introduced simultaneously (1988, 1989, 1990). In Belgium, it is based on the principle of the 'marriage quotient'. In principle, part of the earned income may be fictitiously assigned to the partner for tax purposes. The Belgian version falls short of a total splitting system in that it is limited both in relative and absolute terms. Not all the income is redistributed to the family members (a spouse receives only 30 percent), and there is a ceiling for the amount that can be split/redistributed. This ceiling is indexed and in 1990 amounted to BEF 270,000. Currently, a maximum of around BEF 300,000 (EUR 7,500) can be assigned to the spouse. It should be noted that splitting is limited to the spouse, however, and cannot be extended to the couple's children.

This system favours the breadwinner principle and single-income families whose earnings might be low yet remain above the poverty line. After all, one has to earn money before being able or requested to pay taxes. Moreover, it is of great help and an immense benefit for two-earner families in which one partner earns a small amount.

Lately the principle of a 'marriage quotient' has come under severe attack. Nevertheless, 32.7 percent of all Belgian households benefit from the measure due to the fact that it also has a redistributive effect. An analysis according to educational levels showed that half of the households whose breadwinners only had an elementary education (47.2%) benefited from it, and so did one third of the breadwinners with a secondary education (28.8%) and a quarter (23.3%) of those where the breadwinner had obtained a higher degree.

Throughout the last decade, the fiscal debate in Belgium has focused on the gender issue and on the organisation of family life, rather than on family size. It has been more concerned with the division of labour within the family than with the composition of the family, i.e. the number of members. As the current discussion on tax exemption shows, the emphasis on equity (in terms of gender, marital status and social stratification) remains central in the socio-political debate.

Tax exemption and family structure

So far, I have addressed the issue of taxes levied on 'taxable income'. I have stressed the progressivity of the system: The more one earns, the greater the percentage one has to pay. Yet every system contains provisions to ensure that very low incomes (below subsistence level) are not taxed at all. Moreover, a certain part of all incomes is regarded as a vital minimum and thus is not taxed. In 1988, the non-taxable minimum — i.e. the part of the income exempt from taxation — amounted to BEF 203,000 (EUR 5,000) for a single person; for a married couple, it was BEF 320,000 (EUR 8,000). The different treatment of singles and married persons is based on the assumption that the vital minimum costs for a single are greater than for a couple who share such goods as housing, utilities (e.g. washing machine, commodities and such services as electricity, gas and water). Therefore, the amount is higher for a couple, but not double the amount fixed for a single. For tax purposes, two

persons living together (i.e. the cohabitation of unmarried adults) are treated as two singles and consequently have a (much) higher tax-free base income. In figures, the difference between the tax-free base incomes of cohabiting adults (BEF 406,000) and married couples (BEF 320,000) is BEF 86,000. This taxable difference causes a higher tax burden of at least BEF 21,500 (EUR 525) per year for married couples.

Lately, this discrepancy has been considered discrimination and labelled the 'marriage tax'. In March 1998, the family organisations succeeded in putting this issue on the political agenda. One year later, the government promised to take action to eradicate this discrepancy. However, based on the amount involved (BEF 60 billion or EUR 1.5 billion), solving the issue will take an estimated five years.

Parental system: Children

I have already mentioned that the debate on taxes tended to focus on partner relations (i.e. the division of labour between husband and wife) rather than on children. The amounts to be deducted for children are smaller but can be classified as substantial and not as merely symbolic. Three elements are to be mentioned:

Additional tax allowance

There is an additional tax allowance for each child. The allowance is progressive in line with the number of children, i.e. the allowance for the second child is higher than for the first. In other words, if you have two children, you are entitled to a tax exemption that is more than double the amount granted for one child. The amounts are progressive up to four children: For one child, the tax allowance amounts to about EUR 1,050 (BEF 42,000); for two children, it is EUR 9,850 (BEF 394,000). There is no great debate on this issue, nor was it a priority topic in the programmes of the family organisations.

Nevertheless, there is one issue that deserves our attention. Since 1995, a new divorce law providing for joint custody has been applied in Belgium. However, the fiscal authorities did not take this new law into account, to the effect that the tax exemption mentioned above could only be applied to the household in which the child lived. Family organisations were rather successful with their lobbying: They put the issue on the political agenda in March 1998 and obtained almost full compliance with their recommendations in late April 1999.

Costs for child care

Family organisations have declared child-care costs a high priority. Under certain conditions, the amounts paid for professional childcare (i.e. *crèches*) have since 1988 indeed constituted additional tax-exempted income. The amounts are limited in either relative or proportional terms (only 80%) as well as in absolute figures or in their totality (no more than the flat rate per child, e.g. BEF 345 (EUR 8.6) per day per child. Families who do not claim the tax exemption for childcare (outside the family) automatically have their tax exemption raised by BEF 12,000 (EUR 300) per child per year. Families taking care of their children themselves thus receive a symbolic tax cut amounting to about EUR 300 a year.

It does not come as a surprise that family organisations ask for a considerable increase in this amount. Contrary to the rectification outlined above with regard to joint custody, this request has hardly been taken up in the socio-political debate. However, a new wind has recently been blowing: As the poet put it, a new spring is around, a new sound is heard. I shall deal with these new perspectives in my conclusions.

Taxes on property (real estate/housing) and the family dimension

I shall be very brief regarding taxes on property. Two issues are at stake here that are quite different, namely taxes on housing/property and inheritance.

As defined by the fiscal authorities, all properties yield income and taxes are to be paid on that amount. For the sake of clarity, I shall limit myself to family housing here.

Taxpayers who live in their own housing are granted a lump sum of BEF 120,000 (EUR 3,000) that they can deduct from their income before taxes. In addition, they are granted a lump sum of BEF 10,000 (EUR 250) for spouses and the same amount for each of the children in their care. The system was changed from relative percentages to lump sums. Instead of having to fill out an application form every year, the deductions are now applied automatically. The changes favour some of the lower- and middle-income groups and are more family-oriented, because the size of the family (household) can actually be of greater importance than the mere value of the housing (as currently assessed by regional authorities).

A second recent change involves inheritance taxes. In 1997, these were modified and simplified (a merit in itself). As a main feature, the change can be said to be more family-oriented. A ceiling of 27 percent (previously up to 30 percent) was introduced for the inheritance tax between partners. However, the most significant change relates to inheritance rights in family businesses. Taxes on inheriting a family business now can be as low as three percent. This measure was advocated as a means of saving jobs. As of 18 May 1999 (Belgisch Staatsblad 1999), these taxes were reduced to zero. Although the decision was presented as a labour-market measure, it certainly qualifies as family-friendly.

Current debate

Lately, the tax system has been at the centre of the political debate. For instance, the modification of the inheritance tax led to a heated political debate on equality between married persons and cohabiting adults, in particular lesbian and gay couples. This resulted in a (typically) Belgian compromise proposal: Cohabiting couples should pay considerably less than they do now, but more than married couples or survivors (3 percent as compared to 10 percent in the lowest income bracket). Moreover, it is argued that if a homosexual couple is being put on the same footing as a married couple for inheritance purposes, then there should also be a correspondence with regard to income taxes (including tax exemptions).

However, that debate focused mainly on partnership relations. Lately, a new wind has been blowing. The emphasis has been shifting from spouses/partners to children; the focus has been changing from employment for women to care for children and the elderly. As such, the splitting system (marriage coefficient) has been heavily attacked on social and on family grounds. It has been argued that there are no tax deductions for low-income groups. Regarding families, it has been said that it would be more efficient to fiscally reward those who take care of children, people who are (chronically) ill, people with a disability and older adults.

It is striking to notice that the actors in this policy debate can hardly be divided up along strict party lines. To a certain extent, its ideological overtones have been replaced by a more rational — sometimes research-based — analysis of current situations (where the role of experts becomes more important). In this analysis, such features as the demographic situation (population ageing) and children's needs are getting more attention than are ideological positions or preferences for household structures or life-styles and types of relationships.

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Summary of the discussion in the session on gender and family issues

Christiane Pfeiffer

One of the points made in Schunter-Kleemann's presentation was that the European Union seems to see women solely as members of the labour force. The arguments she outlined were identical with those made regarding family matters. Her main approach was to address the difficulties women face in competing with men in the labour market and how these restrict their particular needs in that area. Questions were also raised about the actors and social movements involved in the three types of equal-opportunity policies she defined.

Schunter-Kleemann explained that the first approach (equal treatment) receives support from the Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice. The latter also promoted equal-treatment policies with national judicial authorities, while the European Commission (DG V) advocated the second approach involving 'positive action'. Moreover, individual and regional experts on the labour market were involved in this action as well. However, the European Communities were not involved in the third approach, i.e. gender mainstreaming. There were neither legal instruments nor funds for this programme. On the one hand, the necessary creativity was missing; and on the other, the programme was being neither institutionalised nor financed. The aim of Schunter-Kleemann's presentation was to shed light on the ambivalence in this area.

In the discussion of Dumon's paper, it was argued that, compared to technical arguments, ideological arguments had lost weight. This could imply a change in reform strategy. Dumon considered timing to be the crucial element for the shifting emphasis in this debate — one basically emanating from the labour market, where the need for action lies. Therefore, the debate was categorised as an economic one, e.g. how to find solutions to unemployment. Participants pointed out that the legal status of cohabiting partners did not constitute any criteria for tax deduction in other countries; married couples were granted the same deduction as two people living together. The discussion then focused on unpaid work. Participants agreed that there should be more acknowledgement of unpaid work and family life in general.

In this connection, Ulla Björnberg reported extensively on an ongoing Swedish research project focusing on moral economics in the family. She presented it as a case study on gender and domestic labour, carried out with the intention of linking a theoretical analysis of the processes behind inequality/equality in marriages with such basic sociological concepts as reciprocity in social relationships, rationality of action, distributive justice, autonomy and dependence. The project was embedded in an ongoing discourse on how family relationships are changing in contemporary society. In today's marriages, i.e. in their private life, men and women try to handle an ethos of equality in intimate relations, an ideal of romantic love, and elements of a still vivid but partly unrecognised patriarchy. All this takes place in a context of social regulations that pretend to be gender-neutral. The main focus was on conceptions of equality, on how men and women presented themselves as equals. The marital discourse on equality shows different mechanisms whereby women and men hide or avoid an unequal position within the family. These mechanisms have to be understood in the light of gender power relationships and family cultures.

There was agreement that Björnberg's approach was a good way to analyse domestic work. However, it was pointed out that there could be several other indicators of or aspects to this matter. In addition, the different preferences for cooperation between women and men ought to be considered.

Participants also wanted to know whether the couples interviewed had been asked to assess the quality of their partnership.

Björnberg explained that she had omitted several dimensions addressed in the analysis. For example, leisure time was integrated as another important aspect of the division of labour when it comes to housework. Women who were asked about their leisure time mainly talked about freedom or about suffering at home. They did not state any desire to have more time; rather, they wanted to be freed from the obligation of planning and organising. Just to be on their own gave those women the feeling of freedom. As a next step, the project would analyse the quality of partnerships. It appeared to be a good idea to confront the couples with their partner's answers. In spite of women's and men's differing preferences for cooperation, there was normative agreement that there should be *some* sort of cooperation. Though men adhere to this social norm, they feel uneasy about sharing housework. In this context, there was a discussion on the differentiation of and change in gender roles, and questions were raised on possible differences due to the social status of the couples interviewed. An earlier study had shown that the division of housework was a question of lifestyles, but the cutting line was having children. There was a clear need to take into account the dynamic dimension and to integrate social 'belongings' into the analysis. Personal feelings on the concept of sharing housework could well depend on the individual.

The point was raised that there was no basis for political action, because the strategy was to solve the problems within families. Political action would mean a push for change, but there was a far greater need to reinforce changes in one's state of mind. Family movements have said for years that what is private is also political. There seems to be a tacit agreement among political parties in their refusal to comment on these issues.

The most fruitful way to do comparative research on family matters would be to identify which actors are involved and which role social movements play within the institutions analysed. It was generally agreed upon that such an actor-related approach would be a very useful tool for studying family policies.

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