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Family Forms and the Young Generation in Europe

Report on the Annual Seminar 2001

edited by

Lynne Chisholm, Antonio de Lillo,
Carmen Leccardi and Rudolf Richter

A Report by the European Observatory on the
Social Situation, Demography and Family

Milan, Italy, 20-22 September 2001



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Preface

The conference from which the papers in this report draw was a new departure, for it brought together scholars from two specialist communities that, strangely enough, normally do not engage intensely with each other's schools of thought and research work: those who study the family and those who study young people. Social institutions and social groups remain distinct ways of understanding social life, even if in practice families are no less clusters of social relations and dynamics than they are structured patterns of behaviours, and even if youth is as much a highly normative social phenomenon as it is a wellspring of personal and social agency for successive generations. Family life is a relatively clearly bounded domain of experience, and family members are connected with each other within and between age and generation affiliations. Youth life is a relatively unbounded domain of experience, and young people are by definition members of particular age and generational groupings *sui generis*.

For the past four decades in Western Europe, theory and research has placed emphasis on youth as a distinct life-phase and an autonomous culture in and for itself. This has meant that young people's lives in socially institutionalised contexts – in school, in the family, in workplaces – have not been a main focus of interest for youth researchers. At the same time, educational, family and employment research has inevitably tended to see young people in the roles and relations they occupy: as pupils, students or trainees; as daughters, sons or siblings; as employees, members of an occupation or unemployed persons.

In the past two decades, describing and analysing patterns of transitions between social roles and locations has become a dominant perspective in youth research, but this has been largely set in the life-course context of 'becoming adult' as a whole rather than in different life domains. Research has also focused above all on transitions between education, training and (un)employment, and much less so, until quite recently, on family and household transitions. Yet during the same period, patterns of couple, family and household formation have changed a great deal everywhere in Europe. Family researchers have documented and interpreted the meanings of these changes for intra-family relations and generational relations within families, which cannot have been without impact for the ways in which young people make sense of their family and social networks, including the importance of peer groups in their lives.

Research is currently rediscovering the fact that for most young people everywhere, good family relations are central to their sense of well being and that they value highly the emotional support of family life and the social networks in which this embeds their lives. Those young people who face personal, educational, social and labour market problems, yet do not have access to positive family support and resources, prove to be especially vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. This seems to be the case regardless of the extent to which public and social benefits and services are provided for young people, although obviously these can help prevent and alleviate some of the difficulties that arise.

Despite similar macro trends observable throughout Europe, differences between the South and the North with respect to patterns of both family life and youth transitions are manifestly evident and have been the subject of considerable discussion within and between Europe's regional research communities. The picture with respect to comparisons between Eastern and Western Europe is far less clear, if only because of the imbalance of information that is available, historically distinct approaches and weaker links between the research communities. The contributions to this conference, therefore, could not provide equal breadth and depth of theoretical and empirical consideration to these two major axes of differentiation within Europe as a whole, still less consider the multiple and complex relationships between Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern European countries and cultures. Indeed, the information we do have available suggests that Europe cannot always be divided up in such a four-fold manner for each and every dimension of family life and youth transitions. But we shall probably not manage to achieve a more accurate picture of similarities and differences until another decade has passed: research-based knowledge cannot be produced overnight.

Nevertheless, it is particularly appropriate that this occasion for exchange and debate took place in Italy. For both family and youth researchers, Italy in comparison with other parts of Europe, and Italian regions in comparison with each other, are very interesting and special exemplars. Italy has the lowest birth rate in Western Europe; the most rapidly ageing European regional populations live in Italy. Young Italians remain

living in the parental household for longer than anywhere else in Western Europe, in most cases they leave only on marriage, and the average age at marriage is high – only matched in the Nordic countries, where, however, many young adults form independent households, enter stable couple partnerships and start having children before they formally marry. Furthermore, participation in education and training has expanded very fast in the past two decades, whilst initial transitions into secure employment are difficult and protracted for very significant proportions of the young population.

Italy's own North-South split (even if the real picture is not quite as simple as this) is in many ways a microcosm of the polarisation in life chances and risks between affluent and poorly-developed regions and communities throughout Europe. Traditionally, rates of migration from Southern to Northern Italy (and to more northerly European countries) have therefore been high – and official rates of youth unemployment in the Southern provinces are chronically very high indeed. At the same time, we know that families and young people – both as independent actors and, of course, as members of a family economy and social network – have long developed a variety of strategies for managing difficult economic circumstances. These translate into a set of specific cultural practices making the family environment and its internal and external relations a distinct, and in some ways perhaps unique, social reality.

In these and related senses, the discussions at the conference were able to view both family and youth issues from a very stimulating vantage point, as represented by the strong participation of Italian scholars and the richness of the work and experience they brought to the occasion. This collection of contributions conveys the flavour and context of those fruitful discussions, and it is a good example of how intercultural and comparative research in these fields can lend an innovative impulse both to research and, by extension, to policy and action.

Lynne Chisholm
President, ISA RC34 (1998–2002)

Introduction

KARIN WALL

The aim of this volume is to report on the international seminar *Family Forms and the Young Generation in Europe*, which took place in Milan in September 2001. Organised under the auspices of the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family coordinated at the Austrian Institute for Family Studies, ISA's Research Committee Sociology of Youth, the Faculty of Sociology of the University of Milan-Bicocca, and Research Committee Vita Quotidiana of the Italian Sociological Association, the seminar focused on four interrelated topics: youth and transition to adulthood, generational relations, family and welfare systems in the transition to adulthood, and methodological issues. Broadly speaking, these topics were explored from two different viewpoints: from a policy perspective interested in the interaction between youth, family and welfare states, on the one hand; and from a sociological perspective, more concerned with analysing social practices and youth/family change in Europe, on the other. The former was introduced more systematically in the keynote papers, critical comments and guest lectures published in the present volume; the second perspective was examined and discussed in greater detail in parallel workshops and will lead to a separate publication.

It is initially useful to note that the major rationale for developing policies in this field is as a response to *youth conditions and change* in such a way as to promote youth well-being. The latter could mean helping with problems caused by social pressures or institutions, or modifying youth behaviour and the transition to adulthood in ways perceived as desirable in the light of the economic, political and/or social goals of society at large. Thus, youth behaviour is also one of the anchors of the papers published in this volume: In order to explore the interaction between welfare states (the other anchor) and youth, analysis must consider both policies and changes in youth conditions as potentially dependent or independent variables. As a result, the papers presented here also delve into much of the ongoing discussion on 'youth' today or on the major theoretical/methodological problems regarding current research on the transition to adulthood in Europe. This introduction will therefore look at some of these major background issues, as well as highlighting the interaction between youth, family and welfare states developed in some of the papers.

'Youth' may be defined as the phase in the life course situated between childhood and adulthood. Strongly influenced by social and historical time, as are all phases of the life course, youth and transition to adulthood have changed sharply in Europe over the past few decades. Forty or fifty years ago, childhood was followed by an intermediate stage (spent living with one's parents while breaking into the labour market) and a rapid transition to adulthood (leaving home, getting married and having children). This type of 'compactness' at the point of finishing school, getting a job, getting married and becoming a parent has given way to more spacing and greater variability in the sequencing of events. The transition to adulthood has become a long, drawn-out and less predictable process, consisting of transitions in and out of the parental home, marked by an increasing tendency to live alone or to cohabit and with the relationship between partnership and parenthood becoming increasingly blurred. A changing youth labour market has led to young people investing more years in their education, with a greater tendency to be unemployed or to have an insecure contract rather than a 'job for life', which was the norm for their parent's generation.

Heightened diversity and precariousness in the transition to adulthood have led to controversy in the field of social sciences. Some analysts maintain that the transition to adulthood has become non-normative, suggesting a trend towards extreme individualisation of the life course. Better able to construct their biographies, individuals experience multiple and reversible transitions through the life course. This interpretation has been supported by a great deal of research that documents loose links between marriage, parenthood and leaving home, as well as an increased likelihood of mixing employment with schooling and parenthood or returning to further education.

In contrast to arguments about extreme individualisation, other analysts suggest that – despite greater complexity in the sequencing of transition markers – the pathways to adulthood continue to be regulated by

the presence of normative clocks indicating the 'right sequence' of steps toward adult roles. Emphasising this perspective, Schizzerotto's article in this volume represents a forceful analysis of the sequencing of transitions. Relying on longitudinal information and taking into account the entire sequence of events toward adulthood, the author shows that most people's trajectories are still quite typical (finishing school, getting a job, getting settled in a relationship, having a baby) and that their weight is rather stable across cohorts. This does not mean that the transition to adulthood is not increasingly slow and difficult. It merely challenges the idea that there are neither social norms regulating it, nor any standardisation whatsoever of trajectories. Rather than individualisation, then, it is the *constraints* (social, economic and gender-related) experienced by young Europeans that lead to their delaying the transition to adulthood, as more and more young people find it difficult to comply quickly or in time with the social clocks. Leaving home is postponed due to insecure job opportunities, the first partnership and first baby are postponed by women pursuing a career, and so forth. Thus, from this perspective, the overall situation of most young Europeans has worsened: it is now more difficult, at least for the present generation when compared to the previous, to respect the social norms regulating the correct sequence of steps into adulthood. This represents a strong inequality between generations. As Schizzerotto concludes, "generational baggage is one of the major social divides in today's European societies. Currently, young people – far from being more free and independent than their parents in shaping their own life courses – are subjected to more stringent constraints".

The issue of the generational divide is examined in other papers. In an in-depth study of four-generation families in Britain, Julia Brannen shows that the generation of fathers born around the Second World War (the grandfather generation) experienced a compressed pattern of life-course transitions: Marriage, parenthood and entry into the labour market all occurred within very few years. In contrast, the transition to fatherhood for the youngest generation was rather differently scheduled. As Brannen points out, these people achieved a complex of staggered life-course transitions before embarking on parenthood. They lived as a couple for a longer time. Those who stayed in school first completed their education and training. They spent more time on and experienced more difficulty in establishing their career; and they typically became homeowners (home ownership being a common expectation for this generation). In summary, structural circumstances have been important factors in shaping men's entry into adulthood; but changing expectations and behaviour seem to have been equally important. In light of the results of this case study, the issue of 'agency versus structure' seems to be a false one. In examining the transition to adulthood in contemporary Europe, it would seem necessary to exploit agency and cultural change as well as constraints and opportunities created by economic, social and political structures (also see Ruth Lister's paper on the importance of taking into account the interplay between structure and agency).

The debate on intergenerational equity goes beyond these generational differences concerning entry into adulthood. Western societies are confronting a new generational crossroads (Walker 1996). While the 1960s witnessed the classic generational conflict between the recipients of economic security and positions of authority and their successors – middle-aged and young people –, in the 1990s attention shifted to the oldest age group. Now the debate about generations is increasingly focused on the economic, social and moral obligations of middle-aged and young people to the increasing numbers of older people and, *vice versa*, senior citizens' obligations to the young.

As Walter Bien and Olivier Galland both underline in their papers, this new confrontation between age groups must be analysed from two different viewpoints. At the macro level, the issue of intergenerational relations refers to the social contract between generations implicit within the welfare state. In terms of social policy, this contract is based on intergenerational transfers of resources through taxation and social expenditure. At this level, there is no direct exchange between generations; the relationship between the generations being mediated by the state that, on the basis of intergenerational transfers, has institutionalised and encouraged the expectation of reciprocity. However, as Bien shows in his paper, there seems to be widespread acceptance of this reciprocity in that most people think pensioners deserve what they are getting. This gives the social contract its legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens (data from *Eurobarometer* surveys show that a majority of the general public supports the social contract and also believes that it should be improved).

At the micro level, the issue of intergenerational relations refers to direct exchanges and transfers (of services and care as well as financial transfers) between the generations. Most importantly, the microsocial policy contract implies intergenerational care duties, whereby adult children, for various reasons including reciprocity and affection, provide care for their ageing parents. Exchange of resources and communication between close kin belonging to different generations is quite significant in European societies (see Walter Bien's paper on the German case). Also, despite its demonstrably unfair impact on female caregivers, the intergenerational caring relationship remains one of the main sources of care for older people.

As Galland points out, it is also important to understand the interconnections between these two dimensions (macro/micro) of generational relations. For example, revisions made to the macrosocial contract within different welfare regimes have increased the expectations being placed on both intra- and intergenerational carers within the family. Thus, the microsocial contract is being altered as a result of changes in public policy and this has major implications for the micro-level contract. On the other hand, growing inequalities between generations at the macro level (in terms of employment opportunities, standard of living and social transfers, for example) are often compensated for by informal intergenerational transfers. For example, Galland shows that in France the informal distribution that operates within families partially compensates for the younger generation's disadvantage on the labour market. Economic support from parents often allows young people to live in an independent household while they are still completing their education, looking for a 'secure' job or building up a career.

If public policy and family support both play a key role in the situation of young people, then another major issue in both debate and research will be the interconnections between public policies, family relationships and youth conditions in different European countries. A first step in this direction has been to map young people's lives and how they vary across Europe. Several papers in this volume provide valuable insights into young people's lives in Western European countries and record interesting differences involving a broad range of indicators (see Lister, Sgritta, Dumon, Galland, Schizzerotto, Vogel, Iacovou). These include educational attainment, relationship to the labour market and to unpaid and/or voluntary work, access to financial resources, young people's role in formal and informal politics, leaving home, partnership formation and having children. All the authors highlight a long and delayed transition to adulthood, and underline national differences in organising access to adulthood. Two main types of approaches are used to bring out contrasts between countries. The first approach is based on 'broad groupings' of countries: the North-South divide emerges as a clear pattern for some indicators (especially 'leaving home' and 'family formation'), with the four ('Southern') Mediterranean countries often quite distinct from the others. However, the classification into three groupings – a Nordic cluster, a Southern cluster and an intermediate Central European one – also allows some results to fall into broad patterns. The Catholic-Protestant divide emerges less often but is sometimes used to separate Austria and Ireland from the other countries belonging to the middle strip. Looking for patterns between groups of countries, authors tend to underline the following differences in the social organisation of delayed transition to adulthood: a group of Northern countries where young people move quite rapidly into independent housing, an intimate partnership and independent resources (but less rapidly to a stable job), a group of Southern countries where young people experience a very long and dependent post-adolescence before entering directly and quite suddenly into adult life (leaving home, entering into a relationship and having their first child), and a group of intermediate countries where youth is a prolonged period of life defined by a combination of dependency and autonomy.

A second approach is based on a 'country-by-country' approach. Rather than eliminate the particularities of this or that country, country-by-country analysis allows research to highlight countries with particularly high or low values for the variables in question. It also allows for a detailed and balanced overview of all the countries in relation to each other. Thus, Great Britain stands out as a country where the transition to adulthood happens quickly in every way, suggesting underlying norms and practices of rapid entry into adulthood. In contrast, Italy shows the highest levels of prolonged dependency, suggesting a widespread and deep-seated "postponement syndrome", as Giovanni Sgritta calls it. Interestingly, it is the latter case that is constantly highlighted and implicitly regarded as 'negative' in terms of youth conditions in Europe (see Wilfried Dumon); the possible consequences (such as youth poverty) of very precocious transitions, which we might

call the ‘hastening syndrome’, are hardly considered. Nevertheless, it is in this type of approach, based on results provided for each country or for small groups of countries, that a more complex analysis is being developed that points to the institutional and cultural specificities of different countries. It goes beyond comparative work in terms of the North-South divide or broad configurations, to include discussion not only on specific country patterns but also on the internal diversity of the transition process (for an example see Galland’s analysis).

Expanding on the interconnections between the different ‘families of nations’ and youth conditions, some authors examine the relationship between welfare regimes and the transition to adulthood. Giovanni Sgritta identifies the residual role of state intervention and a strong emphasis on family obligations in Southern Europe as two particularly important factors that influence delayed entry to adulthood. Focusing on three main indicators of the ‘welfare mix’ (labour-market opportunities, welfare-state performance and family characteristics), Joachim Vogel identifies three different clusters of nations:

1. a Nordic cluster of advanced welfare states exhibiting high employment rates and generous welfare provisions, weak family ties and low poverty rates (“institutional welfare states”);
2. a Southern cluster characterised by low employment, lower social expenditure and welfare provision, strong families and high poverty rates (“family welfare regimes”); and
3. an intermediate Central European cluster with moderate institutional and family arrangements (“mixed welfare regimes”).

Findings indicate a relation between the welfare mix and the sequence of transition to adulthood. For example, when the labour market and welfare provisions provide opportunities, both partnering and fertility happen earlier, as in the Nordic cluster; while the opposite coping arrangement (postponing partnering) occurs in the South (where the labour market and welfare provisions provide less opportunities). Thus, higher fertility levels for women aged 25–29 seem to be related to the joint effect of job opportunities and welfare arrangements (subsidised child-care facilities and paid maternal leave), because all three are in place where fertility levels are higher.

From a policy perspective, the findings emphasise the combined responsibility of three main institutions – labour market, welfare state and family – in shaping youth conditions and the transition to adulthood. Conclusions therefore remind us that it is important to analyse the possible consequences for young people of the ongoing destabilisation of the labour market (flexibility, insecurity, etc.), of the restructuring of welfare arrangements and of family change (divorce, living as a single, short-term partnerships, etc.). In other words, research has not only to continue to map differences in young people’s lives across Europe and how they relate to different institutional constraints, but also to keep pace with the ongoing national and regional changes in employment, welfare performance and family patterns. As Joachim Vogel clearly shows in his article, institutions and welfare regimes are constantly evolving; and this must be taken into account to understand the social and economic factors that either accelerate or slow down the passage to adulthood.

Finally, from a research perspective, the challenges identified by the papers in this volume are multiple. Three seem to be of particular relevance:

- ▶ First, the need to use longitudinal as well as cross-sectional data in order to analyse the sequencing of transitions to adulthood (Schizzerotto).
- ▶ Second, the importance of understanding the interplay between agency and structural factors in the transition to adulthood.
- ▶ Third, the concern about developing comparative research in varied ways and with methodological precautions (a challenge which Maria Iacovou carefully analyses in her paper).

Problems in inter-country analysis include presentational difficulties (how to present data on 15 countries) and methodological issues (how to weight observations, since weighted averages will inevitably be skewed towards larger countries; and how to select a model for analysis). There are also difficulties in interpretation (how to draw meaning from the results of comparative research). In summary, there remains an important and complex research agenda.

Reference

Walker, Alan (ed.) (1996): The new generational contract. London: UCL Press.

The Seminar Topic and its Link to the EU Social Report 2001

CONSTANTINOS FOTAKIS

Introduction

Before I start, please let me express my own personal thanks to all those who worked for the preparation of this event and particularly to our Italian hosts and the Observatory for the organisation of this annual seminar in Milan. I think all the necessary conditions are present for an interesting and fruitful debate.

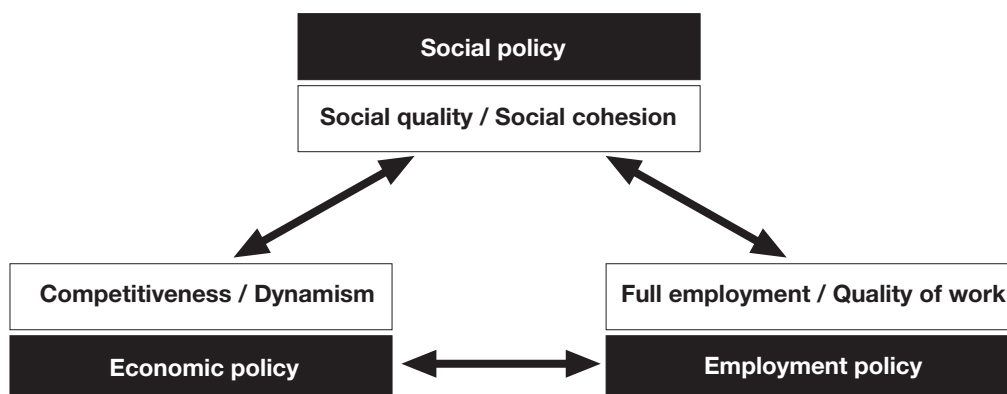
It is slowly becoming an institutional event that the annual seminar of the Observatory opens with a presentation of the Social Situation Report. However, over this last year there has been more substantial progress in our co-operation. As agreed in our last two meetings in Brussels, we have taken practical steps from both sides to reinforce the involvement of the Observatory as a contributor to the Social Situation Report. I am confident that the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family, as is its new official name, will respond to the challenge of this new enlarged and more operational role in relation to the monitoring of the social situation.

Our joint task within this context is of particular importance. We should not only aim towards a holistic view of population and social conditions, we should also develop a prospective view of social developments which are of clear importance to policy-makers.

Last year, in the 2000 Social Report, the analysis of social trends, in particular demographic trends of ageing and changing household structures, pointed to an increasing demand for social services over the coming years. However, the report also identified encouraging trends in social participation as an opportunity for developing the response to the needs of tomorrow.

This year, the focus of the second report are the main social trends in relation to the quality of European citizens' lives and the related challenges for social policy. The adoption of the Social Policy Agenda at Nice in December 2000 confirmed the fundamental role of social policy in the Union's overall policy framework to manage structural change and contain undesirable social consequences. The promotion of synergies between economic, employment and social policies was acknowledged as a prerequisite for strengthening the European economy and its social model.

Figure 1: The policy triangle



Furthermore, it pinpointed the promotion of quality in all areas of social and employment policy as a driving force behind a thriving economy with more and better jobs and an inclusive society.

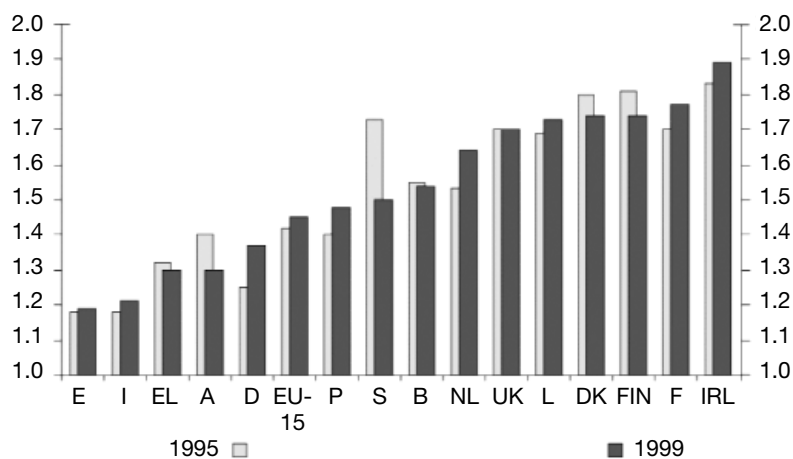
Therefore, by analysing social trends as well as their interplay with the living standards of EU citizens, this second report contributes to a better understanding of the impact of social trends on the economy and society as whole, which serves as a useful basis for designing adequate and efficient policy responses for the Union.

The 2001 Report begins with a brief presentation of the main social trends and identifies the various issues and challenges for policy-makers. This is supported in the following section by a more factual discussion of the main social developments. Analysis and research, both quantitative and qualitative, are presented on four key areas – population developments, living conditions, income distribution and social participation – giving particular attention to the issue of the relationship with the quality of citizens' lives. In the following paragraphs, I shall present a selection of the key findings in each chapter.

Population

With regards to population, the Report shows that life expectancy and, more importantly, disability-free life expectancy, continues to rise. Women can now expect to live for 74 years without any severe disability and men 69 years.

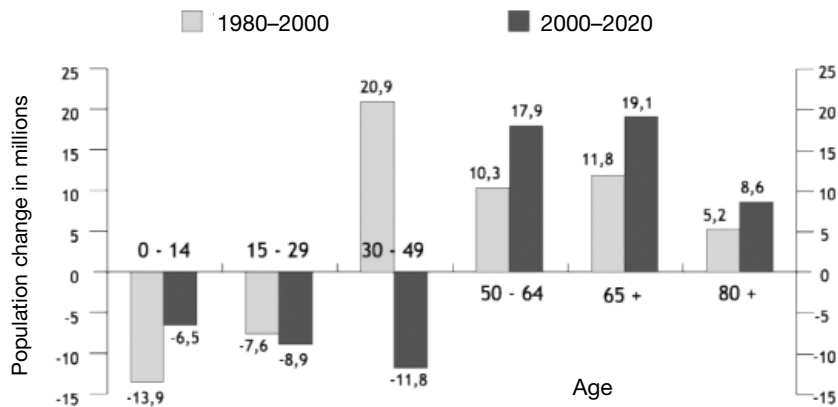
Figure 2: Fertility in the EU Member States



Source: Eurostat – Demographic Statistics

At the other end of life, fertility levels are no longer falling to the extent they were just a few years ago, but in most Member States they have remained at very low levels.

Figure 3: Changing demographic structure in the EU



Source: Eurostat – Demographic Statistics

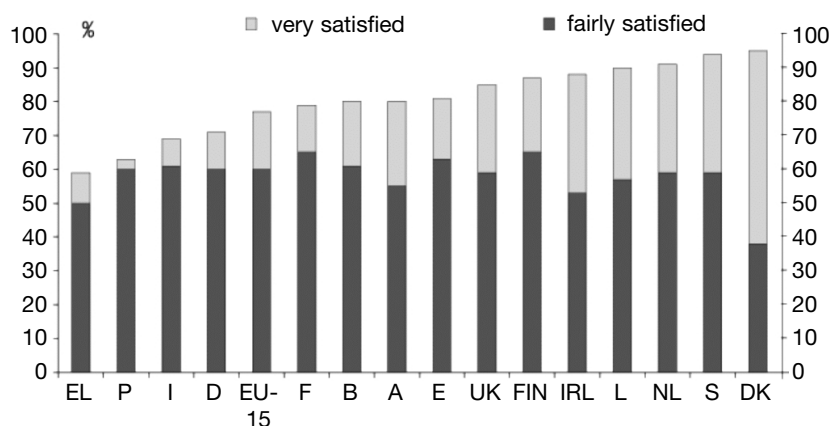
As a consequence, European societies are experiencing accelerated ageing. Over the next 15 years, the number of very old (80+) Europeans will increase by 50% while the younger cohort of 0–24-year-olds will drop about 7%.

Perhaps, the most crucial fallout from ageing is the fact that Europe is faced with the prospect of an ageing and shrinking workforce. Over the next 15 years, the main group (25–54) of the working age population will decrease around 3% while the age group 55–64 will experience an increase of nearly 20%.

The number of households and families is increasing while their average size is getting smaller (2.4 people per household in 1999, as compared to 2.8 in 1981). At the same time, households are changing more frequently than they did before as an effect of growing rates of family break-ups combined with the trend towards de-institutionalisation of family life (fewer marriages, more unmarried unions, more extra-marital births).

Living Conditions

Figure 4: Satisfaction with life in general



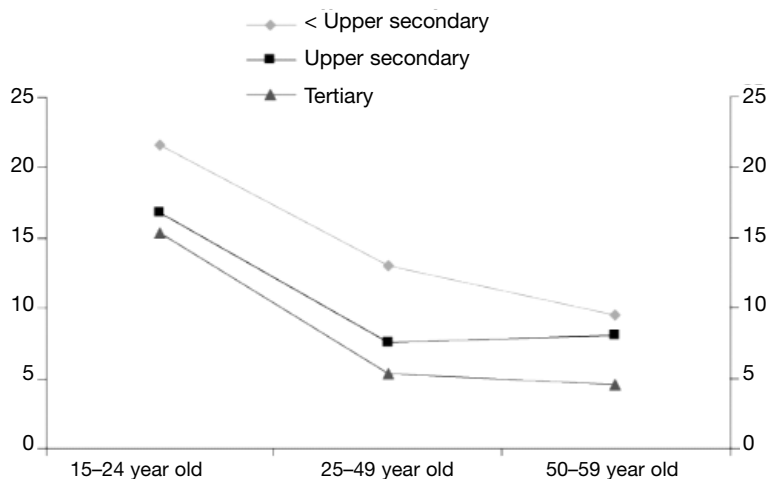
Source: Eurobarometer 53 – 2000

On living conditions, the Report stresses the impressive **level of satisfaction** among Europeans: 83% declare themselves to be satisfied with their health, 77% with their life in general, and 67% with their income.

Health is an absolute priority for Europeans. In their ranking of the main determinants of their quality of life they put health before income and place family life as a close third priority.

Education is another important factor in life quality, one which impacts not just on employment and income but also on health and social participation. It is therefore of great consequence that levels of educational attainment have been doubled over the last 30 years.

Figure 5: Unemployment rate per age group and educational level



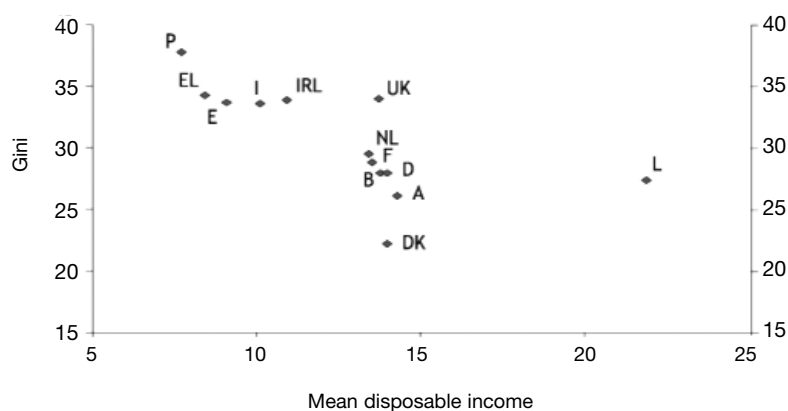
Source: Eurostat – LFS 1999

Despite increasing individualisation and a greater volatility of marriage, the **family** remains a pivotal and treasured factor of European social life. While attaching **priority to work**, a majority of Europeans would like to find more time for family activities.

Income Distribution

Examining income distribution, the Report finds that **income differences in the EU are still large**, both within and between Member States. Moreover, Member States with lower average incomes tend to have greater **income inequalities**.

Figure 6: Income inequality vs. GDP per capita



Source: Eurostat – ECHP 1996

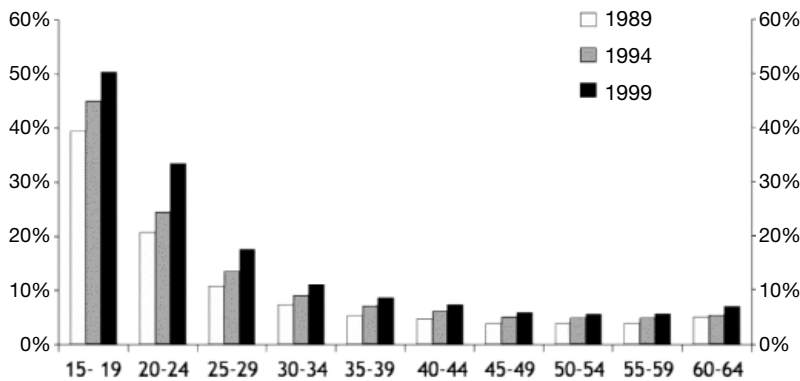
The report reveals that 80% of Europeans agree that income differences are too high and that “large differences in income are not good for society”. And a majority thinks that governments should address the problem.

Among low-income groups, single parent families report the greatest difficulties in terms of making ends meet.

Social Participation

Part-time employment and fixed-term contracts are now a common structural characteristic of employment in the EU. The share of part-time employment has increased from 14% of all employment in 1990 to 17% in 1998.

Figure 7: Proportion of temporary contracts in EU

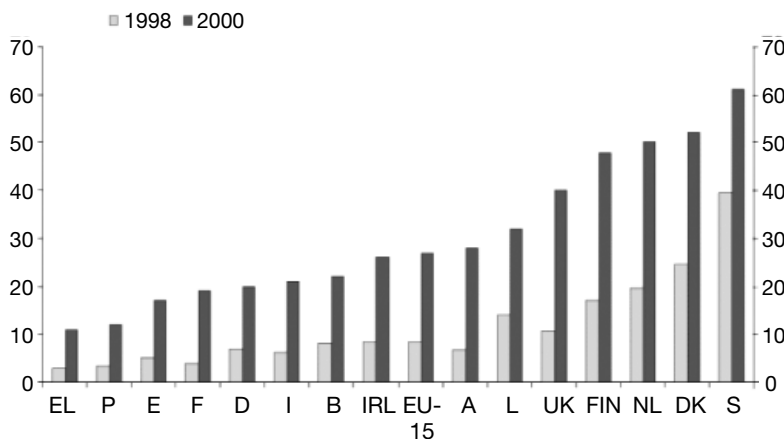


Source: Eurostat – European Union Labour Force Survey

While possibilities for women to participate in society on equal terms have been greatly improved, marked inequalities in gender representation are still prevalent in economic and political life. In the national parliamentary bodies, only one seat out of five is occupied by a woman.

As for the e-divide or digital divide, the situation may be improving but big differences remain in the ability to participate in the e-society through Internet access, both within and between Member States.

Figure 8: Internet penetration in the EU Member States



Source: Eurobarometer

The Report also emphasises that the trust of European citizens in central authorities is surprisingly low (40%).

Some Implications for Policy

In its assessment of the policy implications for the future, the Report identifies that achieving sustainable economic growth and full employment amid a successful transition to a knowledge-based Europe will require that scarce human resources are treated with much more care than in the past. This conclusion gives new importance to social policy.

The current inequalities in income distribution, education and health represent a barrier to people participating in a knowledge-based society to their full potential. The growing availability of knowledge combined with improved individual capabilities for processing and sharing information, is raising the expectations of citizens – there is a growing tendency among people to expect tailor-made, customised responses. In terms of meeting these demands, technological progress and new organisations of production have provided the opportunities to achieve a higher degree of customisation. This shift to user-oriented approaches has been achieved with success in some sectors, mainly those facing globalisation and tough competition.

Increasing individualisation and the spread of customisation are interrelated processes. Ongoing interactions between user and provider, whether in the market place or when accessing public institutions, are necessary for achieving efficient and equitable outcomes whilst at the same time ensuring a guarantee of quality.

These developments have a huge potential for improving the individual's capability of assessing and expressing his/her individual needs and expectations. This opportunity is already being seized by many people of younger age, particularly those with better education and higher incomes. Social policies must ensure that those disadvantaged groups with lower incomes or lower levels of education are not left to lag behind and that everyone has the opportunity to participate to their full potential in social and economic life.

Statistical Portraits

A few words now on the statistical portraits included in the report. Given the important developments in the last year on social indicators it is worth drawing attention to this section of the Report. The section presents a series of statistical portraits that address a range of social-policy concerns for the European Union.

Virtually all the main social policy domains are covered: education, employment, migration, social cohesion, social protection, gender equality and health.

Since last year, work on social indicators at EU level has made considerable progress. Since spring 2001, the Commission has presented an Annual Synthesis Report to the spring European Summits, which monitors Europe's progress in pursuing its medium and long-term objectives of becoming "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with better jobs and greater social cohesion". Subsequently, the Social Protection Committee has set up a subgroup comprising representatives from the Member States to review these social cohesion indicators and make recommendations by the end of this year.

The key social indicators presented in this Report, developed in close co-operation with Eurostat, necessarily cover issues which are of direct concern for the Annual Synthesis Report and the Social Protection Committee subgroup on indicators. The intention is to ensure that the indicators in the Social Situation Report will benefit from the expert discussions taking place and remain in line with the forthcoming recommendations. This is already the case with some of the indicators of this year's Report and those used in the spring 2001 Synthesis Report.

This year's Report includes 20 statistical portraits, five more than last year. Two of these provide contextual information, one on population, households and families, the other on the economic situation. The other three new portraits cover (i) migration and asylum, (ii) lifelong learning, and (iii) jobless households and low wages. Each portrait is built around a selected key indicator. Together, the set of indicators provides not only a snapshot of today's social situation but also a basic instrument for monitoring and comparing progress in the social field among the 15 Member States.

Figure 9: List of key social indicators

Domain	Statistical Portrait	Corresponding key indicator
Economy	1 Economic situation	
Demography	2 Population, households and families	
	3 Ageing of the population	Old age dependency ratio
	4 Migration and asylum	Net migration rate
Education	5 Education outcomes	% of the population aged 18–24 having left education with low qualifications
	6 Lifelong learning	% of the population aged 25–64 receiving education/training
Employment	7 Employment	Employment rate of 15–64 year olds
	8 Employment of older workers	Employment rate of 55–64 year olds
	9 Unemployment	Unemployment rate
	10 Youth unemployment	Youth unemployment/population ratio
	11 Long-term unemployment	Long-term unemployment rate
Social protection	12 Social protection	Social protection expenditure as a % of GDP expenditure
	13 Old age benefits	Old age/survivors benefits as a % of total social benefits
Income and poverty	14 Income distribution	Income distribution ratio (share ratio S80/S20)
	15 Low-income households	% of the population with an income less than 60% of the national median
	16 Jobless households and low wages	Share of households in which no member is in employment among all households in which at least one person is active
Gender equality	17 Female employment	Female employment rate of 15–64 year olds
	18 Earnings of men and women	Average earnings of women as a % of men's
Health and safety	19 Life and health expectancies	Life expectancy (without disability) at birth
	20 Accidents	Incidence rate of working accidents

Note: No key indicator has been chosen for either of the contextual statistical portraits (numbered 1 and 2)

The 2002 Social Report

Before I close my presentation, I would like to say a few words about the planning of the next Report in 2002. While retaining a similar structure, next year's edition will opt for a new balance between the overview of the social situation and the development of specific thematic issues that are of growing importance in the context of the European social policy agenda.

The 2002 edition of the Social Situation Report will pay particular attention to *population movements and the issue of mobility*. Another novelty will be a chapter on recent *social protection reform*. Both of these issues have grown in importance over the last decade due to changes in the economic and social environment. Both of them are also linked with several important policy issues on the EU agenda such as employment, migration, socio-economic sustainability, cohesion and enlargement. In addition, the third Report will contain some selected social data for the 13 applicant countries within the statistical annex.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the huge potential for contribution of the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family Matters when discussing and preparing the Report each year. The wide range of experience of all of you as experts in the socio-economic field and your potential for contribution in terms of testing our findings, being aware of the latest relevant policy developments in the national context and the relevant research bibliographies is extremely precious to us. I should not forget to underline your contribution for the promotion and dissemination of this year's Report and in particular the successful organisation of the presentation of the Report in Vienna earlier this year. I hope that I can count on your continued support in the years ahead.

Models of Living together and Patterns of Exchange between Generations in Europe

Changing Family and Generational Patterns: A Comparative Assessment of Fatherhood

JULIA BRANNEN

According to many commentators fatherhood is in crisis, “shrinking at both ends, with fewer men entering it and more men leaving it than in past generations” (Jensen 1998), while others see this as a wider crisis of masculinity. While some have viewed the marginalisation of fatherhood as a moral issue, others see it as mainly structural. In a provocatively titled article in which the authors as a father and son pose the question “What are children for?”, Taylor and Taylor (2001) make the case that it is problematic for fathers of today to pass on moral codes their to children including a craft or a profession. Moreover, in so far as they may seek to pass on values, Taylor and Taylor argue that these are overlaid by the values of consumerism which lead to a narrow definition of self-fulfilment (p. 14). Moreover, the changing experience of time in late modern society – as captured by the concept of the ‘extended present’ (Nowotny 1994) – is said to make looking to the future, which the process of value transmission implies, highly problematic.

In contrast, John Gillis (2000) argues that the marginalisation of fatherhood over time is structural: that we must look beyond the family, in particular to the “current restructuring of global capitalist economy to understand it” (p. 257). Gillis charts the demise of authority and prestige of patriarchs during the industrial revolution in which men’s work was removed from the household and citizenship took the place of fatherhood. “By the end of the 19th century, middle class fatherhood had become a matter of evenings, weekends and certain calendared occasions” (p. 230). Gillis goes on to argue that the trend towards companionate marriage and women’s feminisation in the home in the post World War II period also served to weaken fatherhood so that men’s link to their children became mediated largely through their wives. However, in the late modern era – from 1970s onwards, Gillis argues that what has emerged as “the crisis of the breadwinner father” cannot be separated from the restructuring of the capitalist economy on a globalised scale, weakening the ability of working class men to fulfil their role as breadwinners. He argues that stagnant and falling wages, unemployment and the demise of traditional types of male occupation have led to the loss of many men’s jobs while many new types of employment tended to attract women’s labour. Such interpretations chime with those of others. For example, Bauman (1998) argues that the work ethic has declined and has been replaced by the aesthetics of consumption. A consequence of these trends is that both parents need to earn an income. Another is the postponement of childbearing and for some it is rejection altogether, as birth rates have fallen and the childlessness rate has risen to pre-industrial levels. Gillis also comments on the rise in standards of motherhood which have occurred even as the basis for good fatherhood has diminished.

In this article I shall conceptualise fatherhood as a set of practices (Morgan 1999) and I shall suggest that the enactment or practice of fathering implies agency and takes place in a structural context. Agency can moreover be conceptualised as moral as well as practical in the sense that fathers bring to bear ethical concerns in their family practices – in determining what they consider to be ‘the proper thing to do’ with respect to parenting (Finch 1989). They may also engage in other forms of intergenerational transmission notably of material resources (Kohli 1999). At the same time, structures of employment and men’s gendered expectations with respect to the domestic division of labour shape the contexts and opportunities available to fathers and form the conditions for the negotiation of fatherhood ‘rationalities’ – the ways in which fathers account for the adoption of or exemption from particular practices.

Support for the thesis that fathers continue to interpret their roles in traditional ways even despite structural change comes from a major recent UK study of fathers of teenage and older children in the North of England. Charlie Lewis and his colleagues (Warin et al. 1999) found that fathers’ interpretation of their roles is still relatively ‘traditional’ in terms of breadwinning or providing; they report that breadwinning was seen by all family members as a defining feature of fatherhood. Moreover they suggest that fatherhood was not a matter for explicit negotiation: Fathers were expected to maximise their earning potential even though this limited their participation in family life. Family support for the provider model came particularly from teen-

age children who wanted their fathers not only to 'be there' for them but also to 'come up with the goods'. By contrast, mothers were assumed to have better parenting skills (Warin et al. 1999: 42). Yet, in a recent study of rather younger children in London, all on the point of transferring to secondary school, children were rather less committed to a normative view that prioritised motherhood over fatherhood. Rather, they considered that fatherhood ought, normatively speaking, to be no different from motherhood in terms of activities they performed with or for children. Children also viewed their own futures rather differently from the traditional male breadwinner model, referring to the ideal of part-time work for both parents when their children were young (Brannen et al. 2000).

In this paper, I want to pose the question, how does this crisis of fatherhood play out in men's lives over the generations within particular families? If the 'impediments' to fatherhood are structural, then fatherhood should take different forms across the generations where such structural change has occurred. On the other hand, familial values and other resources may be transmitted across the generations and so counter some of the effects of wider structural changes. I shall address these questions via some initial analysis of a small-scale study of 12 four-generation families in which great grandparents, grandparents and current parents of young children were interviewed about their lives in work and care¹. The three kin-related parent generations were born within the following periods: great grandparents were born between 1911 and 1921, grandparents between 1940 and 1948, and parents between 1965 and 1975.

The paper will argue that structural changes especially in male employment reshape men's investment in work and that men attribute meanings to fatherhood as they negotiate – implicitly or explicitly – fatherhood practices. In taking this approach it is also important to note that the study is a story of fatherhood remembered as the two older generations (great grandfathers and grandfathers) reflect upon their past practice of fatherhood from the vantage point of their understandings of fatherhood today, as they witness the fathering of their own sons, and also from the vantage point of (great) grandfatherhood. In this paper it is not possible to do justice to the reflexive nature of these accounts and their interpretation. Nonetheless it is important that the reader bear in mind the context in which the data were generated and how they are being analysed for presentation elsewhere.

In the first part of the paper, I shall examine the men's life histories, in particular the extent of continuity and discontinuity in their occupational statuses in order to review the effects of general historical trends relating to education, employment and the labour market. In the second part of the paper, I shall draw upon men's accounts of their lived lives (Wengraf 2001) in order to examine continuities and discontinuities in patterns of breadwinning and in men's involvement in fatherhood. In the final part of the paper, I shall assess

¹ This study, funded under the ESRC Future of Work Programme was carried out by a team of researchers – Julia Brannen, Peter Moss, Ann Mooney, Emily Gilbert – and is currently being analysed and written up. This paper is based on analysis carried out by the author. An intensive case study approach was adopted, the 'case' being the kinship group consisting of four generations (of which the adult members of three generations were interviewed). We make no claim to the representativeness of our sample and cannot generalise from it. The case study kin groups were theoretically sampled (on the basis of employment characteristics of the grandparent generation). Our aim has been to provide a thorough description of these 12 families, to identify patterns, and to provide theoretical interpretations. Our aim was to find six grandparents where both were employed full time, and a further six where at least one grandparent was not employed full time. We sought to divide the sample according to those grandparents employed, either currently or in the past, in a professional or managerial occupation, and to include an equal proportion who worked, or had worked, in lower status or manual (skilled and unskilled) occupations. Thus we hoped that the case studies would yield families at different ends of the socio-economic spectrum (at least in the grandparent generation). We also sought to ensure that the grandparent generation would be split between those in employment and those outside the labour market, so that we might examine the role of the pivot generation with respect to the twin demands of employment and care. Families were found through an extensive screening exercise of current employees and recently retired employees from several large employers; also via newspaper and public advertisements and through personal contact.

the issue of the transmission of fatherhood with respect to a critical case of intergenerational change (space does not allow for comparative case discussion).

The Study

The in-depth study of 12 four-generation families upon which this paper will draw cannot answer these questions quantitatively; it can only do so at a case level. Moreover, the cases are not in any sense representative. The basis for sampling was to secure a diversity of different employment and occupational statuses among one set of grandparents (the 'pivot' generation who we considered to be 'caught', theoretically speaking, between the care demands of grandchildren and elderly parents) (see note 1). A further criterion related to marital status: We decided to rule out further complexity in the study design by including grandparents who were in the same relationship as when they were bringing up their own children and to include only those in the current generation who were living with the parent of their children. Finally, for resource reasons we could only interview persons living in England (over half the families were geographically dispersed while others were concentrated in the same town or city). These criteria, together with the high degree of control the families were able to exert in offering themselves as research participants and the fact that it was necessary to gain agreement from all relevant members of the multi-generation families, lead to some biases in the sample. For example, the sample excludes families where ties have been highly disrupted, for example by divorce. (Yet as we shall indicate, there was considerable variation in the sample with respect to the amount of contact and in the 'closeness' of family ties.)

Change in Occupations and Occupational Status over Three Generations

Given the period covered by the study – 1911 to late 1990 – we may expect to find enormous changes in men's employment. However while change is indeed evident, so too is continuity.

For the oldest generation of *great grandfathers*, adulthood came early in the life course; until 1922 school-leaving age in the UK was 14 years and until 1947 15 years. While grant-aided places were available for upper secondary education in the pre-war, first World War and inter War years, most young people at the time left school with no qualifications while only 10% gained a professional qualification (Smith 2000). In the 12 study families all but two great grandfathers went straight into work at or shortly after attaining minimum school leaving age. Several served apprenticeships and went into skilled trades in the engineering and manufacturing sectors which were expanding rapidly in the first half of the 20th century. A great grandfather, Frank Peters, born in 1915, was the son of a building worker who experienced unemployment during the Depression. His account gives an idea of the expanding global opportunities in engineering in the pre-war period and the family's response to these opportunities. His maternal grandfather who had been a transport manager (coach and horses) clearly had aspirations for his grandson and encouraged him to take advantage of the 'new jobs' in engineering:

I was there (at school) until I was fourteen (1929). I left there, and I took a job with a building firm in the town... My granddad was living with us at the time, and he was dissatisfied with me working on building sites. It was a sort of a – a dip in the family. And so he negotiated with a company at that time, Baggotts (name changed)... heating engineers, and he got me an apprenticeship with them. And I served an apprenticeship with Lawrences (name changed) until I was twenty-one years old. At twenty-one years old (1936) I was still working round the area, whenever Baggotts had jobs, and I ran into a chap who I'd known years previous, and he was working for an American company, and he was stationed in London. And he said, "Do you want a good job?" and I said, "Yeah, I could do with a better one than I've got." "I'll see what I can do." And he got me a job with this firm, Carrier Engineering Company of Iowa, America. And I joined them, and I became what in those days was called an 'engineer journeyman', where you had to be prepared to journey anywhere regardless... The last job we did in France was on the liner Normandy in Le Havre, and by that time we had improved our status so that instead of

just heating and that sort of thing, we'd gone into what they called in them days high pressure, hard water, steam, compressed airs, and all sorts of things, and we got into all that.

More great grandfathers went into semi-skilled or unskilled work than into skilled work. They worked in jobs which are still common; they include railwayman, postman, miner, taxi driver, builder, small shopkeeper, transport manager, plumber, and salesman. Moreover as the accounts of the six great grandfathers who were interviewed² testify, the Second World War shaped their life course and especially their careers as fathers; several were posted abroad for several years and did not see their children until they were three or four years old. Their employment careers were also affected – for some the effect was beneficial as in the case of a great grandfather, Tom Ashton, who trained as a radio engineer during the War and entered the expanding airline industry when the War ended.

Educational and employment opportunities improved for their sons – *the grandfather generation*, most of whom were born around World War II following which there was a rapid growth in the service industries and the welfare state. By 1947 the minimum school leaving age in Britain had risen to 16; and primary and secondary education was marked by a sharp filtering of educational opportunities at the age of eleven (the '11-plus' examination). In contrast to their own fathers, half of the grandfathers (6/12) stayed on at school to complete upper secondary education and several started their employment careers with educational qualifications, with three attaining a university education. Their entry into the labour market moreover occurred at a time of high employment (1960s). In addition, over much of the post-war period, many of the grandfathers maintained continuous employment records and experienced little unemployment.

The three men who left school having completed upper secondary education, whose own fathers had left school earlier without qualifications, made their way into higher status jobs – for example one became a chemical engineer in a power station while another rose quickly into senior management in a large company; they did so without going to university, that is after completing upper secondary levels qualifications. Three grandfathers who went to university entered public sector professional occupations which were expanding in the post-war period and offered job security and opportunities for advancement (Thompson 1997). However only one of these three men had a father who had been a low-skilled manual worker as other studies have found (Bell 1968). Bill Horton, son of a taxi driver, went to teacher training college and became an art teacher in a state secondary school. It is probably significant that Bill's mother started her employment career as a nurse and later retrained as a teacher while her own son was also following a similar vocation. In two others cases of upward mobility via university education, Jim Hurd, son of a sweetsshop owner/factory fitter, studied chemistry at Cambridge University, became a chemical engineer and joined the gas industry. William Samuels, son of a bank cashier, went to university where he studied psychology and became a university lecturer.

The other six grandfathers in the study had few or no qualifications and left school at the minimum school leaving age (15/16). Three of these men fared worse in the labour market than their own fathers. Patrick Miller, whose father was a transport manager in the civil service, was made redundant on several occasions: his apprenticeship as a toolmaker was broken off by his employer. He then sought work as a salesman, next as a driver, a TV repair engineer, and a sales rep in the food industry and finally he became a driver for a police constabulary. Peter Prentice whose father was a public health inspector was apprenticed as an upholsterer followed by a variety of short-term labouring jobs; he then became a milkman and ended up as a postman; he was also off work for several years because of ill health.

Turning to the current generation of *fathers*, born in the 1970s and entering the workforce in the early 1990s, those whose own fathers had achieved higher status occupations went to university straight from school while only three of their fathers had done so. This reflects the growing trend towards university education in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s rather than upward occupational mobility *per se*. However, while in three cases their fathers had worked in the public sector, the sons went into the private sector, a shift which

² The great grandmothers composed the majority in this generation since they outlive the great grandfathers.

largely reflects the subsequent privatisation of those industries. In contrast, the other six fathers replicated the low occupational status of their fathers. As I shall discuss later, the experiences of several of the current generation of low-skilled workers were markedly different. Several current fathers showed very low commitment to the labour market in contrast to their own fathers whose attitude to work, albeit highly instrumental, was driven by a strong breadwinning work ethic. Moreover in these families, it was the wives who were more committed to the labour market.

Continuity of Occupational Status

Despite these historical changes in the labour market and the growth in educational opportunities, all 12 study families do not exhibit the effects of such change intergenerationally at least in terms of occupational status. Across the 12 families, there are almost as many cases of continuity, as expressed through men’s occupational status, as there are cases of discontinuity. In five of the 12 families, the occupations of the three generations of men are broadly at the same level; in four families the men’s jobs exhibit upward occupational mobility while in two families they are downwardly mobile. In one family there is both upward and downward occupational status.

Table 1: Occupational mobility over the three generations in 12 families

Continuity of occupational status: low-skilled (3)	2 cases of unskilled/semi-skilled 1 case of self-employed family builders
Continuity of occupational status: high-skilled (2)	1 case of senior managers/managing directors 1 case of electrical engineers (middle management level)
Discontinuity of occupational status: high to low (2)	1 case of great grandfather in skilled work whose son and grandson were in semi-skilled work 1 case of downward mobility where the grandson generation (through marriage) is in unskilled work (great grandfather and grandfather were in skilled work)
Discontinuity of occupational status: low to high (4)	2 cases of upward occupational mobility in grandson generation to managerial occupations (great grandfathers and grandfathers in skilled or semi-skilled work) 2 cases of upward mobility in grandfather generation to professional occupations (great grandfathers in manual/clerical work)
Discontinuity of occupational status: low to high to low (1)	Case of a great grandfather who was a skilled manual worker/shopkeeper; a grandfather who was a professional engineer; a father (son in law) who was a hospital porter

Continuity in Occupational Status

Patterns of continuity in the fathers’ occupations cross the social class spectrum. At one extreme, there are the Kents, a Jewish family who continued to be successful in business despite the fact that both great grandfathers were forced to migrate from their countries of origin and as refugees had to rebuild their businesses in a foreign country. All three Kents however started life with considerable material and financial advantages which each generation harnessed for its own benefit and also passed on to the next generation. Largely via private education, the Kent men gained educational qualifications (the grandfather did not go to university), and entered high status occupations. The father in this family is not biologically related (a son in law) and, although his own father was in the diplomatic service, he too, like his father in law, moved into the higher echelons of business while also acquiring his own company (like his father in law and his father in law’s father).

In the middle of the social class spectrum, there is a lineage of builders who continue to develop the family business over the generations and a lineage of electrical engineers. In both cases, although the occupational level of the fathers and sons is the same, the youngest generation avails itself of the greatly increased access to further/higher education which occurred in Britain in the 1990s. At the other end of the spectrum are two families in which all three generations of men worked in low-skilled employment. However, while the occupational status of these generations remains the same, the context of having such a job in the 1990s is very different from the 1960s since employment in manufacturing and manual employment more generally declined dramatically.

Wives' occupational careers and occupational status is a more complicated story, especially since in the two older generations their employment was intermittent, while across all three generations it continued to be shaped by motherhood (Brannen et al. forthcoming). Suffice it to say that, at the lower end of the spectrum, there are cases in which wives moved into jobs with higher occupational status than those of their partners for a period of time; however, none of the women in these families moved into jobs which can be classified as middle class.

Discontinuity in Occupational Status

To turn now to the seven cases of discontinuity in men's occupational status: Four families show upward mobility via the men's jobs: in two cases this occurs in the middle generation of grandfathers, and in two cases in the youngest generation. In all four cases it occurs in the context of the increased educational opportunities during the post-war period. Andrew Masters, the son of a skilled engineer grew up in Yorkshire and followed his father's footsteps into the power station; he studied for a Higher National Diploma on a part-time basis and eventually (post fatherhood) completed his Institute of Chemical Engineers qualification to become a professional engineer. His son, Gerald, went to university straight from school and eventually became a management accountant in a private sector organisation. William Samuels, the son of a bank cashier, similarly went to university after leaving school and became an educational psychologist (post fatherhood) and later on a university lecturer; his son also went to university but did not follow his father's professional career route and set up his own business in record distribution. In all four families, there is also marked upward occupational mobility among the wives. In three cases (all grandmothers) the women retrained *after* they had children – William Samuels' wife took her A levels, went to university and became a senior health service manager; another grandmother, Sally Horton, already with an art qualification, went to teacher training college and retrained as a teacher while Kate Miller went to night school to study for a catering qualification following the break up of her first marriage and she eventually became a catering manager in a police constabulary.

The three remaining cases exhibit features of downward occupational mobility among the men's jobs which, in one case, was balanced by a rise in their wives' occupational status later in the life course. In one case, the step down the ladder occurs in the middle generation – a move from secure, skilled manual work to impermanent semi-skilled employment. While the great grandfather in this family, a son of a printer, trained during the war as a radio engineer which led him to a secure job in the new airline industry in the immediate post-war period, his son did less well at school than his father and entered low-skilled employment, ending up as a window fitter on a self-employed basis. His son repeated his father's educational and occupational career and, following several changes of job, found longer-term employment in a company estimating windows. In a final family, there was both upward and downward occupational mobility. In the middle generation, Jim Hurd, son of a small shopkeeper and sometime manual worker, grew up in a mining community in the North of England, won a scholarship to Cambridge University and became a chemical engineer for a large organisation. His son in law left school at 16 and had a number of low-skilled jobs, most recently as a hospital porter. However, in this family, the move downward was counteracted by the daughter taking a teaching qualification, although she did so after marriage and childbirth.

Fatherhood and Breadwinning over the Generations

Fatherhood fits into the life course of these three generations of men rather differently. The grandparent generation entered fatherhood on average rather younger than fathers in the older and younger generations³. The transition to fatherhood for the youngest generation was rather differently scheduled. By and large they achieved a complex of staggered life course transitions *before* they embarked on fatherhood. They spent longer as part of a couple. Those who stayed on at school first completed their training and education. They spent longer and experienced more difficulty constructing employment careers; and they typically became home owners. Their partners too experienced this life course pattern and, unlike their own mothers, built up considerable economic capital before becoming mothers. In contrast, the generation of fathers born around the Second World War (grandfather generation) experienced a compressed pattern of life course transitions: Marriage, parenthood and entry into the labour market all occurred within a very few years. For the oldest generation of great grandfathers born in the first part of the 20th century who entered fatherhood at the time of World War II, their life course was disrupted by war.

The new generation of fathers differ from their predecessors in other respects. For this generation, marriage was not a necessary precondition for fatherhood. Unlike the generations before them, this generation experienced an extended period of youth with time spent living independently, alone, either with peers or in cohabitation. Some of the present parent generation had yet to marry while others married following the births of their children. By contrast, for the two older generations, marriage was a necessary precondition for parenthood. The parent generation was also different in being the first generation for whom home ownership was a common expectation. Public housing was largely sold off in Britain in the 1990s and private ownership was not only easier to arrange financially but became a central value of family life. The youngest generation also stands in marked contrast to the grandparent generation in facing an uncertain, deregulating labour market during the 1990s while their own fathers entered the world of work in the booming 1960s, a time of full employment.

Yet despite these changes, fatherhood remains closely linked to breadwinning. The practice of men as main breadwinners and mothers as supplementary earners remains the prevailing pattern for all three generations. However, intergenerationally there appears though to be a fall off in men as sole breadwinners. Moreover, in the parent generation, we may see a variety of trends (Table 2).

³ For great grandfathers born between 1911 and 1931, the median age of most of those whose first children were born just before, during or just after World War II, is 27. Moreover, they are equally distributed between those who had a first child 'relatively young', that is at or before the age of 25, and those who had first children at an older age. This generation contrasts with the grandparent generation born between 1940 and 1955; more of this generation entered fatherhood in their early twenties (in nine of the 12 cases, the grandfather generation became fathers 'young', that is before 26 (in one case at 18, with a median age of 24). In contrast to the grandparent generation, in the father generation born between 1960 and 1976, fathers were older at the birth of their first children: eight were 26 or over when their first child was born, with a median age of 26 years.

Table 2: Men and breadwinning in the child-rearing years

	Great grandfathers	Grandfathers	Fathers
Sole breadwinner (most of time)	Maternal great grandfather: 2 Paternal great grandfather: 6	2	0
Main breadwinner (all of time)	Maternal great grandfather: 9 Paternal great grandfather: 4	9	6**
Equal breadwinners (both FT some of time)	– –	1	1
Mother main breadwinner (some of time)	Maternal great grandfather: 1* –	0	1
Both parents not employed (some of time)	– –	0	2
Not known/as yet unclear	– Paternal great grandfather: 3	0	1***

* In this case, the great grandmother was employed full-time after her husband's death and after her children were grown up

** In one case, the mother was employed briefly

*** At interview, the baby had yet to be born

The great grandfather generation was most likely to have maintained *sole* breadwinner status throughout the child-rearing years. However, for a small part of the life course their wives adopted a secondary earner role typically through highly intermittent, part-time 'little jobs' which were low skilled. By contrast, only two grandfathers were sole breadwinners throughout the majority of the child-rearing years (in both cases the mothers worked for a very short time, in one case when her husband was unexpectedly made redundant but only until he had found another job within a couple of months). Nine of the 12 grandparent households maintained a pattern of main breadwinning while their wives worked part-time. However, in contrast to the great grandmothers, most of these grandmothers increased their employment commitment over time and eventually, when their children were teenagers or older, resumed employment full-time.

None of the father generation was a sole breadwinner on a consistent basis but being the main breadwinner was still the most common pattern. Several mothers continued in their pre-motherhood occupations following the birth of first children, often initially returning full-time after the first child (the maternity leave regulation) but then reducing their hours to part-time. Mothers in higher status jobs acquired their education and training before embarking on motherhood, in contrast to the grandmothers. In four cases, mothers resigned their jobs when they became pregnant and had already spent substantial periods outside the labour market. However, it is still early days since this generation has been in employment for a much shorter period of the life course than the two older generations.

In contrast to the two older generations, there is most variation among the youngest generation with several instances of 'alternative' ways of organising parenthood. A mother of two young children was the sole breadwinner while her low-qualified male partner looked after the baby and then returned to education. In

two further cases, both parents who have no qualifications and little in the way of employment records embarked on parenthood while being on the dole. Despite the increasing legitimacy accorded to the dual earner lifestyle and current public policy emphasis on the work ethic for both mothers and fathers, there is only one such case of where both parents were in full-time employment throughout their two children's early childhood. There is one other case – in the grandparent generation – where the couple started out as highly traditional when their children were born, with the father in full-time employment and working on the side to bring in extra money. By the late 1960s (when mothers' employment in Britain began to grow) and by the time the children started school, the couple became a dual career couple: the mother re-entered education, acquired a university degree and began a full-time career in hospital management.

While the employment of the current generation of fathers and mothers may still be typified in terms of main and secondary earners, mothers' earnings and employment prospects may prove more significant to their households in the longer term than those of their mothers and grandmothers. Today's generation of mothers have built up considerable economic capital in the years preceding parenthood, enabling them to take advantage of their legal right to maternity leave. They also have built up skills and competences which may assist them in reconciling motherhood and employment. Such resource investment will enable both fathers and mothers to share breadwinning more equitably in the future. However, as our study shows, a transformative model of fatherhood (and motherhood) is evident only among young men with little education, training and employment experience. Moreover their embrace of 'hands on fatherhood' occurs in the context of a labour market which offers few opportunities for unskilled manual jobs which they would have entered had they been born in an earlier decade.

Models of Fatherhood over the Generations

Men's negotiation of the breadwinner/provider role is a key dimension which shapes the practice of fatherhood. We may plot household breadwinning – the 'structural axis' – against men's interpretations of fatherhood – the 'agency axis'. These interpretations are based upon an analysis of men's retrospective accounts told from current vantage points⁴; they are also based upon the accounts of their wives and their now adult children. By plotting these two dimensions one against the other we may generate a typology of fatherhood across the generations (Figure 1). The distribution of cases occurs in only three of the four quadrants; in this study there are no cases of highly involved fathers who are also sole breadwinners.

Fatherhood across the generations comes in the following varieties. First, there are the 'work-focused' fathers, signifying men's overriding commitment to the labour market which constrained the extent to which they could be involved in fatherhood and family life. These men's life stories focused disproportionately on their work while their wives and children testified to their lack of involvement in family life. This group includes two subgroups. First there are (a) the 'careerist fathers' from the current father generation and the middle generation of grandfathers. These middle-class men were in high status jobs which offered high financial and high intrinsic rewards. The current generation of careerist fathers, in particular, put in long hours in the workplace (Brannen et al. 1997), with the result that they lost out on family life. Some clearly resented the long hours and wanted to reduce their work time but were fearful of the consequences for their careers. It may be that, in Connell's terms, the dominant fatherhood model among higher-status workers is characteristic of masculinities that are complicit with the hegemonic project (Connell 1995). On the other hand, it may be that among middle-class fathers (and some middle-class mothers) the project of the family is but a rationale for the project of the self (Grey 1994).

In this quadrant there is a second group of working-class men: (b) the 'family providers'. They were in low-skilled jobs which offered low financial and few intrinsic rewards. In order to gain a decent wage, they

⁴ While using the term 'involvement', the intention is not to assess men's actual involvement in fatherhood – either qualitatively or quantitatively. Rather I have sought to typify men's involvement in terms of their own retrospective assessments over the life course and also on the basis of what their wives and children say.

had little option but to work long hours. Their life stories tended, however, to take the expectation of long hours in the workplace as normative. Only in retrospect and when they were confronted with an alternative fatherhood model did their absence from family life become apparent (see, for example, the critical case discussed below).

In the next quadrant, there are the ‘family men’, all from the two older generations, men who were the main breadwinners but who were ‘very present’ in the home at the end of the standard working day. The men’s life stories were all about ‘being there’ for their families – *not* going to the pub and *not* going out with the lads. Some men reported doing their share of household and care work. The same quadrant contains a second group of current fathers – the ‘child-oriented fathers’ who, like the ‘family men’, were main breadwinners. Their accounts gave priority to their relationships with their children. They talked about making a ‘choice’ at particular points in their employment careers to be less work-focused and more child centred. Significantly both groups were in higher-status jobs which commanded decent wages and which did not demand overtime. There are clear generational differences here. The ‘family men’ are from the two older generations; as fathers they were in employment when working the standard working day was commonplace, that is before the arrival of the ‘long hours culture’ which characterises the conditions of many present-day higher-status workers. The ‘child-oriented fathers’ were all current fathers bar one.

In the third quadrant, there are the ‘hands on’ fathers, all four from the current generation whose involvement in fatherhood was high and who were not main or sole breadwinners in their households. One was a dual earner household (both parents in full-time employment and sharing the children’s care). The other three men embraced an active caring identity but resisted a worker identity. In their view, full-time fatherhood was a more attractive option than low-skilled work.

This typology of fatherhood provides for an examination of continuity and change within families. It can also address the issue of intergenerational transmission: the extent to which sons respond to the models of fatherhood provided by their own fathers. There were instances where fathers and sons adopted the same model of fatherhood. There were instances where the succeeding generation adopted a more traditional fatherhood model. There were cases where the current generation adopted a transformative model.

Figure 1: Typology of fatherhood

Structural	
Main/sole breadwinner	
<p><i>‘Family men’</i> (5) (2 great grandfathers and 3 grandfathers)</p> <p><i>‘Concerned fathers’</i> (4) (3 fathers and 1 grandfather)</p>	<p><i>Absent fathers</i> (12)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>‘Career men’</i> (3 fathers and 2 grandfathers) • <i>‘Family providers’</i> (1 great grandfather and 3 grandfathers)
<p>Agency: high involvement in fatherhood</p> <p><i>‘Hands on fathers’</i> (4) (4 fathers)</p>	<p>Low involvement in fatherhood</p> <p>–</p>
Not main/sole breadwinner	

NB: In addition, two cases move between types – one from sole breadwinner to joint breadwinner; one from main breadwinner to joint breadwinner; one case is excluded since the child was not yet born. Only four paternal great grandfathers were alive and/or available to be interviewed.

Fatherhood Transmission: From Work-focused Father to new Father – A Case of Innovation

The final section of the paper is devoted to a discussion of a critical case of transformation across the family generations – from ‘work-focused’ to ‘hands on’ father. The case illustrates the complex forces of both structure and agency.

The lives of all the members of the Prentice family are marked by low-skilled work; they received no education beyond official school leaving age. None took any public examinations while they were at school. There are strong ambivalences between the two older generations which are expressed in disrupted social relationships (both in terms of contact and affect). However, the younger generation, as represented by Nicholas Prentice and his family of procreation, seems to act as a force for innovation and renewal. In this kin group, fatherhood has undergone dramatic transformation. The great grandfather and grandfather were both traditional ‘family providers’ who participated little in bringing up their children. The current father is by contrast ‘a hands on father’. Nicholas’ transition into fatherhood occurs outside the context of paid employment; a ‘teenage father’ at 18, he had never been employed in the formal labour market. His account of fatherhood is all about learning to be a parent and to share parenting with his wife in the context of financial dependence upon the state. It is also a remarkable tribute to teenage parents who ‘make a go’ of their relationship with few material resources (apart from state benefit), and rather limited experience of life.

Jack Prentice (great grandfather) was the sole provider in his family of five children. He claims to remember little about family life when his five children were young. His rationalisation for ‘not being there’ centres on the long hours he worked and being ‘too tired’ when he got home at night from his job as a coalman. (Later as his children got older he also took on an evening job working in a children’s play centre.) It is also relevant to note that Jack and his wife lived with his wife’s parents in very overcrowded conditions in inner London.

Peter (grandfather), his son in law, also had five children and started married life housing near his wife’s family in North London. He worked first as an upholsterer but as his family got larger he moved on to a range of semi-/unskilled jobs. He was consistently the sole breadwinner. Asked about his involvement in fatherhood, he asserts that he was ‘there’. Indeed, there is little evidence that Peter neglected his family by spending time ‘down the pub’ or on other pursuits. Rather Peter’s rationale for being a not very involved father centres on the prevailing attitudes of the time – when it was commonplace for men to be the main breadwinners: *It was that era wannit? ... You ‘ad to earn the wage... that was my job.* He considered child care to be a gender-specific activity as expressed in terms of his self-portrait of ‘not being a nappy man’. The marginal role that Peter played in bringing up their five children is a significant theme in his wife’s account, although Peter does not think of himself in that way. Rather, he thinks that his children consider him to have been a ‘good father’, portraying himself as a gentle father who did not beat his children and who *always backed ‘em, whatever they wanted to do. I’ve never not, y’know.* His son, Nicholas, describes being closest to his father; he does not express any criticism of either parent for his very disrupted childhood in terms of financial provision, education and housing. (Peter changed jobs and occupations many times; he experienced extended time off work because of sickness; the family also moved dozens of times within London and then later, after they moved from London to South West England on two separate occasions, where they eventually settled, though they had no connections in the area.)

On their second return to the rural South West, and having given up on going to school, Nicholas, aged 17, the third son in the family, met up with a girl he had met the last time they had lived in the countryside. Sharon was herself a ward of court at the time having been taken into care. With the agreement of the social worker she moved into the busy Prentice household to live with Nicholas. Within a year, Sharon became pregnant; Nicholas was 18 and had yet to enter the labour market. In fact neither took a job until the eldest of their two children was five years old (when changes in public policy propelled Nicholas into work). Despite the situation and despite his own different experience of fatherhood, Nicholas’ father is full of praise in the interview for his son and his wife for the way they have shared the care of their two children while being both at home with them. Moreover, Peter identifies the interpersonal, negotiative processes involved:

They kinda work at it, y'know. They actually work... they discuss with one another, they won't do something without the other's (unclear) ... But they would talk about it, whereas we never did... Or never 'ad the opportunity, or... He contrasts this relationship with his own formative experience: I was brought up to think the man makes the decisions... Dad was the man – I know my mum worked but 'e was the breadwinner, 'e was the one that made the decisions. On the other hand, Peter is reluctant to let go entirely of the notion of male privilege and does not want to acknowledge that his son might not have the 'final say' in the relationship: I say 'e won't – 'ell 'ave the final say, if it was to come, if it came to a vote and it was y'know, yeah. 'e would kinda, y'know.

Nicholas had not expected to become a father at 18 even though he and his then girlfriend were living together. He describes being in a state of 'shock' for quite some time *just suddenly becoming a father in one whole day*. However, he quickly faced up to the new situation and set about learning to be a parent. He described reading up on parenthood and going to antenatal classes. The couple was soon granted a council house a stone's throw from his parents. This first move Nicholas described as quite a big step as he had always been with his parents and had not had much freedom.

In contrast to his father and his grandfather, Nicholas had no strong desire or expectation to be a breadwinner. Indeed his preference was to be the main carer and for his wife to be the main earner: *I wanted to like you know, do all the looking after, I wanted to change all the nappies and I just felt that if I was there during the day, we could both pull our weight*. After the baby was born he and his partner shared the care on a full-time basis for two years – *just split the whole thing down the middle*. They worked *as a team – it's not like one of us takes charge*. His involvement with his children was considerable as was evident during the fieldwork visit. Nicholas clearly felt proud of having been able to be so actively involved in bringing up his children: *They are my life*. His project for his children is to keep them children as long as possible and to encourage them to develop their imagination (just as he was developing his own). Giving his children a rural childhood is also part of this project (Nicholas spent his early childhood in the inner city).

It is significant that Nicholas' wife got a job first; in the interview she appeared much more interested in developing an employment career than Nicholas. With both of them now working, forced into the labour market by new government policy as well as by the difficulty of managing to bring up two children on state benefit, they are juggling employment with parenthood. It was clear that Nicholas was finding this particularly hard; he described his employer as unsympathetic to giving him time off when one of the children was sick. Nicholas also resented working the hours required in his supermarket job (a supervisor in customer complaints working 38 hours a week) and having to do overtime.

Not very surprisingly, Nicholas' account focused very little on issues to do with breadwinning since neither he nor Sharon had any labour market experience. Rather his account was about coming to terms with his own disrupted education, childhood and adolescence and about his development as a 'person' and learning to be content with himself and his lot. He speaks about achieving a balance between parenthood and their relationship: *It's just about trying to find a balance of happiness with them and ourselves and what we're doing and where we are going... it's something to have to work at*. Asked how he managed to achieve that 'balance', Nicholas was very reflective about the psychological processes involved: *...by understanding yourself and how you feel about what you're doing... just trying not to bottle things up... just be yourself but at a level where you don't take your frustrations out on other people. You deal with them, keep level-headed*. Getting involved in art, together with his earlier involvement in a pop group (with his brothers), was a crucial part of Nicholas' self exploration. Reflecting on his artistic endeavours and interests, he notes: *I just wanted to see what I could do, what I could create... just like a natural expression of the movement of my arm or how I felt, and how I projected my feelings, and then through being interested in what I was doing I became interested in others' work as well and understanding what they were doing and why they did it and how they painted*.

There is little evidence of transmission of fathering between father and son. If anything, the influence is in the opposite direction as his father, Peter, has clearly changed his own attitudes to parenthood, employment and relationships in the light of seeing how his son and wife were working things out. Like his son, Peter expressed the normative view that both parents should work part-time and share the care of their children, even though he had brought up his own children under very different conditions. There is little evidence either to suggest that Nicholas sought to model his own parenting on his father. Nicholas portrayed his own

father and mother as 'good parents' who were 'level headed'. However, he also says that they lacked the ability to express love. He said: *They were always closed up about how they felt.* Nicholas seems determined to be a very different sort of parent in this respect also. Asked what or who has most influenced his parenting, he told a story of his own journey to self-understanding: *My own life, how I perceived that and, from looking at that, trying to see how I should bring up my own children. Watching other people and seeing how they do it.* On the other hand, Nicholas appeared to be closer to his father than his three brothers. He described helping his father with his upholstery work which his father did 'on the side' while being 'on the sick'. Moreover, Nicholas was happy with the decision of his parents to move out of London to the countryside and intended to bring up his children in these surroundings.

Peter Prentice reported no influence from his own father (who declined to take part in the study) on his own fathering. Even though Peter has been a sole breadwinner like his own father, he did not feel he had been influenced by him. Although initially very surprised by the question, Peter was adamant that he had set out to be a very different kind of father: *My parents were strict. (unclear). And my father's, y'know, whipped me with a belt, y'know.*

This case indicating a dramatic change in fatherhood practice and little intergenerational transmission needs also to be understood structurally. Men's employment has been highly vulnerable to the vagaries of the labour market in respect of low-skilled work. The case demonstrates intergenerational continuities of material disadvantage with little variety or change in men's occupational status over the generations (though the story appears to be a little different in Peter's own family of origin). In the 1990s, structural changes in the labour market affected the labour market transitions of young men like Nicholas who lacked educational qualifications and training. In contrast, the older generations in this family entered the labour market at a time of considerable opportunity for low-skilled manual work. However, by the 1990s, manual unskilled work had become much more difficult to find. Moreover, the numbers of unskilled young men who became fathers in 'settled relationships' and who provided for their children was rapidly falling as the numbers of non-employed lone mothers rose (Holtermann et al. 1998). In this latter respect, Nicholas and Sharon are a deviant case since they have shared the upbringing of their children while living on benefit. The women in this family are also a little different; the great grandmother rose to supervisory/management level in her late post-motherhood years, while Sharon shows a strong commitment to finding a 'better job' (she also has some educational qualifications).

The case demonstrates the exercise of agency. It is a story of innovation especially with respect to the younger generation. Nicholas and Sharon are forging new ways of parenting in the context of disadvantage despite the current public policy climate which considers them deviants. It is a remarkable case. In some families, this story might have been one of lone motherhood and absentee fatherhood.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have identified a variety of models of fatherhood among three generations of men. I have addressed the questions of how far models of fatherhood are shaped by the changing structural circumstances of men's lives and how far men themselves are creative agents of change. I sought to answer this agency-structure questions via some initial analysis of a small-scale study of 12 four-generation families in which great grandparents, grandparents and current parents of young children were interviewed about their lives in work and care. I examined the employment and occupations of the three generations of men and found patterns of both continuity and discontinuity. I identified a shift in the scheduling of fatherhood in the life course of the current generation of fathers. Current fathers sought to achieve a complex of staggered life course transitions *before* they embarked on fatherhood. In contrast, for the generation of fathers born around the Second World War, life course transitions fell thick and fast so that marriage, parenthood and labour-market transitions all occurred within a very few years. Yet despite these structural shifts, fatherhood remains tied to breadwinning and even though women's employment careers have changed over the generations.

To some extent these social constructions and patterns of fatherhood are rooted in the structural features of men's employment, especially so in the cases of those I have termed 'family men', 'careerist men' and 'fami-

ly providers'. Significantly, family men were in higher-status jobs which commanded decent wages; they are from the older generations who, unlike the current generation of higher-status workers and the low-skilled workers in their own generation, were not required to work overtime and so could be more available in time-terms for family life. However, other fathering models reflect cultural change. The child-oriented fathers who prioritised relationships with their children reflect a new cultural meanings around children (Jenks 1996). Some cases reflect a cultural emphasis on gender equity.

New emergent forms of fatherhood are evident in the current father generation. The most transformative version of fatherhood – the 'hands on father' – involved a 'young father' who embraced an active caring identity but resisted a worker identity. This practice was actively negotiated; Nicholas Prentice viewed fatherhood as a positive option and embraced it with creativity and enthusiasm. However, the case also has important structural features. All three generations of men in the Prentice family had no educational qualifications and worked in low-skilled jobs. In respect of the current generation, the decline in low-skilled employment in the 1990s weakened his work ethic and in its stead fatherhood became a meaningful and rewarding occupation. In this situation, the supply of a cultural resource underpinned the agency which Nicholas deployed in responding to the structural constraints of the labour market. Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1997) conceptualise this process with great clarity and thereby suggest how agency and structure work together to give a whole meaning to the 'concept of determination': "...socio-structural components may be found in those decisions and acts apparently most clearly powered by will... the idea that a life trajectory may be determined – or rather, conditioned – much more easily by *the supplying of a resource than by the imposition of a constraint (emphasis not in original)* lends an entirely new content to the concept of determination: one which includes both the socio-structural dimension and praxis" (p. 95). For Nicholas, fatherhood constituted such a resource.

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Comments on Julia Brannen's Paper

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Julia Brannen addresses the question: "How does [the] crisis of fatherhood play out in men's lives over the generations within particular families?" She examines this question in three generations of fathers, whom she and her co-researchers interviewed. (Although she refers to four generations, only three adult generations are being analyzed. The fourth generation are children who apparently were not interviewed.) More specifically, she states her question as follows: "How far are men themselves creative agents of change?" Her main thesis is that fathers' involvement is related to their bread-winning role and occupational mobility. One of her interesting but also debatable findings is that the most recent generation of fathers who had experienced disrupted work careers and who had a lower 'work ethic' made fatherhood 'a meaningful and rewarding' occupation. This was to compensate for the absence of a steady work career.

The author stresses the importance of structural factors influencing the work careers of fathers, and their own models of fathers' roles, in the three generations. However, she does not specify what the structural factors were which affected each generation differently.

In research such as this, it is, indeed, of great importance to take into consideration the *context* of social change and specifically, the structural factors. It is essential to know what were the social, structural, and historical factors affecting each generation. From a life course perspective, it is necessary to identify what the specific historical and cultural forces impinging on each cohort were, in order to understand the differences in their experience under the impact of social change.

An important aspect of the paper is its comparison of three generations over time based on retrospective interviews. The use of generational memory is also very significant. However, the interview method is not described. In reports on retrospective interviewing such as this, it is critical to know how the interviews were conducted, in order to be able to assess the evidence. The sample is very small (12 clusters of three generations of fathers, a total of 36 fathers) and it is not clear where the sample is from – London, another place? What is the social context of the sample? And, how was it selected? I sympathize with the need to use small samples in order to conduct in-depth interviews. But, this sample is too small to enable the author to answer the significant questions she is posing and to support her conclusions.

For example, the conclusion that low status work careers and a low work ethic are more conducive to 'hands-on' fatherhood rests on two cases in the sample. Also, it is not clear what Julia Brannen means by 'hands-on' fatherhood. In this case, it would have been useful to consult both the American and British literature on this topic. As social psychologist Ross Parke points out, there is a difference between fathers' involvement in certain aspects of child rearing and the effectiveness of that involvement.

Some of the descriptions of the findings in the paper are unclear and contradictory. It is difficult, therefore, to provide sustained comments. On the question of the generational continuity of occupational mobility, there are almost as many cases of individuals who did not experience career continuity as those who did. Yet, in the conclusion the author claims that there has been little generational difference in career patterns.

The typologies of models of father involvement designed by Julia Brannen are somewhat overlapping. The reason I find these typologies questionable, is because underlying her categories is once again her assumption that fathers whose main role is that of breadwinner have low involvement with their children. I do not accept this simplistic correlation, nor do the leading scholars on fatherhood in the United States, such as Michael Lamb, Robin Palkovitz and Ross Parke! By contrast, some major studies of fatherhood in the United States have actually shown that fathers combine breadwinning with involvement. The author herself mentions that in the older generation 'family men' and 'concerned fathers' had this orientation even though they were holding high status jobs.

A major question that is central to the very theme of a conference on *Family Forms and the Young Generation* is the impact that the various roles and models of fathering have had on children both in the children's youth and on the children's subsequent roles as fathers. The author actually poses a question as to

how the fathers' roles had influenced those of their sons, but she answers this question through the case study of *one* person only. Once again, it is not possible to generalize on that basis.

One weakness of the psychological and sociological literature on fatherhood is that it parallels what the earlier literature on motherhood experienced: namely, a focus on one parent's role in isolation from the other parent. Although Julia Brannen uses mothers' labor force participation as a variable in discussing the respective roles of the fathers, she does not provide information on the entire family and the couple context. From the retrospective interviews she used, it should be possible to find out how childrearing tasks in each generation were allocated in the family, whether and how parents negotiated the sharing of these tasks, and how they divided or shared their responsibilities. Any of the fathers' roles discussed here can only be understood in the context of the whole family. Also, the advantage of retrospective interviews would be to understand how kin, other than parents, were involved in childrearing. For example, did the role of grandparents or older siblings have an impact on fathers' involvement?

Although Julia Brannen's findings do not answer the larger questions she stated in her paper's introduction, it is important now to return to these questions. I will attempt to discuss trends based on American research that could illuminate larger patterns of change. Specifically those questions are: First, whether there has been an overall decline in the influence of fathers' impact on their children. The second question she poses is whether fathers have been unable to be more deeply involved in the rearing of their children because of what has been referred to as "the crisis of the breadwinner father" (Palkovitz 1997). In addressing these questions it is most important to avoid an idealization of fathers' roles in the past and to avoid sketching a linear course of change. Even some historians have been guilty of this type of linearity because they have ignored differences among classes and cultural groups over time, and have disregarded the complexity of several conflicting trends coinciding at the same time.

The picture of change is far more complex. In the United States, for example, researchers have found a bi-polar trend in fathers' roles, what Parke calls "the two faces of fatherhood" (Parke 1999). On the one hand, there have been increases in real father absence as a result of children being born out of wedlock, especially to teenage mothers and as a result of divorce. Non-custodial divorced fathers have been functionally and psychologically absent, as the study by Furstenberg and Nord (Furstenberg & Nord 1985) has shown. On the other hand, there has been an increasing involvement of fathers in various forms of childcare and household work. These fathers, however, are generally limited to certain social classes. They are mostly in the middle class. Even when fathers are involved, as Hochschild and Parke point out, respectively, the scope of interactions of fathers with their children is far more limited than that of the mothers.

A Historical Perspective

The main problem of a narrow view of linear change is in its simplification of the complexity of the process of change and of class differences. Changes in fathers' roles need to be understood in the *context* of changes in the family. One needs to examine what transformations occurred within the family (as well as society) that have affected the respective roles of mothers and fathers, as well as their interactions with each other. Did the fact that some of the family's functions were taken over by other institutions really weaken the role of parents, or did it lead to greater specialization in the family and to a greater concentration on emotional nurturing? In other words, does loss of power in certain areas of parenting provide empowerment in others? Did the role of grandparents or older siblings have an impact on fathers' involvement? This is still part of the agenda for future research.

The transformation of the roles of both fathers and mothers across the society has been more gradual and uneven among various social classes. The separation of the workplace from the home, following industrialization which led to the restructuring of familial roles, occurred initially only in the middle class. Throughout the 19th century, rural and working-class families continued to maintain a collective family economy. In urban working-class families, wives often worked side-by-side with their husbands and their children. Even if they did not work together in the same establishment, working-class families continued to maintain a strong collective family economy, but one in which the father was still considered the main bread-

winner (Hareven 1982). In the 19th century, fathers' work outside the home, as a result of the separation of the spheres between home and work, was limited to the urban middle classes. Even among middle-class families, however, the father took on new roles such as the sharing of leisure activities with the family and particularly with the children.

When explaining changes in the role of the father over the past century, one should consider the significant developments that may have contributed to the changing roles of both the mother and the father. These are: First, demographic changes which had a significant impact both on fathers and mothers – the decline in age at marriage (since the late 19th century), the decline in fertility and the resulting changes in the life course and in the clustering of age configurations within the family. Related to these demographic changes is also a change in the timing of the transition to parenthood (Hareven 2000).

These changes have had a significant impact on both parents and children over their life courses. The decline in fertility has reduced the number of children in the family, and has thus affected the role of parenting; the decline in mortality and the extension of life in the later years have extended the period of parenting and have increased the opportunity for fathers to overlap with their adult children. These changes have also enabled fathers to experience grandparenthood and great-grandparenthood. Secondly, the increase in divorce has further removed the non-custodial fathers from their children. Remarriage following divorce, on the other hand, has expanded the fathers' roles based on relationships that are not strictly dependent on biological paternity (Hareven 1995).

Finally, the massive increase in mothers' labor force participation has modified the role of the father as an exclusive breadwinner, and has led, among certain social groups, to a renegotiation of gender roles within the family. The increase in mothers' pursuit of full-time careers has also resulted in pressure on fathers to become more involved in sharing childcare and housework. As sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1995) put it: "At the same time, a declining birth rate and higher rates of female education and the industrialization of housework have created opportunities for women to work. Today, two out of three American mothers with preschool children work outside the home, and half the mothers of children aged one and under. As ideal and reality, the new father is partly a response to this new reality."

She further emphasizes: "As the kin system weakens its controls on both men and women, fatherhood, like much else in life, becomes more a matter of active choice. ...the contradictions facing men are likely to differ according to social class. Here a certain irony unfolds. The cultural ideal of the new active father has changed much faster, especially in the middle classes, than the reality of the new father."

Finally, there is also the question as to what fathers' involvement actually means. A study based on a 1997 sample of US children aged 0–12, comparing fathers' involvement in the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s and the late 1990s has found that there has been a gradual increase in the level of father involvement over these four decades (Yeung et al. 1999 cited in Parke, forthcoming). Scholars who have specialized in the study of fatherhood in the United States, especially Lamb (2000), Palkovitz (1997), and Parke (forthcoming), respectively, have made major efforts to distinguish between types of involvement and to examine the developmental impact of involvement on children. Some of these scholars have followed Michael Lamb's model of involvement consisting of "paternal engagement, accessibility or availability and responsibility" for the care of the child. Other scholars have argued that one needs to distinguish between 'absolute' and 'relative' involvement.

The most persuasive argument, however, is by Robin Palkovitz – emphasizing that the most important aspect of fathers' involvement is not the quantity of involvement over time, but rather the *quality* of involvement. He argues that the most significant outcome for child development is what he calls 'good fathering', rather than 'involvement'. This statement could serve as a good starting point for further research, and perhaps for discussion at this meeting.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Loren Marks and to Robin Palkovitz for their insightful comments on current research on fatherhood in the United States and on theoretical issues, and to Janice Thompson for the effective handling of this text.

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Generational Relations, Distributive Justice and Patterns of Exchange

WALTER BIEN

The paper has been optimised for viewing on slides or on the Internet. The texts presented at the beginning of each section can be used independently. To aid the reader's/user's understanding, they have also been put in context. The paper is divided into three major sections:

1. macro level
2. attitudes and values
3. micro level

Each section starts with a set of theses arranged in accordance with the basic premises being made. The tables and figures are provided as evidence to support the theses.

1. Macro Level

Basic premise

- 1.1 Europe is growing older, in such a way that the influence of themes related to young people will proportionally decrease.
- 1.2 The distribution of resources across age groups is disproportional (in terms of both income and social transfers).
- 1.3 The main reason behind the goal of distributional justice lies in the disproportional opportunities within the labour force both for different age groups and for the two sexes.
- 1.4 Social benefits are used to close the gap between different age groups. Therefore, distribution is a good indicator for differences in resource distribution over the life cycle.

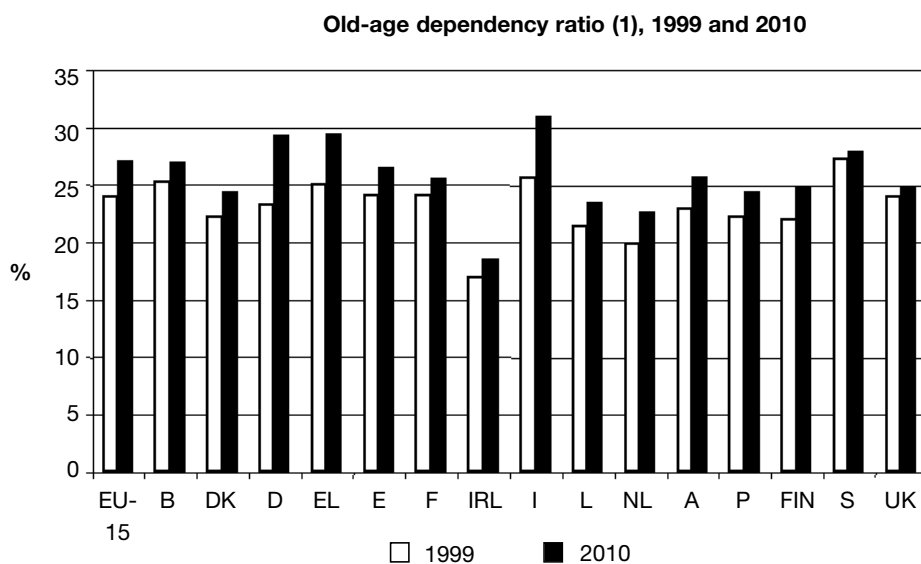
Supporting Evidence for the Basic Premise

Report on the Social Situation in the European Union, 2001

1.1 Europe is growing older, in such a way that the influence of themes related to young people will proportionally decrease.

Figure 1: Old-age dependency ratio (1), 1999 and 2010

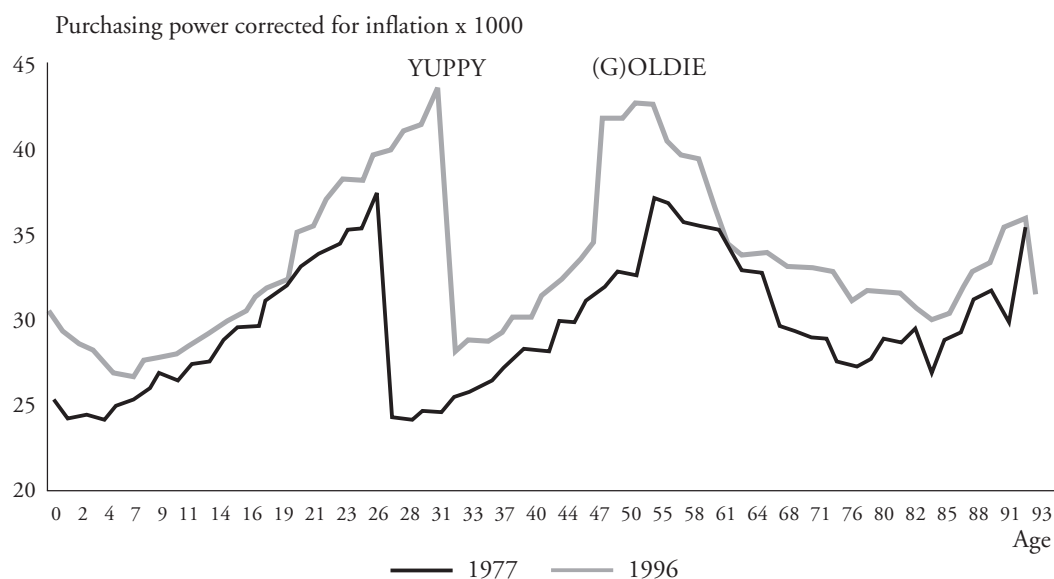
(1) Population aged 65 and over as a percentage of the working-age population (15–64)



Source: European Commission (2001), p. 73.

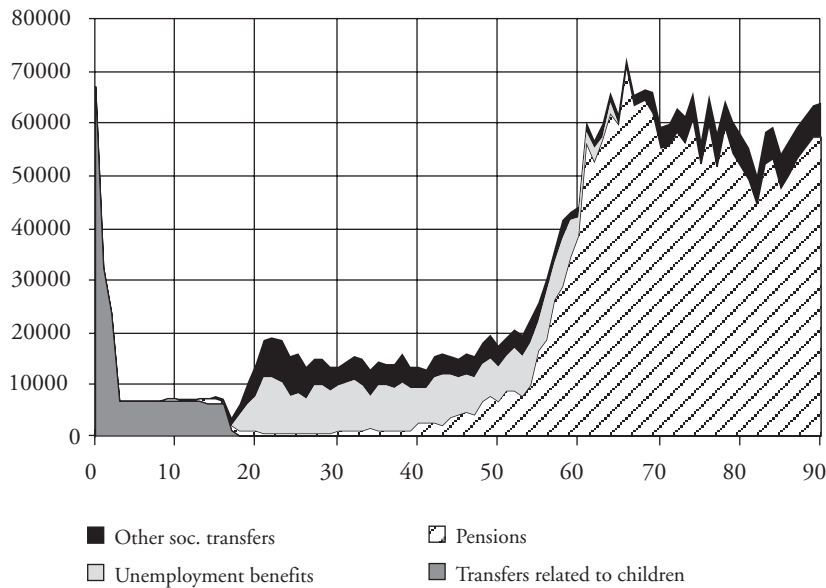
1.2 The distribution of resources across age groups is disproportional (in terms of both income and social transfers).

Figure 2: Shifts in life cycle purchasing-power development, 1977–1996



Source: Cuyvers (2000).

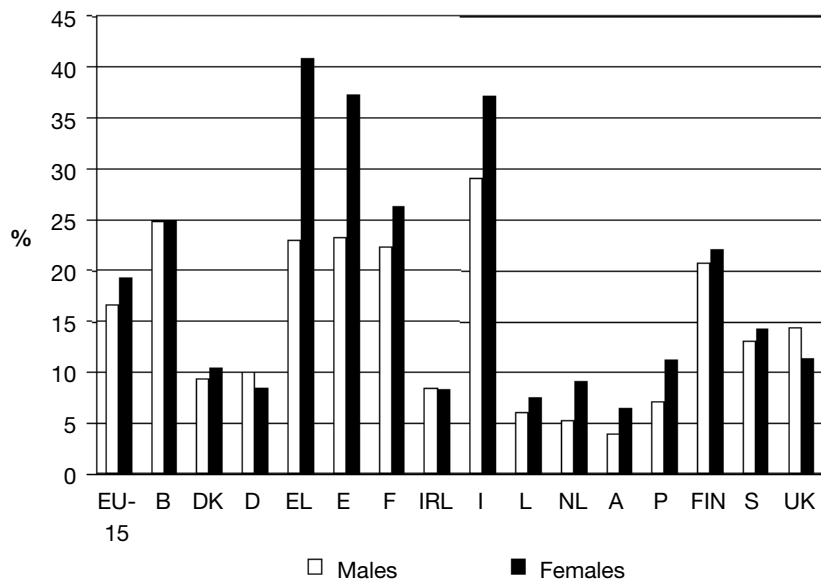
Figure 3: Social transfers by age in 1993 in Finland, per capita FIM



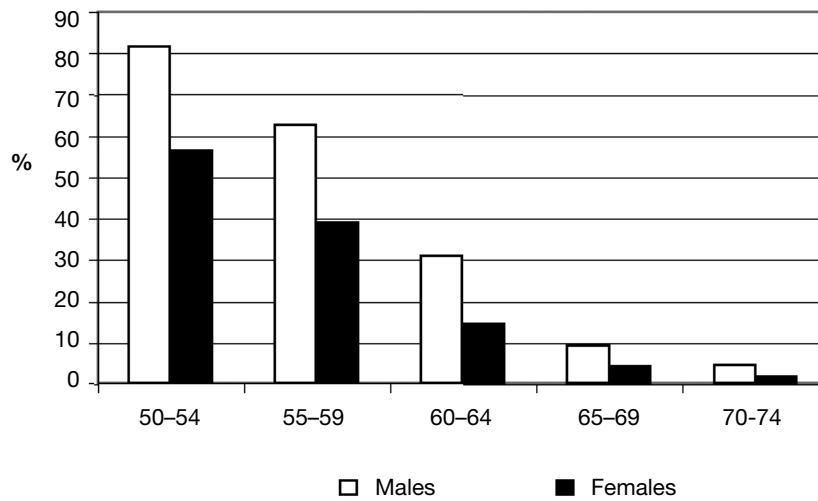
Source: Taskinen (2000).

1.3 The main reason behind the goal of distributional justice lies in the disproportional opportunities within the labour force both for different age groups and for the two sexes.

Figure 4a: Youth unemployment rates (15–24 years) by sex, 1999



Source: European Commission (2001), p. 87.

Figure 4b: Employment rates by age group and sex, 1999

Source: European Commission (2001), p. 83.

Table I: Development of unemployment rates for different age groups in Germany

Age groups	East Germany			West Germany		
	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
Below 20	15.0	15.4	16.0	9.4	8.7	8.1
20-24	21.5	21.5	21.1	10.8	9.9	9.2
25-29	15.0	16.2	17.2	7.8	7.5	7.0
30-34	14.7	16.2	16.7	8.4	7.9	7.1
35-40	16.1	17.7	17.5	9.3	6.9	7.9
40-44	15.6	18.1	18.2	9.4	9.2	8.2
45-49	18.4	20.5	19.7	10.1	9.7	8.8
50-54	18.2	22.5	23.6	12.3	12.5	12.0
55-59	33.4	35.5	28.5	22.4	21.8	18.7
Over 60	33.9	37.3	32.9	20.5	22.1	21.0
Overall ages	18.6	20.6	20.2	10.9	10.6	9.6
Number of unemployed people in 1000	1,232	1,321	1,302	2,733	2,622	2,383

Source: Koller (2001).

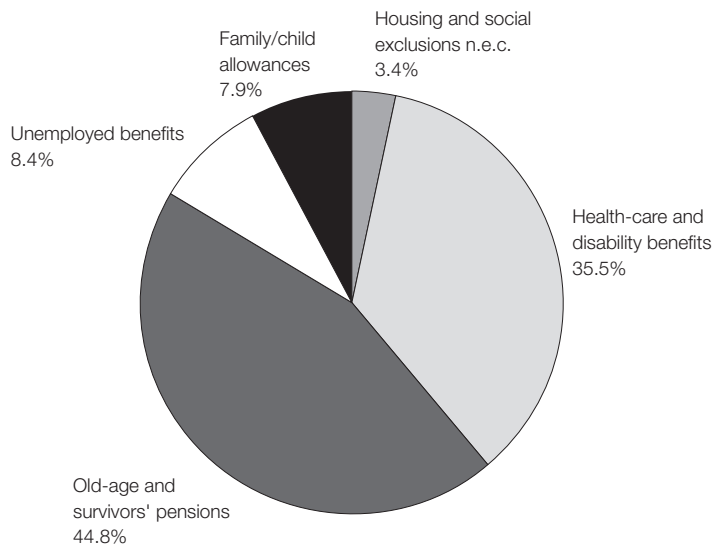
1.4 Social benefits are used to close the gap between different age groups. Therefore, distribution is a good indicator for differences in resource distribution over the life cycle.

Table 2: Per capita social benefits for population, at constant prices, EU-15, 1990–1996 (1990=100)

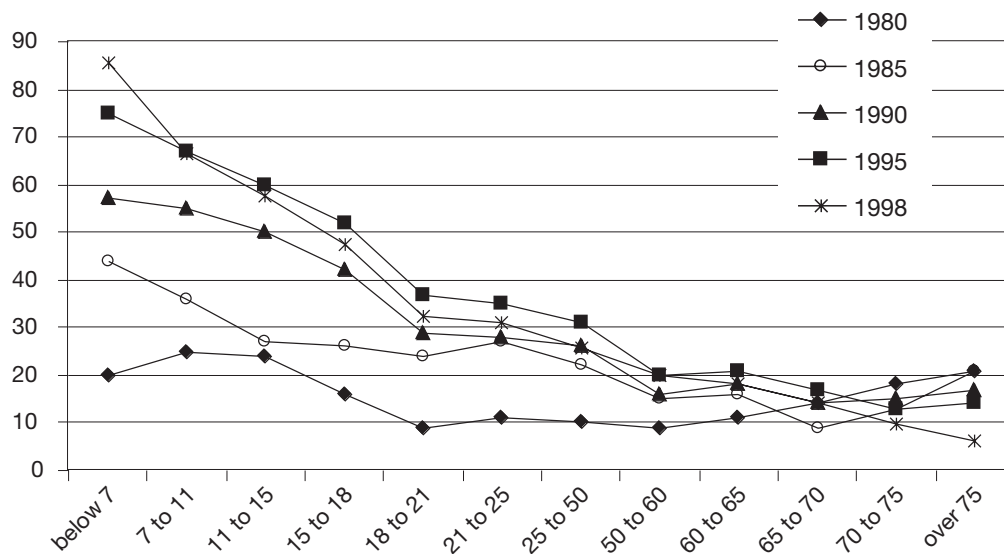
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Old-age and survivors' pensions	100	101	107	109	112	114	117
Health-care and disability benefits	100	103	109	110	111	113	115
Unemployed benefits	100	121	136	151	143	134	138
Family/child allowances	100	103	110	113	111	112	121
Housing and social exclusions n.e.c.	100	99	110	121	126	130	130
<i>Total benefits</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>118</i>

Source: Eurostat – European System of Integrated Social Protection (ESSPROS).

Figure 5: Social benefits by functional groups as a percentage of total benefits, EU-15, 1996



Source: Eurostat – European System of Integrated Social Protection (ESSPROS).

Figure 6: Development of social benefits by age groups in West Germany, per 1000

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt.

As the tables and figures show, there will indeed be growth in the group aged 65 and over as a percentage of the working population. Purchasing power is not equally distributed over the life cycle and the distribution of social transfers is also subject to wide variance.

Youth unemployment also varies greatly between the EU Member States and is on the rise in nearly all countries. At present, it ranges from 7% in Austria to about 42% in Greece. In addition, the employment rate for the elderly is decreasing. In the 15 Member States of the EU, more than half of the population aged 55–59 is not gainfully employed. As the example of Germany shows, unemployment rates differ across age groups. Likewise, the development of unemployment rates over the last few years differs with regard to age groups and regions.

Social benefits can help to close the gap between employed and unemployed people. The welfare system does very well for the elderly. Around 70% of the social benefits (e.g. old age and survivors' pensions, health-care and disability benefits) go to the elderly. For children and youth, regular transfers perform less effectively. In Germany, for example, the need for additional social benefits has decreased for the elderly but has increased four to five times for the youngest group, compared to 1980 values.

On the macro level, there are differences between age groups and between generations. Intergenerational social transfers provided by the social benefits system help abate the problem of differences in the ability to find work. There are changes in the use of the benefits system, and these changes offer better chances to the elderly and diminished benefits to young people (with the youngest having it worst). For this reason, there is a problem between generations at the macro level.

2. Attitudes and Values

Basic premise

- 2.1 Regarding attitudes towards the pension system, there is but little variation between age groups as opposed to high variation between EU Member States. Older people think more in terms of security provided by public funds, whereas younger people tend more towards private arrangements.
- 2.2 In general, young people accept their responsibility for the elderly, especially concerning the payment of pensions. There is, however, some variation among Member States.
- 2.3 In general, young people have no problems with the older generation.
- 2.4 People facing retirement react according to their age. The older a person gets, the more he/she looks forward to retirement. However, the attitude changes when the person has actually retired.
- 2.5 Only 6% of European young people do not want to care for elderly people in their family, but 33% definitely reject the idea of letting their parents live in an old people's home. Attitudes vary greatly across Europe.
- 2.6 All in all, attitudinal data show that young people have a realistic view about the pension system; they have no problems with the older generations (outside of everyday problems with their parents) and love their grandparents.

Supporting Evidence for the Basic Premise

Of course there is a difference between the real problem of changing chances for integration into the labour force, help from the social support system and the feelings, attitudes or values between generations. Europeans' attitudes are the subject of a great number of studies. The results show much variation across the different countries but not much across age groups. The following set of items supports the premises outlined above.

The following data are taken from a Eurobarometer study (51.0. 3–4 1999).

► *In the future, there will be more elderly people than there are now. Do you think that...*

...people will have to retire later?

42% yes; minimum 6%: Greece; maximum 66%: Finland

Age group	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Frequency	2,661	3,138	3,017	2,474	2,272	2,617
Yes (42%)	43%	45%	38%	43%	44%	40%

No age effect

...people will get less pension for their contributions?

61% yes; minimum 32%: Greece; maximum 82%: Ireland. No age effect.

...the welfare state will continue to grow and retired people will be better off than they are now?

20% yes; minimum 13%: Luxembourg; maximum 37%: Greece. No age effect.

...most pensions will be funded by private arrangements – the State will be less involved?

60% yes; minimum 32%: UK; maximum 84%: Denmark. No age effect.

► *Do you think that retired people should be permitted to take paid employment, or should they only work on a voluntary base?*

...paid employment

minimum 14%: France; maximum 72%: Denmark

Age group	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Yes (43%)	36%	51%	44%	47%	41%	39%

Small U-shaped age-effect: values from youngest people (perhaps because they have not yet settled into a job) are lowest; and from the highest value of 51% (25–34), the numbers decrease down to the oldest with 39% (65+).

► *Which of these two statements is closest to your own point of view?*

I am looking forward to retirement.

minimum 14%: Greece; maximum 57%: Netherlands

Age group	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Yes (46%)	24%	34%	50%	64%	67%	43%

Retirement will be difficult for me to accept.

minimum 14%: Netherlands; maximum 50%: Greece

Age group	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Yes (18%)	31%	17%	17%	14%	21%	29%

Missing values to yield 100% are: “Don’t know, never thought about it.”

► *How do you think the pensions should be provided?*

Mainly by the authorities, financed from contributions or taxes.

minimum 27%: Finland; maximum 65%: UK

Age group	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Yes (48%)	40%	47%	49%	49%	51%	52%

Mainly by employers, financed from their own and their employees’ contributions.

minimum 13%: UK; maximum 54%: Finland

Age group	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Yes (27%)	23%	28%	29%	30%	29%	26%

Mainly by private arrangements between individual workers and pension companies.

minimum 5%: France; maximum 23%: Netherlands

Age group	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Yes (13%)	16%	16%	14%	13%	11%	9%

Missing values to yield 100% are: “Don’t know, never thought about it.”

Source: Eurobarometer 51.0. 3–4, 1999.

The following items are taken from Eurobarometer 47.2. April–June 1997. The first figure is the average for the EU-15, with next two figures indicating the Member States with the lowest and highest values. The sample of this study consisted of 9,400 youngsters aged 15 to 24.

- *Here are some opinions about elderly people.
Please tell me which three come closest to your own opinion.*

Elderly people don't understand how much things have changed in our society.
36%; minimum 27%: Netherlands; maximum 47%: Portugal.

Elderly people don't understand what young people want or like.
27%; minimum 18%: Denmark; maximum 37%: Portugal.

My generation shouldn't have to pay for the pensions of elderly people.
5%; minimum 3%: Northern Ireland; maximum 8%: Germany-West

My generation has a responsibility towards the elderly.
37%; minimum 24%: Belgium; maximum 53%: Denmark

There is no particular problem with elderly people.
24%; minimum 12%: Greece; maximum 40%: Sweden

I would not let my parents go and live in an old people's home.
33%; minimum 13%: Denmark; maximum 54%: Greece

I wouldn't like to have to take care of the elderly people in my family.
6%; minimum 2%: Spain; maximum 17%: Netherlands

It is the responsibility of the State to take care of elderly people.
20%; minimum 6%: Sweden; maximum: 37%Greece

Elderly people should remain active as long as possible.
31%; minimum 11%: Greece; maximum 46%: Germany-East

Medicine should not prolong elderly people's lives indefinitely.
13%; minimum 2%: Portugal; maximum 34%: Denmark.

Elderly people should show more interest in young people, help them out more.
14%; minimum 6%: Northern Ireland; maximum 22%: Luxembourg

Source: Eurobarometer 47.2. April-June 1997.

3. Micro Level

Basic premise

- 3.1 Family life is not restricted to living together in a single dwelling. For example, in Germany, nearly 90% of the people aged 18–55 live in two-, three- or four-generation households at a distance of less than one hour's travel time.
- 3.2 Family life can be described in terms of exchange of communication, financial transfers, mutual help or one generation lending a hand to another.
- 3.3 It is much more important that family members in need can get help than it is to get help on an everyday basis.
- 3.4 The proportion of relationships not based on kinship in the exchange networks of middle-aged and older people is remarkably low.
- 3.5 Within a family, the balance between generations is remarkably high, especially when looking at the complete life cycle.

Supporting Evidence for the Basic Premise

As we have seen, there are differences between the generations on the macro level and a more or less realistic view on the attitude level. But what really happens between generations within a family on an everyday basis? Is it true what household statistics tell us about multi-generation arrangements being very rare, or is it more realistic to look at real living arrangements and communication patterns than to rely on official statistics? As the following table shows, there is indeed life outside of official statistics, at least in Germany. Only 4–5% of the people live together in a three-generation household; but if we look at the number of those living together under one roof, i.e. in one house, the number doubles to about 11–12%. If we take the immediate neighbourhood, the numbers increase to about 19%; and if we extend the area to those living in the same vicinity – meaning less than 15 minutes away – the numbers rise to about 30%. If we look at towns and distances, we can say that about 40% of all Germans between 18 and 60 live in a three-generation arrangement in the same town; and more than 50% less than an hour away. An analysis of communication patterns shows the same result, namely that at least in Germany, generations interact by communicating and exchanging resources.

Table 3: Generational arrangements by housing distance: a comparison between East and West Germany from 1988/90 to 1994, in %

		Household	One house	Neighbourhood	Vicinity	Town	Less than 1 hour	More than 1 hour
Singles living alone	'88: West	5.8	4.9	3.9	2.5	1.1	0.6	0.4
	'94: West	4.8	3.8	2.7	1.4	0.7	0.3	0.1
	'90: East	3.4	2.8	2.0	1.2	0.6	0.2	0.1
	'94: East	4.7	3.7	2.8	1.8	0.8	0.4	0.2
Two-generation family	'88: West	61.5	58.3	54.9	51.4	48.0	41.7	37.2
	'94: West	64.0	60.9	56.7	51.4	47.1	39.4	34.3
	'90: East	70.2	66.5	62.0	52.5	44.1	31.2	21.0
	'94: East	63.2	59.6	55.8	49.4	41.6	32.2	24.8
Three-generation family	'88: West	4.7	11.2	18.0	26.6	35.9	47.0	55.9
	'94: West	4.9	12.1	19.6	29.5	38.4	50.9	59.1
	'90: East	5.2	11.2	18.5	31.8	42.6	55.7	66.5
	'94: East	3.8	11.3	19.0	31.2	44.5	56.2	64.2
Four-generation family	'88: West		0.2	0.5	1.1	1.8	3.1	3.9
	'94: West	0.0	0.2	0.6	1.1	2.0	3.1	4.0
	'90: East		0.4	1.0	2.7	4.5	7.4	10.4
	'94: East	0.1	0.4	0.9	1.9	3.6	6.2	8.2
Other families	
For each year–region combination		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Exchange Patterns between Generations in Different Areas

- ▶ support or lending a hand
- ▶ financial transfer
- ▶ communication

The following is an example of the above:

Table 4: Lending a hand

Lending a hand between generations (parent-child relation)		
	Mentioned by	
	parents	children
Expecting help in case of illness	.48	.34
Giving help in case of illness	.15	.25
Getting help for housekeeping	.10	.11
Giving help for housekeeping	.35	.42
Getting help for childcare	.00	.18
Giving help for childcare	.32	.00
Getting help with administrative problems	.11	.16
Giving help with administrative problems	.09	.03

Source: Alt (1994).

404 families, interviews in the start generation: 18–32-year-olds with a spouse; 50% with children and 50% without children, with their parents, parents-in-law and grandparents.

When analysing such resource exchange patterns as lending a hand, one result is that a giver tends to remember more than a receiver. Most exchange takes place within one generation: between spouses or – with unmarried couples – between partners. Looking at balance patterns covering different areas (see table above) one can find a remarkable balance between generations. Within a family, nearly half of all exchange patterns are balanced. Looking across different families, almost identical figures emerge for families from the offspring generation (18–32 years old) getting more or giving more. For parents (meaning the parents of the offspring generation), the number of families who give more than they get is 24% higher than the number of families who get more than they give. For the grandparents’ generation, things are the other way around, with the number of families who get more being 13% higher than the number of those who give more. From the perspective of family members, everyday relations between the generations seem to be fair and balanced.

Table 5: Number of persons by generation, both kin and non-kin, to whom the persons interviewed lent a hand (as described above)

Persons mentioned by	Interviewed persons		
	18–32 age group	their parents	their grandparents
18–32 age group	0.78*	0.75	0.12
Siblings**	0.42	0.73	–
Parents	0.64	0.63*	0.16
Grandparents	0.22	0.64	0.51*
Kin	0.11	0.14	0.16
Non-kin	0.51	0.16	0.12

* partner, spouse

** siblings of the persons interviewed in the 18–32 age group and their partners

Source: Marbach (1994).

404 families, interviews in the start generation: 18–32-year-olds with a spouse; 50% with children and 50% without children, with their parents, parents-in-law and grandparents.

Table 6: Balance across all generations for the different areas

Balance	Lending a hand	Financial*	Communication	All area
Children				
Getting more	24	62	7	24
Balanced	52	3	82	50
Giving more	24	35	11	26
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Parents				
Getting more	16	12	7	17
Balanced	47	2	79	42
Giving more	37	86	14	41
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Grandparents				
Getting more	20	20	7	22
Balanced	72	0	90	69
Giving more	8	80	3	9
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Alt (1994).

404 families, interviews in the start generation: 18–32-year-olds with a spouse; 50% with children and 50% without children, with their parents, parents-in-law and grandparents. Aggregation across families.

* Aggregation across individuals.

Conclusions

The results show that the everyday balance between generations who live together within a family, and the confrontation of the young and the old – a dispute kept alive by lobbyists and those influencing public opinion – are not one and the same issue at all.

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Comments on Walter Bien's Paper

OLIVIER GALLAND

I completely agree with Walter Bien's main argument, according to which the two faces of intergenerational relations – that is, everyday relationships within the family and generational relations at the societal level – must be considered separately. The French data offer a good example of this distinction. At the macro-social level, inequalities between the generations have grown. While the standard of living of adult persons and elderly people has increased, that of young people has remained at the same level for ten years. Hence, a relative inequality between generations has emerged. However, at the micro level, exchanges between relatives – regardless of their form, substance or level of affection – are very intense and seem to be becoming common practice.

Nevertheless, in my opinion – and this is where I would like to perhaps complement what Walter Bien said – these two facts are not completely independent. To explain it, I would like to say a few words about the French situation, with which I am personally most familiar. In France, entry into working life is quite a long and difficult process for young people. The *insiders*, i.e. members of the 'middle-aged generations', are more protected and remain longer in the same job than in other European countries. As a consequence, any flexibility on the labour market is upheld mainly by young people – the newcomers on the market, the *outsiders*. In addition, the contrast between these two age strata is becoming more and more pronounced. For instance, the ratio of young people who have a precarious job or none at all, compared to adults, was 2:1 in 1982, and is now 3:1. However, the informal redistribution that operates inside families partially compensates for this disadvantage on the labour market and permits young people a kind of 'residential emancipation' with regard to their parents, albeit one relying on family support. One could see in this pattern of 'access to independence' an implicit compromise between generations: the oldest implicitly says to the youngest, "Don't enter the labour market too soon, stay in school! In exchange, we, as parents, are going to help you gain access to some of the attributes of independent living – if not a job, then at least your own place to live".

If we look at the way in which the different European countries are currently negotiating this compromise between generations, we see a great deal of contrast, mainly in terms of North and South. The statistical feature that best summarises this difference is probably the age when young people leave their parents' home, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Proportion of young Europeans still living with their parents

Age	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	UK	EU 14
18–21	95	73	91	88	98	86	95	96	90	83	85	93	72	79	90
22–25	68	15	51	67	89	53	74	88	64	38	52	82	21	43	63
26–29	26	5	21	47	59	18	34	63	31	10	34	53	7	15	32
Total	61	30	51	67	83	51	71	83	57	39	54	78	32	42	60

Source: Eurostat, European Community Household Panel, Wave 3 (1996). (Chambaz 2000)

Young people from Mediterranean countries leave the parental home extraordinarily late, while young people from Nordic countries do it very early. For instance, between the ages of 22 and 25, only 15% of all young Danes live with their parents, as opposed to 88% of young Italians and 89% of young Spaniards. Nonetheless, as Alessandro Cavalli (1995, 2000) has shown for Italy, this situation does not mean that an archaic pattern of family life is still operating in terms of intergenerational relations. In fact, young Italians – even if they do remain at home until they get married – have a significant amount of personal freedom in their everyday life. Cultural traditions simply do not facilitate their living anywhere else; and maybe more importantly, economic conditions do not facilitate rapid entry into adulthood either, due to high levels of youth unemployment combined with low levels of welfare benefits extended to young people.

In broad terms, we can consider that entry into adulthood is likely to progressively take on certain 'attributes' in accordance with the intergenerational compromise, which can occur more or less quickly. Among these attributes are having a stable job and the financial resources to guarantee stability, residential autonomy as a sign of independence *vis-à-vis* one's parents, and finally being part of a couple with a certain level of emotional stability.

Now let us take a look at the data from the European Community Household Panel. If we examine the speed at which young people take on these attributes in each European country, we again see very marked contrasts (Table 2). Only one country shows speed in all the dimensions of independence: the United Kingdom (UK). Consequently, this country is the only one in which entry into adult life happens really precociously. As such, Great Britain avoids the general tendency of prolonging youth. The cultural and institutional model of youth in the UK remains based on the idea that entry into adulthood must be as fast as possible. On the other end of the spectrum, becoming an adult in Spain and Italy undergoes delay on all counts. Other countries show delays in some areas but acceleration in others. France and Ireland, for instance, stand in contrast to each other: French youngsters leave the parental home and get involved in a relationship rather quickly, even if they do tarry in getting a stable job with their own funds. If they can do so, it is only thanks to parental support, the main factor enabling them to become partially emancipated even without being totally in control of their own resources. The opposite is true for Irish youngsters. They drag their heels in setting up an independent household and in entering into a relationship, even though they find a stable job rather quickly and thus come into their own resources. Perhaps in this case, the factors that act to slow down access to an independent life are cultural and not economic.

Table 2: Country ranking based on scores for access to adult-status attributes (1994–1996)

Rank	Having an independent household	Being in a relationship	Having one's own income	Having a stable job
1	Denmark	Denmark	United Kingdom	United Kingdom
2	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	Denmark	Luxembourg
3	Netherlands	Luxembourg	Germany	Germany
4	France	Germany	Luxembourg	Ireland
5	Germany	France	Netherlands	Portugal
6	Luxembourg	Portugal	Ireland	Netherlands
7	Greece	Greece	Belgium	Denmark
8	Belgium	Belgium	Portugal	France
9	Portugal	Netherlands	France	Belgium
10	Ireland	Spain	Spain	Italy
11	Spain	Ireland	Greece	Greece
12	Italy	Italy	Italy	Spain

Reading: In each scale, the countries get points for each indicator, gender, cohort and year. This calculation yields the order in each field of independence presented above.

The Danish case is also interesting. Throughout Europe, we see that Danish youngsters emerge on top by virtue of having their own household and being in a couple, and second for having their own resources. However, they do not come by stable employment quickly, with their score being quite low on this scale. The reason for this is that six Danish youngsters out of every ten receive social benefits, with payments greatly above the European average. In fact, social transfers account for a full half of the resources Danish youngsters have at their disposal (Chambaz 2000).

It is important to bear in mind that investing a more or less long time in one's education is not the main explanation for these national differences in how fast young people gain access to adult life. If we compare the situations of youngsters from different nations who have completed their studies, we see approximately the same hierarchy among countries. Hence, social, institutional and cultural patterns act in concert to make

access to adult attributes easier or harder in each country, regardless of whether young people have completed their education or not.

In conclusion, we see that the institutional and cultural arrangements that organise the transition towards autonomy are very diverse among European countries. In some countries, the process occurs precociously on all dimensions (mainly in Great Britain). In others, there are delays on all fronts (as in Italy and Spain). Most of the other countries show considerable variety in combinations of precociousness and delays. These intermediate cases are the most interesting ones. In my opinion, they show that entry into adulthood is no longer a process that involves crossing all the necessary bridges at the same time. In fact, depending on the cultural and institutional specificities of each country, young people may accelerate their access to one adult status attribute while slowing down access to another (Galland 2001).

If we exaggerate the contrast between countries, we could say that young people in the UK know only childhood and adulthood: They move directly from one to another. Mediterranean youngsters go through a very long post-adolescence before entering directly in adult life, prolonging dependency in all aspects of life. Other countries show different paths for youth – I use this term to differentiate this stage from adolescence and post-adolescence – as a period of life defined by a combination of dependence and autonomy.

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Acquiring Responsibilities and Citizenship

Family and Welfare Systems in the Transition to Adulthood: An Emblematic Case Study

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A Question of Method

The transition to adulthood is the process by which young generations pass from dependence to autonomy. The question is much more complex, however. First of all, independence and autonomy can be reached in various ways: by leaving the parental family, by access to more or less steady employment, by starting to cohabit with a partner or by setting up a family of one's own. To become 'adults', citizens in their own right, it is sometimes enough to reach just one of these goals, whereas in other cases, it is necessary to have gone through a sequence of stations. Secondly, the time required to carry out the whole process is in and of itself important. Moreover, the question becomes more complicated due to the fact that the final result is affected not only by material considerations but also by psychological motives, as well as by elements of a normative, institutional or cultural nature subject to frequent variation in both time and in space.

Among the conditions that influence this process, two are particularly important: the family and the welfare system. By now, the theoretical idea of *welfare system* or *regime* has come to be a part of the conceptual armament of the social sciences. The idea behind these terms is that "contemporary advanced nations cluster not only in terms of how their... social-welfare policies are constructed, but also in terms of how these influence employment and general social structure" (Esping-Andersen 1990: 2). Talking about the welfare system instead of simply the welfare state or social policies means expanding the analytical framework to a great extent. Thus, many elements take their rightful place in the analysis: cultural heritage, the relationship between public and private, the power structure, social stratification, the system of social obligations, the regulation of the labour market, the education system, religion, voluntary organisations, associations, etc. The combination of these elements results in a regular pattern of occurrence or action and, as many studies and research findings have demonstrated, makes it possible to give a concise description of the welfare systems found in different countries or clusters of countries.

With regard to the family, things are just as complicated. If one excludes the contributions of feminists and experts from countries with strong familialistic tendencies (Ardigò & Donati 1976 / Balbo 1976, 1984 / Paci 1982 / Sgritta 1983, 1984, 1988 / Donati 1981, 1986 / Saraceno 1984, 1996 / Ferrera 1998), the family has not always received the attention it deserves from an economic and political point of view. Until a few years ago, it was mainly considered a residue of traditional societies predating the formation of the welfare state. The family was perceived as an institution on the whole out of date and, in any case, less and less responsible for the production of welfare. Things are different today. Recently, G. Esping-Andersen recognised that the family is "an all-important actor", "...perhaps the single most important *social foundation* of post-industrial economics" (Esping-Andersen 1999: 67, 18).

Seen from this point of view, the family takes on the status of a 'noble' component of the welfare regime, an essential element that contributes to the organisation of welfare systems. As a rule, any society in which primary solidarity is dominant tends to protect itself from risk differently from a society in which the system of public policies is more highly developed and that dispenses universalistic services and assistance to all citizens. The range of consequences, however, is much wider and more articulated. Given a certain institutional division of welfare, all the pawns tend to arrange themselves neatly in the position that has been assigned them on the chessboard. In plain terms, most – if not all –, of the collective choices influencing the quality of life of individuals, families and social groups are coherent with one another because they are modelled by and embedded in the same general pattern. This applies to factors ranging from the formation of families to

the fertility trend, from the labour market to the condition of women, from the division of domestic work to the risks of poverty, from the measures of income maintenance to the relations between the generations.

This statement must, however, be considered with caution. For one thing, it cannot be ruled out that there may be tensions and conflicts between the different parts, nor that changes may take place or contradictions develop. Wherever there are significant changes in the socio-economic picture, for example, there exists a heightened risk that the relations established in the course of time between institutions participating in the social division of welfare may tend to remain – giving rise to perverse and, in extreme cases, self-destructive consequences. The same is also true when changes occur in the demographic panorama. The transition to adulthood is, as we will see, an emblematic example of how welfare systems can become victims of their own organisation.

The first part of this paper examines the relations between family and welfare systems, in an attempt to define the characteristics of the different ‘families of nations’ (with particular reference to the Southern European countries). The next section enters *in medias res* and directly discusses the subject of the transition to adulthood. The observations and data presented in this section refer almost exclusively to the Italian situation, although the situations in the other countries remain in the background and are sometimes mentioned. The reasons for this choice are dictated partly by the availability of a large quantity of data on the transition to adulthood. Above all, however, they are due to the fact that Italy, along with other countries of Southern Europe, is a completely anomalous case in the panorama of Western countries. A kind of paradox appears to exist. On the one hand, it is characterised by the existence of a social regime that burdens the family with many of the welfare responsibilities that have been transferred more or less extensively to the state or the market in other countries. On the other, it is characterised by a considerable decline in all those functional expressions that we are used to associating (erroneously) with *familialism*. Such expressions include early family formation, high fertility, state protection of family responsibilities, etc. Seeing all of this, one becomes aware there is no paradox at all. In Italy and the Southern European countries, one must look beyond the facade to detect the ‘problem’ of the transition to adulthood (because that is what it really is, as we shall see). We are faced by a constellation of strongly integrated factors all acting in a similar and essentially coherent way. Under these conditions, the passage to adulthood is similar to those phenomena that the French anthropologist M. Mauss called ‘total social phenomena’ (*phénomènes sociaux totaux*). It appears to be a synthesis of multiplicity, something that ‘precipitates’ a number of processes and behaviour involving the individual, the family and political, economic and educational institutions that together as one force distinguish a country’s entire social life.

Past and Present

In the second half of the century that has just ended, a semi-revolution took place in the calendar of events marking the modes and times of an individual’s entry, transition and exit from the different stages of the life cycle. In the past, the transition to adulthood took place according to a pre-established order; it ended a relatively brief period of preparation for life (childhood) and flowed into a series of events that followed one another at short intervals. The range of positions in the social hierarchy could introduce variations in the length of time spent in the different stations of the life course and probably reflected the quality of results; but altogether, the succession of the passages remained basically unchanged (Galland 1986).

In the span of a few decades, this sequence has been literally overturned. Marriage is taking place later, fertility is decreasing, educational preparation is continuing to a greater and greater age and employment rates corresponding to younger age groups have gone down (OECD 1999). The same thing has happened, although to a lesser degree, with the average age when a person leaves home, which has increased in most Western countries. These results suggest that there are common forces influencing a person’s individual life course across national boundaries.

Nevertheless, in such a delicate context, touching upon the roots of social reproduction, national differences are just as important as – if not more important than – the commonalities. On the one hand, a progressive homogeneity of behaviour among young people can be found in many spheres of life – customs,

sexuality, attitudes, life styles, use of free time, and degree of political and social commitment (Gauthier & Furstenberg 1999 / Eisner 1999 / Tilly 1999 / Teitler 1999). On the other hand, there can be no doubt that there are still considerable differences among the various countries. Many elements can influence the major decisions and role changes that intervene in the transition to adulthood: cultural tradition, the existence of more or less strong religious beliefs, the possibilities for economic growth, welfare policies, the rules of the education system, the organisation of the market of goods and services, etc. It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish which particular combination of factors is able to speed up or, on the contrary, hinder the transition. The number of national variants is practically unlimited. Furthermore, in many cases, it is only a question of nuances that cannot always be grasped with the conventional instruments of quantitative research.

Families of Nations: Commonality and Peculiarities

In an attempt to explain the variability of the different ways of reaching adulthood, one quite promising approach has been to examine the characteristics of the welfare systems or regimes operating in the different countries. Several models have been proposed, identified by a range of different factors: the division of responsibilities between the different institutional spheres (family, market and state), the normative recognition of the different living arrangements and the objectives they pursue with regard to the support of children and dependent subjects in general.

In light of these criteria, three systems or 'families of nations' stand out. To the first belong those countries in which social protection is a right of citizenship; family obligations are reduced to a minimum and political action is usually aimed at the individual. This model is typical of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. To the second group belong those countries mainly assigning support obligations to the nuclear family – Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Some differences exist between the continental and non-continental countries (Ireland and the United Kingdom) that we can ignore for the moment. The last 'family of nations' comprises the countries of Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain). There, the general rule is that obligations of supporting and caring for weaker and more dependent subjects fall within the perimeter of the extended family, meaning by this the nuclear family and a broader kinship group (Millar 1996).

The Nordic countries emphasise the rights and prerogatives of the individual, guaranteeing these rights through universalistic procedures. In these countries, the family is seen as an institution based on the equality and economic independence of its members. In this sphere as in others, the entire equilibrium of the system with regard to children depends on the complementary responsibility of the state and parents.

In the second group, care and support obligations mainly fall on the nuclear family. "Individuality is relatively little developed; benefits and taxes almost always recognise the reciprocal obligations between the husband and wife and between parents and children; as far as the services are concerned, they are mostly considered auxiliaries to the care given by the family" (Millar 1996: 6). There are relatively few services on behalf of children; and policies rather tend to encourage one of the two parents, usually the mother, to curtail her own working activity while the children are small and in greater need of care. This system is consistent with a private, familial idea of childcare. The community, although it supports the family, does not replace it. Rather, it encourages the temporary absence of the parents (almost always the mother) from the workplace during the crucial phase of the child's development. There is one main difference with respect to the Nordic countries. While in the latter the care of children is seen as a collective public responsibility, in the former it is a private one assigned essentially to the family and centred on the maternal role. As such, it is seen as an activity worthy of protection and is indirectly supported by the state.

As for the Southern European countries, the characteristics of this latter family of nations are not all that different from those of the continental model. What distinguishes them is the residual role of state intervention and a strong emphasis on the responsibilities and obligations of the family, even beyond the strict limits of the nuclear family. In no other context is the rule of *tertium non datur* so well applied. According to this rule, social policy is based "on the premise that there are two natural (or socially given) channels through

which an individual's needs are properly met: the private market and the family. Only when these break down should social welfare institutions come into play, and then only temporarily" (Titmuss 1974: 30–31). With respect to the rest of continental Europe, what is lacking or at least extremely inadequate is a system of income maintenance, especially for young people or at any rate for those who have not yet joined the labour market. A second common aspect is the marked 'particularism'¹ that characterises the way they function in the field of both intervention and financing. "The low degree of *stateness* of the Latin welfare system is one characteristic which isolates this family of nations from others present in Europe" (Ferrera 1995: 9).

As things are, it is not surprising that in the Southern European countries, families – and in general, relationships of primary solidarity – have played the role of 'social shock-absorbers', taking the place of assistance given to the poor and services supplied by the state. However, it is not because the family has been ignored that state intervention in the field of family policies is poor or residual in these countries². On the contrary, the exact opposite is true: in political discussion, the family has been absolutely *sanctified*, its praises have been sung on every possible public occasion and its 'staying power' has been extolled and glorified as providential. Looking closer, a paradox emerges. If the state has not considered intervention indispensable, it is precisely because the ability of the family to adapt was taken for granted, or at least did not seem problematic for a long period of time. Indeed, the division of labour and family responsibilities between men and women, as well as intergenerational solidarity, were similarly taken for granted (Saraceno 1994). As we shall see, many of the problems currently assailing Italian society and the Southern European countries in general arise precisely because of this. They are caused by the failure of the illusion that these 'natural' resources are limitless and the family's capacity for rolling with the punches can be counted on indefinitely.

The North-South Divide

The presence of these characteristics clearly emerges in the first comparative social survey conducted in 1994 by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, in its twelve Member States³. As a matter of fact, the survey's findings show the existence of two extreme models leading back *en gros* to the (not strictly geographical) division between North and South⁴. The differences between these two models concern a wide range of factors that either directly influence the transition to adulthood or are a consequence of it.

To start with, there is a wide gap between North and South as far as socio-demographic aspects are concerned. Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Italy and Greece, in that order, have larger average household sizes compared to the other countries. On the other hand, in these countries there are fewer one-person households (on average between 6–9%) compared to the 13.2% average of the EU countries and with the near or above 20% rates in some Northern countries. Other general characteristics that separate the Latin countries of Southern Europe from the Northern ones are extremely low fertility, with the exception of Ireland. Furthermore, families are much more stable than elsewhere, while the percentages for out-of-wedlock births

¹ What this means is that little attention has been paid to citizens' rights, which by definition are general, while maximum attention has been devoted, for purely electoral ends, to particular or corporate interests. The consequence of this is that special interests are met (whenever, wherever and as far as possible) while more general interests – i.e. those of families, children, the elderly, etc. – are left hanging.

² In Italy, family policy was based on two major assumptions. First, a role was certainly played by the idea – or the ideology – that family solidarity was irreplaceable, that no intervention, manoeuvre or programme of the state should intervene in family life and family choices. Second, it was commonly held that no state action in this field would succeed in any case.

³ To this survey (the European Community Household Panel, or ECHP) was then added similar micro data for the Nordic area, utilising the national Surveys of Living Conditions regularly conducted by the national statistical institutes of Finland, Sweden and Norway. The total sample size of the 15-nation database, which amounted to 142,000 interviews, makes this the largest survey ever conducted in this field. For further information on population, domains covered, sampling and response rates, see Vogel (1997).

are lower compared to the countries of Central and Northern Europe (Greece: 3%; Italy: 8%; Spain: 11%; Portugal: 19%; and Ireland: 23%, as opposed to Denmark's 47%, Sweden's 53%, France's 37% and the UK's 34%). In addition, the percentages of single-parent households are lower in comparison with the European average (Whitten 1998).

Continuing this random review, it is noteworthy that in the countries of Southern Europe the percentage of women between the ages of 25 and 59 who are outside the labour market is very high, if we compare it to the countries of Central and Northern Europe (Spain: 48%; Greece: 42%; Italy: 39%; Portugal: 22%; and Ireland as high as 60%; while in the Nordic countries, the rates are relatively negligible, around 5–10%). Furthermore, the quota of unmarried cohabiting young people in the countries of the South between the ages of 16 and 29 lies within a range of between 6% (Italy) and 14% (Spain); while Denmark, France and Holland stand out with rates of 72%, 46% and 54%, respectively (*ibid.*: 60). The extremely high unemployment rate of the youth population – on average, over twice the average national rate – is probably due to the scarcity of measures in favour of the young generations (but not only to this, as we shall see). Youth unemployment (under the age of 25) is a problem in the great majority of European countries, the North included. In the countries of the South, however, it reaches abnormal levels – in some parts of Southern Italy and Spain even higher than 50% – and even hits young people with a high level of education.

Another difference between the North and the South is the age when young people move out of the parental household. The ECHP shows that in the 16–30 age group, the percentage of young people who stay on with their parents amounts to 44.7%. This percentage is, however, the average between the decidedly high levels in the countries of the South (Italy: 65.1%; Spain: 59.1%; Portugal: 56.3%; Greece: 42.9%; and Ireland: 55.7%) and the much lower rates of the Nordic countries (Finland: 22.6%; Denmark: 24.7%; Sweden: 34%), with the countries of Central Europe to some extent in an intermediate position (UK: 34%; The Netherlands: 25%; France: 41%; and Germany: 33%) (Vogel 1997: 131). In the group of young adults aged 16–24, the proportion that lives with their parents is obviously higher. The European average amounts to 57% for girls and 69.6% for boys. Once again, however, this is the result of the combination of two extreme values: those of the South, which for the male component are quite close to the threshold of 80% (or when including Ireland, 77.5%) and of much lower rates in the other countries (with the exception of Belgium, which at 83.3% has the highest rate within the EU).

A preliminary analysis of this data shows in both contexts that it is not merely the reflection of the different unemployment rates. In fact, as J. Vogel observes, “in the South a large proportion of young adults in their late twenties stay on with their parents, even after their education is concluded and they are established on the labour market” (*ibid.*). After taking into account the educational level and the labour-market position,

⁴ In fact, two studies conducted on the same data as the European Community Household Panel, specifically that of J. Vogel (1997) and that of M. Iacovou (1999) reach different conclusions. Vogel identifies three configurations or clusters: “...a Nordic cluster of advanced institutional welfare states (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway); a Southern cluster of family welfare states relying on the traditional family as the prime welfare delivery strategy (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece); and an intermediate Central European cluster with moderate institutional and family arrangements, in combination with corporate social protection strategy” (Vogel 1997: 159). Iacovou speaks instead of two models of behaviour: “...a Southern European model (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland), where people make a direct transition from living in their parents' home to marriage and parenthood; and a Northern European model (Denmark, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium and Luxembourg) where people leave home early and make multiple transitions via a number of intermediate states such as living alone, cohabitation, and extended periods of marriage without children” (Iacovou 1999: 2). As a matter of fact, the difference between these two classifications is due to the fact that the two studies set themselves different objectives. Vogel's is wider-ranging and considers the whole complex of economic institutions, social policies and models of family life; while Iacovou's study limits itself to the consideration of the behaviour of household formation. In fact, if one only takes this last subject into account, the conclusions of the two authors actually converge (see Vogel 1997: 171).

the differences between the two groups still remain almost unchanged. One fact common to all the countries, North and South alike, is that young people are more likely to remain with their parents if they are still studying. Of male and female students aged 16–30, 68% live at home with their parents, compared to 58.5% of those who have completed their education but have not yet found a job and 34.8% of those who are working. This ratio remains constant in all the countries, apart from the fact that the percentages are higher in the countries of the South than in the North.

On the other hand, the data relative to educational level can produce some surprises. In most of the countries of the North, young people with a lower educational level tend to stay on longer with their parents, while those with a higher level leave the parental home earlier. In Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, the opposite is true: apparently, it is the young people who have attained a higher educational level who tend to stay on longer in the parental household. In Italy for example, among young people aged 16–30 with a compulsory school qualification, 55.7% still live with their parents; at the level immediately above (post-compulsory), the proportion rises to 70.2%; and it grows further (71.2%) with the highest level of education (third level).

Longer in the South and shorter in the North, the residence of young people in the parental home inevitably reflects their living arrangements. An analysis conducted on ECHP data is particularly illuminating in this regard. Dividing the youth population of 11 European countries⁵ into four typologies – single with and without children and partnered with and without children – the results fully confirm the gap between the two models. The first noteworthy fact is that the behavioural differences between North and South are concentrated in a relatively brief time span. “At age 15, there are few differences, because virtually all young people are single and childless in every country. Significant differences between countries start opening up around age 20 and begin to close again around age 30. Significant inter-country differences persist past age 30, but by age 35 a majority of people... are still living with a partner and have children” (Iacovou 1999: 11).

Between the ages of 20 and 29, the differences explode. In Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland, the proportion of males who at ages 25–29 still live in a single state without children is almost 30 percentage points higher than in the North (Denmark, The Netherlands, UK, France, Luxembourg, Belgium), or at 73.7% as opposed to 45.2%. Moreover, the gap is also evident in the remaining typologies. Males of the same age class who live with a partner (married or not) without having children are just 11.8% in the South as opposed to 30.1% in the North; those who live with a partner and have children are 14.4% in the South and 24.6% in the North. On the other hand, there are no differences concerning the proportion of single parents, which is identical in both contexts (with a minuscule gap of only 0.2%).

As far as women are concerned, the gap – although not so wide – is still considerable. In the South, the number of women aged 25–29 who still live as singles without children is more than double that of those in the North: 49.2% vs. 23.4%. However, the ratio is later inverted; and the women of that age who live in partnership (with or without children) and as singles with children are 30.8%, 39% and 6.9% in the North and 17.6%, 30.8% and 2.4% in the South, respectively. We will see further on what interpretations this data suggests. For the moment, it is interesting to note that in this panorama, Italy is in a somewhat singular position. For both the 20–24 and 25–29-year-old groups, there is no other country of the South with such a high proportion as Italy when it comes to young people, both men and women, still living as singles without children. The rates correspond to 98.2% and 78.7% of all young men in the 20–24 and 25–29-year-old groups and 90.2% and 54.7% of women in the same age groups. Accordingly, such a high share of young Italians living as singles during this phase of their life can only correspond to relatively low percentages of young people living with a partner or who have children without cohabiting, the total equal to 100. This applies both to the Southern countries and, even more so, to those of the North. In fact, with rare excep-

⁵ M. Iacovou's analysis, unlike that of J. Vogel, does not include the data set relative to the three Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden and Norway). Furthermore, due to the impossibility of accessing the data, Germany is also excluded from Iacovou's analysis.

tions, this yields the following results: as a rule, among both men and women, the proportion of young people in Italy between the ages of 20 and 29 who live with a partner, with or without children, or who have children anyhow, is the absolute lowest. The only case in which Italy is above the average of the Southern countries concerns the typology of 'partnered without children' for women between the ages of 25 and 29. Just under 20% of young Italian women of this age are in this situation, compared to an average of 17.6% in the Southern countries as a whole.

The difference is quite small but not without interest, considering that in Italy – just as in the other Southern countries – the proportion of young cohabiting people is very low (the great majority of women who live with a partner are legally married). In addition, in the 30–34-year-old group, the proportion of married women is even higher than the average of the Northern countries. That said, this fact suggests at least three considerations. First, in Italy young people – if and when they leave the parental home – do so almost exclusively to get married and not to cohabit. Second, the age at marriage is relatively high (given that in the preceding age group, women with a partner and without children amount to only 4.6%; and those with a partner who have children amount to only 4.5%). Third, having children tends to be postponed to a more advanced age. These three situations sum up the singularity of the Italian case, both in comparison to the countries of the EU as a whole and in comparison with the Southern countries. More than in other nations, in Italy “young people remain in the parental home for protracted periods. There is a relative absence of ‘transitional’ states, such as living alone and cohabitation; rather, young people leave the parental home mainly to get married” (*ibid.*: 27).

The Postponement Syndrome

It has been known for a long time that things were like this. Almost all, if not all the research carried out in Italy during the past few decades, has come up with the same conclusions. Back in 1983, a study carried out by a team of sociologists on behalf of the IARD with a sample of 4,000 young people aged 15–24 pointed out that “when they come of age... approximately half the young people are not yet economically independent of their families” (Cavalli 1984: 115). More particularly, the researchers certify that “in the 21–24 age group, there is a considerable mass of young people – about 30% – who try to cling in some way to the youthful condition of a student, even though they are working. Many of them have a steady job or expect to have one in the next few years but they postpone, so to speak, the step that would take them into adulthood for good” (*ibid.*: 130).

About four years later, in 1987, the survey was repeated re-interviewing some of these young people. Just as expected, the results of the first study were confirmed, point by point; indeed, in many ways the behaviour noted in 1983 was even more marked. “Only 10% of the sample no longer live at home with their parents and the percentage does not increase much (18.9%) in the higher age groups (ages 21–24)” (Cavalli & de Lillo 1988: 60). About one third of these young people ruled out the possibility of concluding their studies in the next five years, that is by 1992. In the group aged 21–24, quite a large proportion of young people (about 15% of the men and 38% of the women) declared that they were “sure they would not find a job or had serious doubts about the possibility of finding one” (*ibid.*: 59). Furthermore, most of those who had replied in the previous survey that they did not intend to get married (54.8%) reaffirmed this intention for the next five years as well. The same was true concerning the prospects of maternity/paternity, where the percentage actually rose from 61.5% to 68.4% (*ibid.*: 63).

Faced with these results, widely confirmed both by population censuses and by the periodic surveys carried out by the National Institute of Statistics during those years, someone coined the phrase ‘long family’ to describe the progressive extension of the time that young people stayed on with their parents. Donati and Scabini (1988) maintained that it was simplistic to consider only material or structural reasons to explain the tendency of young people to postpone leaving the parental home. Their difficulty in finding a job or the high cost of housing certainly played an important role in explaining why young people put off leaving home; but they were not a good enough reason for the spread of the phenomenon. The ‘Italian way’ of transition to adulthood was something more complex; it implied “an interrelation between structural causes...

and cultural and psychological reasons” (Scabini 1988: 172). It was, in fact, the algebraic summation of a set of macro and micro, public and private, material and motivational factors that finally ended up in a certain way: the structure of the welfare system, the economic situation, regional differences, the proverbial readiness (necessity?) of Italian families to bear the burden of satisfying the primary needs of family members, the operation of the school and university systems, certainly the difficulty for a young person at the beginning of his/her career to find somewhere to live at an affordable price. However, these were not the only reasons. Apart from or together with them, there were also cultural and psychological reasons. How else can we explain why so many young people remain in the parental home despite having finished their studies and having found a job?

‘Long’ Passages

In every country, the fundamental institutions that mark the transition to adulthood are family, school and work. Each of them is capable of encouraging or slowing down the conclusion of the journey; the result depends not only on their characteristics and their operation, but above all on their *interaction*. A particular organisation of family life will probably tend to reflect, positively or negatively, on the times and ways in which the educational course is accomplished, and vice-versa – just as the opportunities for young people to enter the labour market will tend to impact both on the education system and on the family, lengthening or shortening the duration of the time spent in them according to circumstances. In Italy and the other countries in the Mediterranean area, these three means of access to adulthood are, so to speak, ‘long’. The family is certainly ‘long’, as we have seen; as regards education and work (or rather its lack, which is unemployment), to speak about long passages could turn out to be misleading and therefore requires explanation.

To say that young Italians stay at school for a long time is a half-truth. It is certainly false if one considers the proportion of young people attending school. Comparison with the other European countries ‘cuts the Gordian knot’. Both in the 16–19-year-old group and in the next age group (20–24), Italy’s position is certainly nothing to boast about. All of the Nordic countries and most of the continental ones – with the exception of the UK, Ireland and Austria – do much better (Bowers et al. 1999: 48). Another indicator that speaks volumes about Italy’s situation as compared to the other advanced countries is the share of young people not attending school and not employed. In 1997, in the 20–24-year-old group, the young Italians in this situation came to around 30%, as compared with less than 10% in Austria and Holland and an OECD average of around 18% (*ibid*: 51). Matters are no better for Italy and the group of Southern European countries on other fronts. In the age group 25–29 – at an age in which the scholastic itinerary can be considered as essentially finished – Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece (in that order) have higher percentages of young people with low educational attainment compared to the collective OECD countries, for both men and women (*ibid*: 52).

More than long, the educational itinerary of the Italians would therefore appear to be ‘inefficient’, both because the education system does not facilitate access to the labour market and because many human resources are lost along the way (selection, repetition, dropping out). The number of young people who continue their studies after compulsory school is in continual growth (about 80% in the 14–18-year-old group), but this is not valid everywhere or for everyone. It is valid in some Italian regions but not in others; it is valid for the young people from the better-off classes but not for those from the less well-off. Nevertheless, it is above all at the higher levels that the educational system is inefficient. For many young adults, school and university act as a ‘parking place’ where they can wait until they find a job. The university encourages and tolerates young people staying on for excessively long periods; one only has to think that young Italian university students take an average of six to seven years to complete a degree with a legal duration of four years. In addition, unless they give up before, they graduate at the age of 26–27, and many of them get their degree when they are over 30.

From family to school, from school to labour market, the transition to adulthood is fated to accumulate additional delays and inefficiencies by means of a ‘snowball’ process that increases or expands at a rapidly accelerating rate. What is striking, however, is not the way in which – for better or worse – each of these

institutions carries out its own role. Rather, it is the consistency and uniformity of their action. The behaviour of families absorbs and justifies the inefficiencies of the education system, and the latter acts as a cushion against the malfunction of a labour market that is extraordinarily difficult for the young to break into. The deterioration of the position of young people on the labour market is a common experience in most OECD countries, but the situation of the Southern European countries stands out. Spain, Italy and Greece (Portugal is an exception) share the unhappy record of having the highest rates of youth unemployment, aggravated by the fact that in many cases this situation lasts more than 12 months. One year after leaving school, the probability of employment of new graduates aged 16–24 is lower in the Southern European countries than everywhere else but Finland (*ibid.*: 60). Another characteristic is that in these countries, the unemployment rates for young adults (25–29) remain relatively high across all levels of educational attainment (Table 1).

Table 1: Unemployment rates for young adults (ages 25–29) by educational attainment and gender (1999)

Country	Men				Women			
	Less than secondary	Upper secondary	University / tertiary	Total	Less than secondary	Upper secondary	University / tertiary	Total
Australia	13.4	6.6	5.6	8.3	10.4	7.8	4.1	7.5
Austria	8.6	3.4	3.9	4.2	8.5	2.8	7.6	4.3
Belgium	13.0	6.0	3.4	7.2	29.1	17.4	6.5	14.8
Canada	20.2	12.5	7.8	11.1	23.6	10.8	7.4	9.5
Czech Republic	17.6	1.9	0.9	2.5	18.2	5.6	1.4	6.0
Denmark	14.9	5.6	6.0	8.8	24.3	9.4	6.3	12.4
Finland	25.8	15.3	8.0	15.6	32.9	19.0	11.5	18.8
France	21.1	12.1	11.1	14.1	32.4	18.4	12.9	19.1
Germany	18.6	7.4	6.2	8.5	15.8	7.7	5.6	8.2
<i>Greece</i>	8.2	9.9	16.8	11.0	26.7	24.1	24.2	24.6
Hungary	20.5	8.7	2.7	10.0	21.4	12.5	5.3	12.4
Ireland	24.7	8.5	5.6	13.2	24.5	7.3	4.5	9.3
<i>Italy</i>	14.1	15.4	27.3	15.4	22.0	20.2	34.0	22.3
Korea	3.5	3.6	5.2	4.1	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.0
Netherlands	9.0	4.0	6.9	6.0	8.0	5.1	6.3	6.0
New Zealand	12.7	3.0	3.9	6.0	9.2	3.6	4.4	5.7
Norway	9.9	6.4	6.0	6.6	11.6	6.0	5.0	6.1
Poland	21.8	11.3	7.7	12.1	34.3	19.2	7.9	17.9
<i>Portugal</i>	8.2	7.9	11.2	8.6	10.3	9.8	7.5	9.6
<i>Spain</i>	26.3	19.9	24.7	24.4	41.3	30.9	32.7	35.5
Sweden	20.0	13.9	7.1	12.9	26.4	13.1	6.6	12.6
Turkey	8.2	10.0	7.0	8.5	7.4	20.1	8.9	10.0
United Kingdom	23.6	10.5	5.0	10.6	17.8	8.3	3.3	7.6
United States	15.7	7.6	4.1	7.4	17.3	6.6	1.3	5.1
OECD unweighted average	15.8	8.8	8.1	9.9	19.8	12.0	9.1	12.0

Source: OECD Education Database, in: Bowers et al. (1999).

(Unemployment rates for Southern European countries in italics.)

**Table 2: "Where do you get most of your money from?"
European young people ages 15–24 (1997)**

Country	Parents or family	Partner	Regular job	Casual work	Work in the underground economy	Unemployment/social-security benefits	Training allowance/ educational grant
Austria	41.0	3.2	45.5	8.2	1.7	4.7	13.5
Working	9.6	3.2	82.6	2.8	1.8	1.1	10.3
Studying	77.5	1.1	11.4	12.5	0.7	1.8	18.5
Neither working nor studying	17.0	14.9	19.1	14.9	6.4	44.7	4.3
Belgium	48.0	5.8	33.0	9.2	2.7	10.3	2.3
Working	12.6	6.9	78.8	6.1	0.0	1.3	0.0
Studying	87.9	1.5	2.9	14.3	5.1	1.5	3.7
Neither working nor studying	20.6	16.5	9.3	2.1	2.1	56.7	4.1
Denmark	18.7	1.7	64.8	3.5	4.2	8.5	28.2
Working	3.4	2.4	94.7	2.9	7.8	3.4	6.8
Studying	29.2	0.6	54.9	4.1	2.4	3.2	45.7
Neither working nor studying	12.7	5.5	14.5	1.8	1.8	60.0	0.0
Finland	40.5	2.7	24.7	19.5	0.8	15.2	25.3
Working	9.2	1.7	78.2	10.1	0.8	10.9	2.5
Studying	52.7	1.7	12.9	23.8	1.0	6.3	35.0
Neither working nor studying	23.2	10.1	2.9	8.7	0.0	73.9	7.2
France	47.8	8.3	40.2	14.7	7.0	5.7	5.3
Working	14.1	9.0	87.5	5.1	2.7	3.9	1.2
Studying	83.2	2.7	3.9	22.7	9.8	1.2	11.3
Neither working nor studying	42.7	22.5	7.9	18.0	10.1	23.6	1.1
Germany	37.8	4.9	51.2	15.8	2.4	7.8	5.8
Working	14.8	1.4	84.4	7.8	1.7	1.1	5.1
Studying	80.1	2.7	13.9	30.3	2.5	1.0	8.7
Neither working nor studying	22.3	25.7	8.1	10.8	5.4	55.4	1.4
Greece	50.8	5.3	40.5	5.3	0.3	1.7	0.0
Working	9.2	1.5	86.0	5.9	0.4	1.8	0.0
Studying	94.0	0.5	2.5	5.0	0.0	0.5	0.0
Neither working nor studying	71.5	20.8	4.6	4.6	0.0	3.8	0.0
Ireland	38.0	2.2	36.8	12.0	1.3	13.2	4.7
Working	6.5	0.5	89.7	3.8	0.5	2.2	0.5
Studying	66.2	1.3	15.6	19.8	1.6	1.9	7.5
Neither working nor studying	10.3	7.5	6.5	4.7	1.9	64.5	3.7

**Table 2 (cont.): “Where do you get most of your money from?”
European young people ages 15–24 (1997)**

Country	Parents or family	Partner	Regular job	Casual work	Work in the underground economy	Unemployment/social-security benefits	Training allowance/ educational grant
Italy	67.5	2.3	26.2	15.5	3.5	0.2	1.3
<i>Working</i>	14.9	3.7	85.7	7.5	2.5	0.0	1.9
<i>Studying</i>	91.4	0.6	3.7	16.3	3.1	0.3	1.5
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	73.9	5.2	6.1	24.3	7.0	0.0	0.0
Luxembourg	58.0	5.5	37.5	23.0	7.0	1.5	4.5
<i>Working</i>	16.7	4.1	91.7	8.3	5.6	1.4	0.0
<i>Studying</i>	85.6	4.5	6.3	35.1	5.4	0.9	7.2
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	52.9	11.8	5.9	0.0	23.5	5.9	5.9
Netherlands	32.5	4.7	33.8	22.8	3.8	5.7	24.7
<i>Working</i>	5.9	5.0	71.7	15.1	2.3	3.7	2.7
<i>Studying</i>	55.8	1.6	12.9	28.1	4.4	0.9	44.2
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	7.8	18.8	6.3	23.4	6.3	35.9	3.1
Portugal	50.7	3.3	47.0	5.0	1.0	1.3	1.7
<i>Working</i>	15.6	2.3	87.9	3.6	1.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Studying</i>	93.0	0.4	3.0	6.1	1.3	0.9	4.3
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	65.6	18.8	9.4	7.8	0.0	9.4	0.0
Spain	62.3	2.8	35.8	10.8	1.5	2.0	1.5
<i>Working</i>	26.7	1.5	85.9	6.8	0.5	0.0	0.0
<i>Studying</i>	91.9	1.2	6.5	9.6	1.2	0.4	3.5
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	60.4	8.2	16.4	19.4	3.7	8.2	0.0
Sweden	34.2	1.2	29.5	18.7	3.2	11.7	10.3
<i>Working</i>	3.4	0.0	82.7	10.6	5.0	8.4	7.3
<i>Studying</i>	52.4	1.7	7.3	22.8	2.5	4.8	12.4
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	21.2	1.5	4.5	18.2	1.5	59.1	9.1
United Kingdom	17.4	6.1	56.8	6.3	0.5	18.3	2.8
<i>Working</i>	4.2	3.6	89.6	2.4	0.4	2.9	1.6
<i>Studying</i>	58.3	0.6	29.2	17.3	0.0	3.0	7.7
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	12.1	17.0	1.6	4.9	1.1	70.3	0.5
European Union	45.0	4.7	41.5	12.6	2.9	6.8	5.2
<i>Working</i>	12.6	3.6	85.9	6.0	1.6	1.9	2.4
<i>Studying</i>	79.9	1.6	9.7	18.7	3.5	1.3	9.9
<i>Neither working nor studying</i>	41.4	14.9	7.6	14.5	4.6	32.5	0.9

Source: Eurobarometer 47.2, *Young Europeans, spring 1997*.
(Percentages for Southern European countries in italics.)

In 1996, among those who had completed their university studies, 27.3% of all young Italians, 24.7% of Spanish and 16.8% of Portuguese young people were still unemployed, compared to an OECD average of 8.1% (*ibid*: 67). Furthermore, the phenomenon of working students, be they teenagers or young adults, is almost non-existent in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain; while in countries like Holland and Denmark, it involves over 40% of young men, with an OECD average of 17.3% (*ibid*: 10, 68). Another characteristic that is rather interesting from our point of view is the close link between the labour market, the educational status of young people and their family situation. A recent Eurobarometer Survey (1997) asked a sample of young Europeans (aged 15–24) the following question: “Where do you get most of your money from?”⁶. The result, devoid of surprises, is that in the Southern European countries, young people receive most of their financial resources from the family (67.5% in Italy, 62.5% in Spain), compared to an EU average of 45%. The difference is considerable, in particular compared to the United Kingdom (17.4%), Denmark (18.7%), The Netherlands (32.5%), Sweden (34.2%) and Germany (37.8%). This is interesting, but the other side of the coin is even more significant. In fact, there is obviously a direct relationship between the financial support given by the family and what young people receive from other institutions (unemployment or social-security benefits, training allowances and educational grants) or from their participation in the labour market. In the Southern European countries, the burden shouldered by the family is extremely heavy, if not exclusive and monopolistic, while the state’s contribution is almost non-existent. In the Nordic and most of the continental countries, the assistance guaranteed by the state is added to and often surpasses what families provide. In Denmark, 8.5% of a young person’s resources come from social-security benefits, and 28.2% from training allowances. In Finland, the quotas are 15.2% and 25.3%, respectively; and in Sweden 11.7% and 10.3%. In Ireland, which is similar to the Southern countries in other respects but from this point of view differs from them, the quotas come to 13.2% and 4.7%. Finally, as could be foreseen, the massive presence of the family in this sector has the negative consequence of decreasing young people’s commitment to finding either a regular job or casual work (Table 2).

As a matter of fact, the unequal distribution of responsibilities between family and state not only has undesirable effects. In certain circumstances, the ‘compulsory protagonism’ of the family can also lead to socially positive results. An interesting aspect is the following: the proportion of unemployed young people (20–24 years old) in households where no other person is employed was 35.7% in 1996. In addition, the concentration of unemployed young adults in jobless homes has increased in the last decade in the majority of OECD countries (OECD 1998). The reality, only apparently paradoxical, is that this proportion is relatively low in the countries where youth unemployment is very high and many young people have to rely on their parents for support. It is much higher in the countries of Northern and Central Europe, where educational and training systems, labour-market legislation, and systems of wage formation and unemployment benefits encourage the autonomy of the younger generation. In Finland, 64.6% of all young people aged 20–24 years are in this situation; in The Netherlands 44.5%; in the United Kingdom 48.7%; while in Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, the corresponding values are equal to or lower than 27% (Table 3).

Basically, this data shows that in the Southern European countries, supporting young people is a ‘family affair’. Insofar as it is possible, the family divides what it has among all its members, regardless of whether they are still studying or have finished their studies and are looking for a job. In these countries, the educational system, the labour market and the system of state guarantees take it for granted *a priori* that the greatest burden must be shouldered by the family; and they act accordingly. When, however, the family fails or does not have the resources to enable it to provide for the maintenance of all its members (as is precisely the case in those families where nobody is employed), the young people find themselves in a *cul de sac*. There is no other way out than to become independent; therefore, they leave the parental home and/or look for a job. In short, in the Southern European countries, young people’s dependence is more a family than a social question; vice versa, in the Northern and Central European countries it is more a social than a family question.

⁶ Several answers were possible (my regular job; unemployment or social security benefits; training allowance or educational grant; my parents or family; casual work; my partner; work in the underground economy; others). (Eurobarometer 47.2 on Young Europeans, spring 1997).

Table 3: Proportion of unemployed young people in households where nobody else is employed (1985, 1996)

Country	Ages 15–19		Ages 20–24	
	1985	1996	1986	1996
Australia	26.4	22.8	37.1	36.3
Austria	—	18.4	—	21.6
Belgium	20.2	33.9	28.3	38.8
Canada	21.7	24.1	39.7	40.9
Finland	—	23.5	—	64.6
France	19.2	25.8	27.9	29.8
Germany	17.5	36.3	36.6	45.5
<i>Greece</i>	<i>18.6</i>	<i>16.1</i>	<i>25.7</i>	<i>23.6</i>
Ireland	27.9	40.5	35.0	43.5
<i>Italy</i>	<i>12.4</i>	<i>21.5</i>	<i>21.1</i>	<i>27.1</i>
Mexico	—	8.5	—	8.5
Netherlands	22.3	17.8	48.6	44.5
<i>Portugal</i>	<i>8.9</i>	<i>9.5</i>	<i>15.1</i>	<i>18.6</i>
<i>Spain</i>	<i>20.0</i>	<i>22.6</i>	<i>24.1</i>	<i>26.2</i>
Switzerland	—	4.8	—	22.5
United Kingdom	26.6	32.4	44.1	48.7
United States	20.0	18.8	39.6	40.1
OECD unweighted average	20.2	24.8	32.5	35.7

Source: OECD, *Employment Outlook, Paris, 1998*.

The OECD unweighted average does not include Austria, Finland, Mexico and Switzerland.

Percentages for Southern European countries in italics.

(—) = data not available.

This is another case where the situation of youth employment is organically set in a system of inter-institutional relationships, a system in which labour-market legislation, the trade unions and employers have favoured adult workers with families and have shown hardly any sensitivity for the condition of young people. It is no coincidence that one of the peculiarities of the Italian situation lies precisely in this fact. According to the results of the European Labour Force Survey of 1993, out of every 100 unemployed Italians, 63 had the status of ‘children’ and only 13 that of ‘heads of household’ – exactly the opposite of the situation in Northern European countries. In Germany, for example, the respective percentage values were 14% and 53%; in the United Kingdom 27% and 47%; and in France 25% and 38%. The expression *work gerontocracy* sums up in the best possible way the significance of these figures. In it, the existence of “a strong system of occupational and remunerative guarantees in favour of employed workers – males, adults, with a family to support – have actually reduced the competitive capacity of young people entering the labour market today” (Paci 1995: 748).

With good reason, the Italian model of unemployment has been described as having *patriarchal roots*. Coherently with the historically corporatist nature of the Italian welfare system, the right to social protection ends up being linked to one’s employment status. Moreover, since “there is no provision for income support for those who... still represent the majority of the unemployed, that is young men (and young women) looking for their first job... the entire burden of the cost of maintaining the unemployed... has been thrown on the families” (Pugliese 1995: 470). There is unanimous agreement among those who have studied the phenomenon that it has been this *familialistic regime* which has made it possible for Italy to contain or cushion the otherwise explosive tensions of very high youth unemployment.

Compared with most of the Central and Northern European countries, there is no doubt that the Southern European families still continue to carry out an important social role of containment of the in-

equalities between generations. J. Vogel is right when he observes that “the Southern family tradition tends to incorporate generations outside the labour market in larger extended households, where earnings as well as assets can be shared, thereby utilising the economy of scale” (Vogel 1997: 145). A recent study on the incomes of Italian families has, in fact, demonstrated that, in families consisting of several generations, the elderly members make a large economic contribution to the family budget. In families containing at least one elderly person (aged over 65), the quota of the family income that can be attributed to the elderly members is 47%. Territorial differences, however, are very marked: “In the Southern regions, a good 57% of the incomes of this family typology are provided by elderly members”. Correspondingly, when there is no elderly person in the family, the quota of income receivers is greatly reduced. In the South, it goes down to 45%; and on a national average, to about 56% (Cer 1999: 44–46).

Now, while it is true that intergenerational solidarity makes it possible for most families to face the economic difficulties resulting from the long time that young people have to wait before entering the labour market, this is only one side of the coin. The other side is that the protective action carried out by the family also risks producing socially undesirable effects. Even admitting that families are able to cushion the negative effects of their younger members’ unemployment in the short to medium term, they cannot substitute for state intervention in each and every way. In the long run, the overall implications for young people’s well-being can only be adverse, both with regard to the labour market (dependence on the family) and to social relations as a preferential means of finding employment. Under such circumstances, the more disadvantaged subjects will be willing to accept whatever job they are offered within the underground economy, contributing to the employment of minors, etc. This has its effect on socio-demographic behaviour (Ferrera 1998: 58) – not to mention the spread of poverty, which in some cases is a sort of perverse effect of family solidarity.

The Role Game: Perverse Effects

In recent years, the solidaristic strength of the Italian family has been very much put to the test. The economic crisis has widened the gap between resources and needs and increased the difficulties of families in bearing the burdens that have traditionally been assigned to them. At the same time, there has not been any substantial adjustment of state-provided relief policies (Ginsborg 1988: 433). The consequences have been a profound change in reproductive strategies and an increase in risk situations (poverty, dependence and social exclusion).

Between 1973 and 1981, births declined enormously, decreasing by about 30%. The second Italian Fertility Survey (1995–96) shows that the cohorts born in the 1950s have progressively lengthened the interval between births, while those born in the 1960s – now at reproductive age – “have increased the proportions of unmarried subjects at every age and put off the birth of the first child even longer, experiencing lower levels of fertility in all orders of birth (parity)” (De Sandre et al. 1997: 117–118). The results leave no shadow of a doubt on the long-term trend. The proportion of women without children rises from the 9% of the generation 45–49 to 17% for the generation aged 35–39. The average age at the birth of the first child has increased constantly in the course of time: 25 for women born before 1955, 26 for those of the 1956–1960 cohorts, and 27 for those born between 1961 and 1965. Finally, the proportion of women aged 45–49 who have had a third child is 37%; among women aged 40–44, 32%; and among the 35–39-year-olds, 25% (*ibid.*: 120–122).

In light of these data, one might think that the recent generations are rejecting marriage; but in fact, this is not at all the case. Italian women, especially the younger ones, have a very positive opinion of marriage; and the same can be said for men. Interviewed on these questions, 85.9% of women aged 20–24 do not consider that “marriage is an outdated institution”; 93% think that “more importance should be given to the family”; and 70% agree that “parents have a precise duty to do their best for their children, even at the expense of their own well-being” (*ibid.*: 45). The attitude of young Italian women towards marriage is thus still strongly traditionalist (73.3% of unmarried young women aged 20–24 would be against “cohabiting without considering marriage” and 71% do not consider it acceptable to “cohabit instead of marrying”). It would be impossible to otherwise explain why, in all the research carried out in the past 30 years, the family

has not only remained firmly at the top of the hierarchy of the things that young people consider “very important” in life but has been the only *item* on the scale, together with friends and leisure, that has become stronger in the course of time (de Lillo 1993: 74). In general the ‘private’ sphere is still very important for young Italians from the 1990s – more than studying, social commitment and political participation, all of which distinguished the previous decades (de Lillo 1997: 344–345).

Young Italian men and women do not reject either marriage or the family; sooner or later (above all *later*) they get married and have children (maybe only *one*). The point is that, in order to embark on this undertaking, they lay down certain conditions. They require greater guarantees. They want to begin the relationship as a couple in conditions of greater security and stability. At the same time, they do not reject procreation but put off reproductive choices until they have reached those targets that make it possible for them to face the parental role with greater tranquillity and responsibility. They are therefore more ‘conservative’ than ‘renunciatory’. How otherwise can we explain the replies that young people gave to the question “What conditions are necessary for getting married?” in the second Fertility Survey? More than their older contemporaries and in surprisingly high proportions, unmarried women between the ages of 20 and 24 subordinated their eventual matrimonial choice to “completing their own and their partners’ studies” (over 60%), to both members of the couple having “an adequate job” (about 90%) as well as “having a home of their own” (77%), preferably their own property (40%) and nicely decorated (28.5%) – with the addition, as a corollary, of the further condition that the new union should not be burdened with the responsibility of looking after their parents (30%) (De Sandre 1997: 84).

Unless they are all ‘rationalisations’ that discount *a priori* the objective difficulties of the employment and housing situation in this country, these replies reflect a basic attitude that is stubbornly guaranteed-minded and ‘familialistic’. Moreover, it is perfectly in line with the trends and behaviour prevailing in many contexts of the country’s social life, from work to the family. In any case, they express the difficulty young Italians have in venturing down the road of the transition to adulthood with those healthy doses of irresponsibility and self-assurance that are the indispensable equipment needed for facing any new experience. It is difficult to say what counts more: the fear of a future which objectively has become more and more opaque and unpredictable for the new generations (because of the uncertainty of finding a job, the difficulties of being parents, the growing instability of conjugal relations) or the fear of leaving a place within the parental family that, at the price of some minor renunciations, avoids traumatic breaks in the continuity of the life cycle and in any event guarantees the satisfaction of basic needs.

The fact is that, in this way, a perverse mechanism is set in motion. Each of the institutional actors who take part in the *mise en scene* of the transition process to adulthood contribute, even though unintentionally, to producing an unwanted result. Young people postpone both the formation of a family and procreation *sine die*, with demographic outcomes that, in the long run, cannot be sustained by society as a whole. The family, like it or not, offers a safe and, according to the means available, comfortable shelter for the children who decide to stay at home. The educational system allows an excessive waste of resources, does not manage to contain the actual duration of education within its limits and does not promote effective links with the labour market. The latter in turn does not create enough and/or suitable employment opportunities for young unemployed people. Finally, politics and the welfare system do not do enough to resolve these problems. In not offering adequate support to families with children and to young people, they end up “aggravating the solidaristic function of the family system abnormally, overburdening the parents and clipping young people’s wings in their transition to adulthood” (Livi Bacci 1997: 1005).

As regards the risk of poverty, the diagnosis made by J. Vogel on the results of the European Community Household Panel is basically correct. In effect, in the Southern countries, the presence of strong family relations contributes to reducing the generation gap in terms of financial well-being and quality of life. Generally, this is so – but not always. Beyond certain limits, family solidarity risks turning into its opposite, and the family ends up acting as a kind of ‘multiplier’ of difficulties and poverty. In fact, it has been demonstrated that the incidence of poverty increases with any growth in the number of family members. In other words, among poor families the *large* ones are definitely over-represented (Romano 1998: 89). In the Southern regions, this relationship is even more accentuated, both because the proportion of large families is higher and because

the quota of children and young people present in the family is greater. Therefore, in these regions, a real phenomenon of family poverty takes shape that particularly hits children and young people who end up being poor because – how can one say it? – they are forced to share *in solidum* the family's financial situation (Sgritta 1993a).

Too Late, too Slow: The Difficult Process of Becoming an Adult in Italy

In recent decades, a model of life has developed among young Italians. According to this model, as M. Livi Bacci summarises, “the conclusion of education is an indispensable requisite for finding a job; having a steady job – and accommodation available – is needed for the family's independence; this precedes the decision to live as a couple, which is, in its turn, preliminary to making reproductive decisions. Each of these intervals – at the tail-end of this century – has been growing longer” (Livi Bacci 1997: 1007). Inevitably, the transition to adulthood has been postponed and more and more young people continue to live for longer and longer periods in the parental home. Recently, the phenomenon has taken on a worrisome dimension unequalled in any other advanced country (apart from the case of Spain, a country with which Italy has many points of contact).

The preceding paragraphs have tried to describe the context in which this *postponement syndrome* that has hit the Southern countries to a greater degree than other European societies has developed – and the factors which presumably have caused it, above all at macro-social level. At this point, we must enter into the merits of things and try to understand who these young ‘late-comers’ are, where and how they live, what reasons they have for staying on in the parental home, and if and when they are thinking of leaving. Fortunately, in recent years a series of surveys on young adults living with their parental families has been carried out; and we thus have a large quantity of information, some very recent, that makes it possible for us to draw quite a precise and detailed picture of the situation. (For practical reasons, in the following paragraphs the paper will concentrate mostly on the Italian case.)

The data of the last wave of the Multipurpose Family Survey, carried out by the Italian National Statistical Institute with a representative sample of 32,931 households selected in more than 800 municipalities, pictures the situation up to 1998. It lists a wide number of characteristics common to young people who still live with their parents. In Italy today, young people aged 20–24 who live in the parental home amount to 89%; those of the next age group (aged 25–29) to 59.5%; and those aged 30–34 to 22.8%. In comparison to the results of the 1990 survey, this data shows surprising dynamics. Eight years earlier, the respective proportions were far lower: 79.6%, 39% and 13.7%. The increased length of time spent living with the family applies to all areas of the country and to both males and females. At every age, the percentage of young women still living in the parental home is lower than their male counterparts; but the rate of growth of the phenomenon is greater for women than for men in all age groups (Sabbadini 1999: 18).

There is a radical difference between Northern and Southern Italy regarding the conditions of young people who live with their family. In the Northern regions, a large proportion of these young people (60% of men and 50% of women) already have a job; while in the South, they amount to 32%. As we have already seen, it is more difficult for young people in the South to find a job, though when they do find one they tend to leave the parental home. Apparently, the opposite happens in the North. This shows that lack of work, often evoked by many experts as ‘the’ reason for young people's long stay in the family, is not so crucial. Certainly work counts; but we must not focus exclusively on the presence or absence of a job in order to find an explanation for the singularity of the Italian situation with respect to the other countries. A considerable share of young adults continues to stay at home with their parents despite having found a job and, before that, having finished their education.

So now what? We are stuck with either one or the other. Either the approach that looks for the causes of the ‘postponement syndrome’ in objective scarcities and obstacles (education not completed, no job, no housing, etc.) is incorrect and must be abandoned. Or that interpretation *was* correct but is no longer so, and other motives that we must try to identify have superimposed themselves on or have substituted the material factors. Unfortunately, as far as the past is concerned, we can say very little, due to lack of data. For

the present, however, we can try to put forward and verify the hypothesis that the anomaly of the transition to adulthood of young Italians is not due exclusively to contingent *necessities* but also to more trivial and superficial motives of *convenience*. The thesis is hazardous but, as we shall see, certainly not unfounded.

There is no doubt that, in recent years, very great changes have hit the new generations. The fact remains, however, that these changes have taken place with more or less equal intensity in all advanced societies. However, the phenomenon of the slowing down of the time for entry into adulthood is found to such a pronounced degree only in Italy and in the other countries of Southern Europe. In these countries, a whole series of institutional characteristics play a role, as we have pointed out more than once. Nevertheless, it is probably in the motivations for behaviour that we should look for the reasons for the difference. Let us return therefore to our hypothesis and, in the first place, look at how young Italians live out this situation. One section of the 1998 Multiscope Survey was devoted to the examination of the reasons for remaining at home. The results are extremely interesting (Table 4).

Table 4: Reasons for remaining at home for young people ages 18–34 (by gender and age group, per 100 young people living with their parents)

Reason	Age group														
	18–19			20–24			25–29			30–34			Total		
	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F
I'm studying.	52.9	64.8	58.9	26.5	36.4	31.1	13.1	21.0	16.1	4.0	7.0	5.0	22.3	34.5	27.5
It suits me, I have my freedom.	44.0	38.8	41.4	47.8	45.2	46.6	51.0	50.4	50.8	58.0	47.5	54.4	49.8	45.7	48.1
I don't feel like leaving.	2.5	3.7	3.1	6.0	6.5	6.2	8.3	7.9	8.1	9.3	10.0	9.5	6.8	6.7	6.7
I would have to give up too much.	4.8	3.7	4.3	5.7	4.5	5.1	5.1	3.0	4.3	5.8	5.0	5.5	5.4	4.0	4.8
I can't find a job.	9.6	11.2	10.4	20.2	16.6	18.5	18.8	16.8	18.0	14.3	20.0	16.2	17.4	16.0	16.8
I can't find anywhere to live.	7.9	10.4	9.2	15.4	18.3	16.8	19.7	17.5	18.8	18.3	18.3	18.3	16.2	16.7	16.4
My parents would be sad.	8.4	8.0	8.2	7.3	7.7	7.5	5.6	8.3	6.6	4.5	8.5	5.9	6.5	8.0	7.1
My parents need me.	1.9	0.9	1.4	2.8	2.3	2.6	2.9	4.3	3.5	6.5	9.2	7.4	3.3	3.3	3.3
Other	1.5	2.2	1.9	3.8	3.0	3.4	5.0	5.0	5.0	6.8	4.2	5.9	4.3	3.5	4.0

Source: ISTAT, *Multiscope Survey "Family, social subjects and conditions of childhood"*, 1998.

What is most striking is that the main reason given by the young people (male or female, it makes no difference) who continue to live at home is, simply, that it suits them. "It suits me, I have my freedom", reply 48.1% of the interviewees. The only group that differs is that of the younger ones (aged 18–19). They give as their main reason for staying on at home the fact that they are still studying (the girls more than the boys: 64.8% as opposed to 52.9%), and only in second place the fact that they have a certain amount of freedom (around 40%). As they grow older, this reason becomes paramount and reaches the highest value for men in the 30–34-year-old group (58%) and for women aged 25–29 (50.4%).

Evidently, among the reasons that young people give to justify their status, continuing their studies (which obviously declines as their age increases), the lack of work and of a place to live (which on the other hand increase) have a very important place; but this is not what matters. What is most interesting is that all these *objective* obstacles only predominate over the other reasons in the younger age groups. One can see this clearly if one adds up, on the one hand, the frequency of the answers pointing at hindrances to leaving home ("I'm studying", "I don't have a job", "I have nowhere to live", and "My parents need me") and, on the other hand, the reasons we can call more *subjective*. These are linked to the way in which the young man or woman

perceives and justifies his or her situation: “It suits me, I have my freedom”, “I don’t feel like leaving”, “I would have to give up too much”, and “My parents would be sad” (...if I left).

Well then, in the 18–19 and 20–24 age groups, the first – the, as it were, material reasons – are far more than those that one could define as ‘convenience reasons’. In the 18–19-year-old group, the answers indicating objective obstacles to leaving home have a frequency of 79.9%; in the 20–24-year-old group a rate of 69%. In contrast, those who mentioned ‘discretionary’ and subjective reasons amount to 57% and 65.4%, respectively⁷. The exact opposite happens in the two age groups above them, where the reasons hindering or not encouraging leaving home are above all subjective ones: 69.8% among the 25–29-year-olds, and a whopping 75.3% among the 30–34-year-olds (compared to 56.4% and a mere 46.9% of answers citing objective obstacles). Thus, where the first are higher, the second are lower; and vice versa (Table 5).

Table 5: ‘Objective’ and ‘subjective’ reasons for staying on with their parents, for young people ages 18–34 (by age group, per 100 young people living with their parents)

Reasons	Age group				
	18–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	Total
Objective	79.9	69.0	56.4	46.9	64.0
Subjective	57.0	65.4	69.8	75.3	66.7

Source: ISTAT, *Multiscope Survey “Family, social subjects and conditions of childhood”, 1998.*

It is premature to draw conclusions, though admittedly one can talk about conclusions in a state of affairs in continual evolution. However, in the infinite variety of circumstances, one can identify two distinct moments. In the first, at the beginning, the young adults think that their situation is ‘normal’. This is also aided and abetted by that fact that, for better or for worse, there are well-founded reasons for staying on at home. These include education (for those who continue to study), waiting for a job (for those who have finished their education) and rents that are too high (for those who have a partner and would like to get married). Then, as the years go by, their attitude changes, at least as far as words are concerned. Instead of fueling their feelings of frustration, they try to come to terms with the existing situation and end up convincing themselves that living at home is not so bad after all. This could be either because the old reasons are no longer valid or because it is convenient at a certain point to “make a virtue of necessity” or to “put a good face on things”, as they say.

In support of this interpretation, we can bring the answers to a successive question in the questionnaire, where young people were asked to express an opinion on their situation in their parental family. The picture that emerges is not completely clear (Table 6). However, if we also add up the different kinds of answers in a certain way, they give us two distinct typologies that we might call those who *make the best of things* and those who are *restless*. The young people who think staying on at home is ‘normal’, who adapt themselves to the situation and in any case have no wish to leave home, belong to the former group; those who “would like to leave home” and perceive their situation as a burden, to the latter. The trend is clear: as their age increases, the proportion of those who “make the best of things” diminishes (from 83.9% of the 18–19-year-olds to 67.2% of the 30–34-year-olds) and that of the ‘restless’ ones increases (from 16.1% to 32.7%, respectively). Two things emerge as most striking in the data reported in the table. The first is that the share of those who do not suffer from their lack of independence is still so high in all age groups (74.35%, on average); the second, that at every age it is the women who perceive this situation as a problem.

Since numerous studies have reached similar results in recent years (Cavalli & de Lillo 1988, 1993 / Buzzi et al. 1997 / Rossi 1997 / Scabini & Cigoli 1997 / Bonifazi et al. 1999), the conviction has progressively grown that the ‘postponement syndrome’ cannot be interpreted *sic et simpliciter* as a consequence of a

⁷ Obviously, the interviewees could give more than one answer; but we are unable to establish if and to what extent the answers they gave were consistent with the others.

cultural tradition that assigns the family an important protective function towards children – even when these have already become adults. This is a cause, naturally; but it is not the only one. According to some scholars, the phenomenon of the ‘long family’ is rather the result “of a radical transformation of the Italian family in a ‘modern’ sense during the last few decades”. It is a transformation of the interpersonal relations between parents and children that have made it possible for the former “to adapt to the cohabitation of two generations” and for the latter to “negotiate large areas of freedom within the family” (Cavalli 1993: 212). Basically, instead of becoming emancipated *from* the family, young Italian adults are emancipated *in* the family.

Table 6: Opinion expressed by young people 18–34 years old about remaining at home (by gender and age group, per 100 young people living with their family)

Reason	Age group														
	18–19			20–24			25–29			30–34			Total		
	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F
It's normal to stay on at home	50.8	47.6	49.2	42.4	38.0	40.3	35.1	29.8	33.0	31.1	26.6	29.6	39.6	36.5	38.3
I've no wish to leave home.	30.6	28.9	29.8	31.0	26.6	29.0	26.4	26.3	26.4	27.8	22.1	25.9	29.0	26.5	28.0
I make the best of things.	1.8	2.8	2.3	3.6	3.6	3.6	5.6	4.1	5.0	7.1	5.3	6.5	4.5	3.8	4.2
<i>Total</i>	83.2	79.3	81.3	77.0	68.2	72.9	67.1	60.2	64.4	66.0	54.0	62.0	73.1	66.8	70.5
I would like to leave home	11.0	15.4	13.2	16.1	25.3	20.4	22.1	32.9	26.3	23.9	33.0	27.0	18.4	26.2	21.8
It's a problem	1.1	2.7	1.9	1.5	1.4	1.4	4.0	1.6	3.1	2.2	5.9	3.5	2.3	2.1	2.2
<i>Total</i>	12.1	18.1	15.1	17.6	26.7	21.8	26.1	34.5	29.4	26.1	38.9	30.5	20.7	28.3	24.0

Source: ISTAT, *Multiscope Survey "Family, social subjects and conditions of childhood"*, 1998.

Even if it does not give a complete explanation of all the matters we have considered so far, this thesis is consistent with the data we have just reviewed. It rightly emphasises that there has been a profound change in relationships within the family. The ‘family’ in which young adults live for such a long time has very little in common with the traditional family. Many of the attitudes and ways of behaving – the children’s *and* the parents’ – that have been certified by recent surveys would have been unthinkable only 20 or 30 years ago. The picture of the family that clearly emerges from these surveys is that of “a golden prison” (Menniti 1999: 16). A *prison* because, like it or not, there is no escape from those four walls; *golden* because, in spite of this, young adults enjoy a great deal of freedom within the family. Some of them can do almost anything they like without encountering obstacles of any kind. The family does not ask, it gives, so that in the end, the balance is in their favour and staying at home brings more advantages than disadvantages. The young adults have a space of their own where they do as they like and from which their parents are often excluded. They plan what they do in complete freedom with few or no restrictions. They can associate with whomever they like without any interference from their parents. Interpersonal conflicts are reduced to a minimum. If the families can afford it, their children are even given relative financial independence, a kind of ‘subsistence income’ that the parents never fail to provide and that guarantees the young adult an adequate degree of buying power. Last but not least, the young adults who have a job and live with their parents contribute very little to the family *ménage*. All this is very well documented.

The 1998 Multiscope Survey put a series of questions to the young interviewees to evaluate their degree of autonomy and the material opportunities that they had within the family. The questions concerned

whether they could “invite friends home without asking their parents’ permission”, whether “there would be any problem about coming home whenever they liked”, “spending the night away from home without letting their parents know”, “inviting friends home when their parents were away”, and further, whether they received money and how much, whether they contributed with their possible income to the family budget and, if so, how much; whether they had a car or a motorcycle at their disposal; whether they had a bank account in their name; and whether there were conflicts with their parents on certain crucial aspects of life. How they could reply was arranged in four modalities, according to the frequency with which a certain behaviour took place: often, sometimes, rarely, never. In the following table (Table 7), for simplicity’s sake we limit ourselves to showing only the sum of the answers “often” and “sometimes” (the complement to 100 makes it easy to calculate the other two reply modalities):

Table 7: Young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 who live at home and have stated that they “often” or “sometimes” behave in a certain way (in %)

Behaviour	Age group				
	18–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	Total
Inviting friends home without asking permission	41.3	41.0	38.6	37.7	39.9
Coming home any time you like without problems	34.0	48.9	59.4	68.1	52.2
Sleeping away from home without letting parents know	2.1	4.1	6.5	9.4	5.2
Inviting friends home when parents are absent	35.9	37.6	40.2	37.0	38.1

Source: ISTAT, *Multiscope Survey “Family, social subjects and conditions of childhood”, 1998.*

The picture that emerges shows that there is a certain ‘accommodation’ between parents and children, a kind of unwritten pact that establishes the rules of behaviour on some of the essential points of living together in the same house. The impression is that, in most cases, the children continue to respect certain conventions – probably the same that the parents made them obey during the socialisation phase – without, however, giving up their autonomy. They feel free to stay out until late at night; but if they decide to sleep away from home, they let their parents know. They invite their friends home, but they are considerate enough to warn their parents first, etc.

Another survey, carried out by the Institute of Research on the Population (IRP) on a sample of young adults (aged 20–34) still living with their parents, showed the following. Although they saw many of the rules and restrictions – from coming to eat on time to keeping their room tidy – as limitations, they usually respected them. The conclusion the researchers came to was that “young people who live with their parents are adapting very well to a situation that is comfortable, reassuring and without responsibilities; to grow up in a compliant environment that adapts to the requirements of the young adult, attenuating every form of criticism and conflict, makes it objectively difficult and, on the whole, almost unreasonable to leave home. Where could conditions be better than those one enjoys living at home with Mum and Dad?” (Menniti 1999: 18).

Many of these young people also receive money from their parents – on average, over 200,000 Lira per month (about 100 Euro). About half of them do not contribute to the family expenses because they are not working; and the ones with a job in any case make a limited contribution. Among the 30–34-year-olds, only 25.7% regularly hand over a more or less considerable part of what they earn to their families; and 15.3% do so every now and then. Even so, this contribution to the family budget usually does not exceed half of their earnings. Furthermore, more than 70% of those interviewed said that they had the use of a car, either the family car or one of their own (80% among the 25–34-year-olds, a little less among the others). Many of them have a motorbike or a moped and just as many have a bank account: 19.9% among the 18–19-year-

olds, 39.8% among the 20–24-year-olds, 51.6% among the 25–29-year-olds and 59.1% among the older ones (Istat 1998a).

We cannot rule out the possibility *a priori* that, thanks to their parents' help, young Italians and Spaniards enjoy a standard of living higher than that of their contemporaries in other countries. Unfortunately, we do not have much information about this, apart from the aforementioned *Eurobarometer* survey that asked a sample of young Europeans (15–24 year olds) to list the three main reasons why "...nowadays, adolescents and young adults tend to live longer in their parents' home than they used to". The impression one receives from the replies is that, both from a material point of view and from a sentimental one, there are no clear-cut differences between the Southern European countries and the rest (Table 8). In many countries of Northern and Central Europe, more young people attribute staying on in their parents' home to material reasons ("I can't afford to move out" or "There's not enough suitable housing available for young people") than do young Italians, Spanish, Greeks and Portuguese. The same is true where other motives are concerned ("They want all the comforts of home without all the responsibilities" or "These days, parents don't impose such strict rules on young people in the home as they used to"). In short, we cannot conclude from the survey that young Europeans are very different from one another as far as their relations with the family environment or with the broader social context are concerned. Rather, it is impossible to discover a single item that allows us to establish which circumstances make it easier – and which more difficult – to start an independent life. The economic situation is not easy in any country. There is a housing problem almost everywhere. Parents have by now become quite tolerant and liberal wherever you go. Young people everywhere, on the other hand, are trying to balance the benefits of dependence and the costs of autonomy. This result confirms the theory we have already put forward in this paper: that is, that the transition to adulthood is a totally social phenomenon, which as such cannot be understood by examining its individual elements but rather must be analysed and explained as a complex whole.

Table 8: “Nowadays, adolescents and young adults tend to live longer in their parents’ homes than they used to. What do you think are the three main reasons for this?” (young people ages 15–24, by gender, 1997)

Country	Can't afford to move out		They want all the comforts of home without the responsibilities		They want to save up in order to make a good start later		There's not enough housing available		Parents don't impose strict rules at home		They get married or move in with their partner later than they used to	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Austria	54.4	61.1	27.7	30.7	28.0	33.4	46.9	26.7	29.3	27.0	29.3	27.0
Belgium	62.7	58.5	37.3	42.5	41.5	42.9	19.0	32.7	26.5	29.9	26.5	29.9
Denmark	65.4	61.9	35.3	34.0	36.6	40.1	39.9	27.1	18.6	22.4	18.6	22.4
Finland	75.2	81.9	35.8	31.1	41.0	43.0	32.2	32.6	18.9	20.8	18.9	20.8
France	86.2	86.1	32.1	30.2	32.5	37.6	22.0	32.5	27.5	34.6	27.5	34.6
Germany	62.7	61.6	33.7	35.3	30.9	34.1	30.3	35.7	32.4	37.0	32.4	37.0
Greece	62.9	73.7	39.1	36.5	36.2	31.7	8.1	21.2	20.8	23.9	20.8	23.9
Ireland	70.7	72.0	41.7	41.3	38.8	36.9	21.2	24.4	14.0	17.7	14.0	17.7
Italy	69.8	73.6	42.6	41.4	24.9	28.8	15.7	32.8	25.9	27.8	25.9	27.8
Luxembourg	56.3	47.4	40.8	37.1	44.7	49.5	18.4	24.3	45.6	41.2	45.6	41.2
Netherlands	69.6	75.2	42.5	40.5	36.3	44.2	32.7	27.1	32.7	25.9	32.7	25.9
Portugal	60.2	70.6	23.4	19.6	40.8	39.5	38.2	28.9	28.9	27.0	28.9	27.0
Spain	77.9	83.3	27.4	29.7	31.6	28.7	31.3	16.0	35.2	32.4	35.2	32.4
Sweden	94.5	96.2	30.3	22.5	47.2	51.5	28.3	14.3	20.2	24.6	20.2	24.6
United Kingdom	75.6	81.3	43.2	41.3	32.7	33.6	37.1	22.2	10.0	16.4	10.0	16.4
European Union	72.6	75.7	35.8	35.3	32.1	34.4	27.4	28.0	25.9	28.8	25.9	28.8

Source: Eurobarometer 47.2, Young Europeans, spring 1997.

Parents and Children: A Mechanism of Complicity

Like the survey from the Institute of Research on the Population, the *Multiscope* also shows that the living together of young adults with their parents does not create particular problems or conflict in interpersonal relations. The following table (Table 9) reports the answers the interviewees gave to the question of whether there were disagreements with their parents on certain aspects of family life. Once again, we restrict ourselves to showing the sum of the response modalities ‘often’ and ‘sometimes’.

Table 9: Young people between 18 and 34 years old who live at home and have said they “often” or “sometimes” find themselves disagreeing with their parents

Behaviour	Age group				
	18–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	Total
On how much they help with the chores	45.3	38.7	31.4	25.0	35.8
On how they spend their money	36.1	33.1	27.2	22.2	30.4
On their scholastic performance	26.2	10.8	5.5	1.9	13.7
On how they spend their free time	30.2	23.6	16.9	13.4	21.3
On how they structure their day	25.5	20.7	14.7	10.9	18.4
On how hard they work or try to find work	13.1	17.9	15.5	13.0	15.8
On the company they keep	20.5	14.5	11.6	9.5	13.9

Source: ISTAT, *Multiscope Survey “Family, social subjects and conditions of childhood”, 1998.*

As one can see, conflicts are not very frequent; moreover, they decrease as age increases, perhaps because of resignation or “anything for a quiet life”. Even continuing to stay at home with their parents, young Italian adults seem to have achieved a kind of ‘squaring of the circle’. They live in a precarious but sheltered situation, possibly laden with uncertainties and inconsistencies compared to the expectations they cultivated in the past but today lived in a relatively serene way on both fronts of interpersonal relations. There are no particular circumstances that encourage young people to hurry up and leave home – certainly not the end of their studies, or getting a job, which for many of them is evidently perfectly compatible with staying on at home. There is not even the idea of going to live on their own with a partner (only for a very small percentage is this a way out). The only stimulus that could induce them to cut the umbilical cord for the second time is marriage. In fact, the *Second Fertility Survey* shows that, among young people aged 30–34 at the time of the interview, a little under half had left home to get married and only 5% had left to cohabit (De Sandre et al. 1997: 79).

With regard to the parents, the little data available to us seems to indicate that they do not put great pressure on their children to go their own way and face the choices and responsibilities of life independently. Often the question does not even arise. Asked if having the children stay on at home was a problem, only 8% answered in the affirmative: for 38% it is “a normal phenomenon”; and for 54% even “a pleasure” (Bonifazi et al. 1999: 80). Furthermore, to the question about the main reasons for which the son/daughter did *not* want to go and live on his/her own, a whopping 43% of the parents declared without mincing words that “they would have to give up the comforts of their home”. Apart from the list of the usual objective ills (lack of work, cost of housing, etc.), there were also those who admitted candidly that their son/daughter “did not want to be independent” (17%), that she/he “is not used to making sacrifices or giving things up” (7%) or to “taking on responsibilities” (7%) or that she/he “doesn’t want to upset us” (3%) (*ibid.*: 81). More than half of the parents interviewed are likewise convinced that their children will miss life in the family when they leave.

Another curious fact that has emerged from the IRP Survey, the only one taking into account the attitude of parents, comes from the answers to two specific items on the advantages and disadvantages for both parents and their children of the latter leaving home. The range of answers offers a real sentimental *cahier de doléances*: 55% reply that there would be no advantage, apart from fewer expenses (21%) and less work (17%); only 12% of the answers indicated that the parents would receive some benefits in terms of greater freedom and greater privacy (5%). At any rate, nothing much compared with the disadvantages that the ‘loss’ of the son/daughter would involve in affective terms (50%), worries (24%), loneliness and sadness (34%); only 20% of the answers indicate that no disadvantage (for the parents) would result. Objectivity or

excessive paternalism? It is difficult to say. In any case, according to the parents, their son/daughter would not gain much either if he/she chose to leave home and become independent. Of all the answers, 26% admitted that he/she would gain in freedom of choice and decision, 27% in freedom of movement, 20% in a greater sense of responsibility. However, there are also those who place these 'conquests' in the column of disadvantages; and only 12% of the answers indicate that this eventual decision would not result in any disadvantage at all for their son/daughter (*ibid.*: 83).

(Non-)Concluding Remarks

The Italian family has thus changed a great deal; it is certainly not what it used to be, when attitudes and behaviour like those we have met in this rapid review of the principal research findings on this subject would not have been possible. In other words, the slowing down of young Italians' transition to adult life is not a 'metastasis' that has spread in the traditional body of the Italian family. Rather, it is a new phenomenon, born and growing within a new organism. This is not just probably so; it is most certainly so. And yet, one must take care not to draw hasty conclusions from this conviction. For a start, the changes that have overtaken the family are not necessarily to be interpreted as positive or 'modern'. Modern with respect to what, to what model? If the standard is the family in the other advanced countries, the comparison does not stand up. Those families are modern too, and perhaps – even without the perhaps – they have been that way for much longer than the Italian family (if, that is, the Italian family has ever become modern). And yet, in those countries we are light years away from finding even a pale image of the 'postponement syndrome' of the transition to adulthood that is so widespread and deep-seated in Italy. But then, in what sense is it modern? If 'modern' means flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, then Italian families have modernity to spare, in the sense that it is precisely those attributes that are the most important heritage, the special feature of their cultural tradition. If instead it means the capacity to promote exchange among generations and to encourage young people to leave the parental home and become independent, thus helping them to become 'citizens', then the Italian family is anything but modern. On the contrary, it is more traditional than ever.

However, even this is a somewhat forced conclusion. The truth probably lies somewhere in between. On the one hand, it is certainly true that, with regard to their children's transition to adulthood, the behaviour of Italian families acts more as a brake than as an accelerator. The data that we have considered shows clearly that the family interprets its social function in absolutist terms, as if it were the only bulwark in defence of its members' well-being, the final rampart beyond which there lies nothing or almost nothing. The impression that one gets from the data we have examined is that a mechanism of 'complicity' has been established between parents and children. The young adults who continue to live at home with their parents are not unhappy with this situation; on the contrary, for many of them it is quite normal. It is no coincidence that 64% of the young people interviewed in the IRP survey declared that, if they left home, "the greatest disadvantage for Mum and Dad would be the feelings of affective loss, loneliness and sadness due to their absence" (Palomba 1999: 32). This sensation would not be possible if it were not fuelled by the corresponding expectations on the part of the parents, for whom their children's independence is seen as a loss, the end of a role of protection and control that Mum and Dad do their best to hold on to for as long as possible. In fact, it is a kind of reciprocal 'affective blackmail', which after all suits each of the actors in the play but, as time goes on and beyond certain limits, risks turning into a comedy or a tragedy.

Even though it is well founded, this impression is, however, only one aspect of reality. On the other hand, the considerations that we made in the first part of this paper are still absolutely true. That is, the way in which families interpret their social function does not spring from nothing, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. In other words, Italian families are not the way they are simply because they choose to be like that: they behave in this way because, at least to a great extent, there is no reason or alternative for them to act differently. It is not always possible to make different moves in the economic, political and social chess game. It is difficult to establish what counts most in the mix of factors taking part in the process: culture, tradition, family solidarity, social control, Latin sentimentalism, the psychology of the actors or the atavistic absence of a policy of family support worthy of this name, the presence of a welfare system that transfers "more to the

fathers than to the sons” (Rossi 1997), the economic situation, the organisation of the education system, the dramatic scarcity of jobs or the inadequacy of employment instruments.

The question is destined to remain without a response. Each of these elements is certainly capable of influencing the course of events; each of these *tesserae* contributes to make up the final picture of the mosaic, although none of them taken singly is sufficient to produce that result. If one really must identify a protagonist or a defendant, I personally am inclined towards the political and social sphere. All things considered, it seems to me that, in this question of the transition of young people to adulthood, it would be unjust to put families and young people on trial. And even more than unjust, it would be contrary to the truth of the matter. Anything but protagonists, young people and families are the designated victims of what has happened over the past 20 to 30 years and of its consequences that will come to maturity in the next 20 or 30. The grave delay with which young people in Italy come out of a condition of ‘captivity’ prolonged to pathological limits is not at all an unexpected phenomenon. It is simply the conclusion of an event that has been announced over and over again.

The ‘youth question’ in Italy has been off the political agenda for too long; and for too long politicians and policy-makers have trusted in the family’s miracle-working powers and its endless solidaristic energies. But it is above all in correspondence with the start of the economic crisis in the middle of the 1970s that one notices a great penalisation of the new generations in the distribution of resources. Around this date, which acts as a watershed between two distinct phases of the development of the welfare state, a decisive turning point was reached in the collective attention towards the different members of the population. And in all honesty, this did not happen just in Italy (Thomson 1991 / Sgritta 1993b, 1994 / Fussell 1999). Within a few years, in place of the trend of the first post-war decades in favour of the younger age classes and of action in support of family formation, an abrupt change of course took place. Since then, the temporal horizons of politics have become ever shorter and narrower; the flow of public resources changed destination, or rather continued to follow the ‘first generation’ of welfare beneficiaries, guaranteeing their prospects of future well-being. Inevitably, as a consequence of this redesigning of the welfare state in step with its own ageing (and electoral) interests, the cost-benefit balance among generations has worsened, transfers to families have diminished, child poverty rates have risen, youth unemployment has increased and entry into the labour market has been deferred.

For a series of reasons (demographic, economic and political), these trends have been pushed to extremes in Italy and the other Southern European countries. A few facts are more than enough to illustrate the situation, beginning with public policies. In 1995, current expenditure (in relation to GDP) on social protection in Italy was around four percentage points less than the average of all Member States, or 24.6% as opposed to 28.5%. Only Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain spent less than Italy (ranging from 20% in Ireland to 21–22% in the others). Moreover, the composition of this expenditure by function shows that in Italy the share of pensions is substantially higher than in any other country. Indeed, Italian (old-age and survivors) pensions represent almost 63% of total social spending, or 15% of GDP compared to the European average, with values ranging from 42.4% to 12.1%, respectively. Even taking into account that part of this share is due to the allocation of some transfers to pensioners – which in other Member States are included elsewhere – the high figure for Italy denotes a specific level of generosity towards the elderly. This generosity inevitably takes away resources from other groups of the population. In fact, such high levels of pension expenditures are matched by extremely low levels (among the lowest of all) in expenditures aimed at ‘families and children’ and at unemployment, housing and social exclusion. For example, in 1995, the share of GDP expenditure earmarked for families and children was 0.8% in Italy, compared to a European average of 2.1%; the only country that does worse is Spain, with 0.4%.

This is not all. If one considers the trend of expenditure in real terms (relative to consumer price inflation), one thing is clear. While expenditures for (old-age and survivors) pensions grew in Italy by 4.8% in the period from 1990–1993, those aimed at ‘families and children’ actually went down by 5.8% during the same period, as opposed to a Europe-wide increase averaging 3.3% (European Commission 1998: 61 ff). One can also reach similar results by other means. A study carried out by the European Observatory on National Family Policies compared the performance of different Member States in reducing poverty by means of tax-

benefit measures. In the great majority of the countries, the effectiveness of social transfers and the redistributive force of the system of direct taxation are generally high (Belgium is the most successful, reducing over 80% of pre-transfer poverty). However, “in Italy and Spain the tax-benefit system leaves couples with children worse off, because income tax exceeds social benefits overall”. Another result worth noting, still from the same study, regards the composition of the poor after transfers. As was to be expected, given the scarce incidence of economic and social relief aimed at families with children, “in Spain and Italy couples with children represent over 40% of the poor” (Ditch et al. 1996: 54). The conclusion is obvious: In the Southern European countries in general, and in Italy in particular, the family – when not actually penalised – has been left alone to bear the burden of its members’ needs.

Given these conditions, it was inevitable that young people and families would adapt, using up all the resources at their disposal. In some cases, they came up with new solutions; in others, they simply resorted in exaggerated measure to the store of material and affective instruments supplied by tradition. Perhaps this has contributed to aggravating the situation, giving rise to a vicious circle – the real drama from which many young people and families must try to escape. In certain areas of Southern Italy, there are young people who, having come of age and formally become citizens, get ready to face life without any real prospect of finding a job or ever getting free of their family. Some of them, the worst cases, actually run the risk of finding themselves confined to a sort of never-ending social moratorium, passing without a break from adolescence to pension, from dependence on the family to state assistance.

Many others, the majority, will presumably be spared this sad fate – but at what cost? If thousands and thousands of young people stay too long in the protective embrace of the family, will they grow up disappointed when promises can never be fulfilled? Will they acquire a welfare-dependent mentality, consuming without producing and engaging in fortuitous and impermanent relations with work? Will these experiences unite an ever-greater class of child-adults accustomed to seeing themselves as ‘social outcasts’, as non-citizens? In such a scenario, it cannot be ruled out that – unless one intervenes as soon as possible with effective measures – the demographic, economic and political costs could be of incalculable gravity.

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Comments on Giovanni Sgritta's Paper: Family and Welfare Systems in the Transition to Adulthood: An Emblematic Case-study

WILFRIED DUMON

Giovanni Sgritta's key paper is typically well documented and challenging. It is conceived from a macro-sociological perspective and presented as a case study of Italy but somewhat atypical from a pan-European perspective, despite its reference to other EU Member States in the Mediterranean, particularly Spain. I am not an expert neither on Italy nor on the Mediterranean, yet I will try to react to this paper along the macro variables of (a) time and space, and (b) age and gender. The former dimensions will be treated more extensively, since they are dealt with in the paper. The latter will only be briefly mentioned, since they do not feature as central elements in the paper.

Time and Space

The paper focuses on the geographical area of the Mediterranean, and especially Italy and the typical Italian society. The thesis of the paper may be summarised as follows:

- ▶ Transition into adulthood is a process that tends to be prolonged, one coined as 'postponement syndrome'.
- ▶ Italy represents a special case due to typically Italian situations and circumstances. According to Sgritta, responsibilities can be identified as follows: young persons themselves, the family, the educational system, the labour market, and politics and the welfare state.
- ▶ The effects are judged negatively in Sgritta's presentation ("worrying dimension") and remedies are indicated more implicitly than explicitly.
- ▶ Families in particular are forced to cope with the consequences. Their capacities, especially in economic terms, are stretched to the limit.

In the late 1990s, the theme of 'transition to independence' attracted a lot of attention both in Europe and in the United States. As far as Italy is concerned, two other articles (beside Sgritta's paper) specifically deal with this theme. One is by Rossi (1997), entitled *The Nestlings: Why Young Adults Stay at Home Longer: The Italian Case*. The other is by Billari & Ongaro (1998): *The Transition into Adulthood in Italy: Evidence from Cross-Sectional Surveys*. All three papers emphasise the 'particular' situation of Italy. All three come to the same conclusion: Italy constitutes an extreme case of postponing adulthood. The argument of these authors is that Italy represents a special case. Cordon's comparative research (1997) supports this thesis. He compared three Mediterranean countries – Spain, Greece and Italy – with three Western European countries – France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The feature common to all is an increase in the number of (economically) non-active youth, particularly in the 25–29-year age bracket. All these young people were still living with their parents. Another feature relevant here is that, between 1986 and 1994, the economic situation of young adults in all the Mediterranean countries got steadily worse. Consequently, these young adults apparently also encountered great difficulties in getting fully integrated into society.

Yet in a broader geographical perspective, all the studies – be they Italian, European or American – have features in common. They all suggest young adults stay at home longer and they all tend to describe the transition into adulthood as problematic.

It is taken so seriously that the phenomenon has left the more academic debate to become part of the public discussion. It is even discussed in the boulevard press, e.g. in tabloids like the British *Daily Express*, in

which one headline read “Why we’re all big kids ... until we’re 35”¹. In scholarly studies, two elements are striking. First, the notions of staying-at-home (residential characteristics), independence, family formation, and adulthood are used as if they were unconditionally interchangeable, or at least as if they referred or contributed to the same process, with hardly any differentiation. Secondly, all studies tend to describe the situation as becoming increasingly complex.

Most studies specify the ‘markers’ (i.e. steps or milestones) showing the way into adulthood. Some, such as Corijn (2001) identify eight such markers; Sgriffa reduces these to four:

- ▶ leaving the parental family,
- ▶ access to more or less steady employment,
- ▶ starting to cohabit with a partner, and
- ▶ setting up a family of one’s own.

It should be stressed that these markers are characterised as normative in a double sense: by the *nature* of the event, to the effect that these events tend to be institutionalised as expressed by the rituals occurring during this transition; and in terms of their sequence or ‘timing’, as Shana Han (2000) recently said in an article: leaving school, starting a full-time job, leaving the parental home, getting married, and becoming a parent. This order implicitly refers to ranking over time, in a prescribed sequence.

Looking at the markers/milestones in the different studies, let us study Corijn’s eight (which include Sgriffa’s four):

- ▶ the first time for sexual intercourse,
- ▶ one’s first steady relationship,
- ▶ leaving home for the first time,
- ▶ living with a partner for the first time,
- ▶ getting married for the first time,
- ▶ the birth of the first child,
- ▶ finishing one’s education,
- ▶ first entry into the labour force

There are characteristics common to all research reports on this topic, including similarities in the theoretical frameworks applied. At this point I would like to make some remarks:

First remark: To me, the most striking fact in this list of markers, put forward at the turn of the century, is the sharp contrast with the *same* markers of half a century before: the 1950s. All of the four – or eight – milestones used now refer, in one way or another, to one single marker: *marriage*. In the 1950s, almost all the events described in all these markers occurred, at least normatively (if not ideal-typically), at *one* single moment: *marriage*, representing *the* one single step into adulthood. Until the 1960s, intercourse and pregnancy remained a serious topic in family sociology: take the ‘problem’ of premarital pregnancy, at the time of Christensens’ studies on ‘forced marriages’. The latter term is a strong indicator of normative sequence. One had to get married before becoming pregnant, let alone having a child. Illegitimate children were normatively unacceptable. Even the marker of ‘having a job’ indirectly refers to marriage, particularly for men. A young man had to have a job before qualifying for marriage. For women of that period, it was quite the reverse: leaving a job to get married and to have children (the two events being irrevocably linked).

Hence, *timing* has always been the crucial variable. Sgriffa also notes that marriage has lost its monopoly in terms of transition into adulthood. Though he claims that “young Italian men and women do not reject either marriage or the family”, this does not belie that fact that both the meaning and nature of marriage have changed dramatically – not only in Italy, but in other countries as well. It is an *ex-post* confirmation of

¹ Kate Muley, “A new study shows reaching adulthood takes a lot longer than we thought”, Daily Express, 3 September 2001, p. 59.

Trost's (old) hypothesis that marriage has changed from a ritual of introduction into a ritual of confirmation. The methodological consequence, however, is far greater. The concept of family cycle has become, in certain respects, an inadequate tool. By stressing and emphasising change at certain well-defined and consecutive phases of the life cycle, this approach tends to become obsolete. Hill has pointed this out very well involving the notion of 'crisis'. The old approach is being replaced by life-course (not life-cycle) analysis. An essential difference is that the family life-cycle points to a change in status and the preceding role shifts (wife/mother). In contrast, the life-course approach focuses on roles. A crucial difference between the two notions – status *versus* role – is that in family-cycle analysis, the status of husband/wife or father/mother is taken on *before* the roles are carried out, in contrast to life-course analysis. The latter focuses on behaviour instead of expectations, and the focus is on the actors instead of the institutions.

Second remark: The most 'popular' milestone currently is 'leaving the parental home'. Let me make two observations here:

1. This marker represents a typical life-course event, not a family *life-cycle* event; hardly any rituals are involved.
2. In this key-presentation, 'staying on' with one's parents is seen as having negative effects. I am not taking issue with this stand. If we are to discuss positive or negative effects, then we need to specify on whom the effects have a positive or negative effect (i.e. identify the different actors involved). I simply want to stress the importance currently being placed on this 'event' in the life course. In addition, the very semantics used – 'young adults' who 'live at home' – lead to a similar observation suggesting that *no one single* event marks the transition into adulthood. There is no longer any clear marker, not even marriage or cohabitation.

Recently, in the USA, Arnett's study found that, in the minds of adolescents, marriage ranked lowest in importance as a milestone marking entry into adulthood. This has become not only a complex but also a diffuse process. In post-modern terms, many situations and even such expressions as 'young adults' versus 'old youngsters' can be characterised as ambiguous. From a psychological perspective, it tends to involve not role transition but rather the actors' accepting responsibility for their own actions (Arnett 2001). From a sociological perspective, more dramatic changes can be detected.

Although no conceptualisation can yet be framed in well-defined terms, I would suggest that we are experiencing a vastly greater change than merely 'staying on in the parental home'. Put differently, and perhaps more accurately, remaining in the nest is not a marker but rather an indicator of a much greater societal change. The phenomenon so well described in Sgriffa's paper can only be understood in the context of a vast and profound change in the social fabric. When I discussed this with De Singly, he said the current relationship of young people *within* the parental home not only reflects a change towards more democratic relationships within the family (what De Swaan calls 'from command to negotiation'). It also reflects a totally new model and image of relationship and partnership within society. In this, Italy might present a very interesting case indeed.

Third remark: Returning to the markers, such as 'initial sexual intercourse', one can notice that this marker refers to an event that, in the 1950s, was still normatively expected to take place after the wedding. Nowadays, sex can no longer be regarded as the beginning of adulthood (or the end of youth) but rather as the opposite: the beginning of adolescence instead of its end. As a result, the duration of 'youth' seems to have increased at both ends. Hence, the discussion actually leads to a clear demarcation of childhood, youth and adulthood. In Sgriffa's paper, adulthood is equated with 'autonomy'. However, the very concept of autonomy has become differentiated. Opdebeeck (1993) identified four types of autonomy: economic, symbolic, affective and social. Sgriffa's paper focuses on the overlap between economic independence, held by people who have a job, versus psychological independence, which is labelled as a "mechanism of complicity".

Despite this, an alternative interpretation might be possible: e.g. economic autonomy might no longer be such an all-dominant factor in the perception of youth. More accurately put, autonomy might be per-

ceived differently, to the effect that staying on with one's parent might not be taken as a lack of autonomy, given the freedom of movement that today's young people have. Therefore, staying with one's parents could be conceptualised as a rational choice. Moreover, it could be a viable alternative to living alone, thus rejecting the commitment to live in yet another *permanent* (time/space) relationship with a partner (of either the opposite or the same sex) – while at the same time enjoying a relationship characterised by a lesser degree of commitment. The latter interpretation does not necessarily invalidate Sgriffa's implicit advocacy for improving the Italian welfare state. However, it might have some impact in that the differentiation between Italy and some other (post-)modern societies might become less pronounced.

Conclusion of Part One

As a general conclusion of the first part of this discussion, and focusing on time and space, one could speculate that the transition to adulthood leads to the question of what being young is all about, and what are its borders. Here, it seems appropriate to suggest that there is no clear-cut border, no line of demarcation. There might be several other things: either a no man's land referred to as 'young adulthood', or perhaps an overlap of life sectors during youth (in terms of dependency rather than autonomy). There are also cultural factors, like subscribing to various forms of youth culture to varying degrees.

In this respect, the actors might increasingly have a chance to steer their own life course. Shana Han's article (2000) devoted ample attention to an overview of variability within cohorts. In addition, Dutch research results (Iedema et al. 1997) suggest a wider variety among younger cohorts than older ones.

What is really important is this: In most contributions, as well as in the key paper under discussion, the transition into adulthood is conceptualised as a general process. These studies offer an explanation that should hold true for or apply to society as a whole. However, some elements of post-modernist thinking might offer an alternative explanation. Some sectors of society – even such well-developed ones as the entertainment industry, sports, and young celebrities – are not considered as belonging to the 'not-yet-adult' population. For example, in tennis, 20-year-old females might be fully competitive and are treated as mature, full-blown adults, even though they might be unmarried and, in some instances, might be chaperoned by a parent.

Age and Gender

Age

In the life-course approach, timing is by definition a crucial, important variable; and so is age. In Sgriffa's contribution, in seven out of the nine tables presented, the independent variable relates to age. In addition, the material presented is predictably broken down by age (into four age categories: see Table 4 in Sgriffa's paper). Nevertheless, the importance with respect to age actually doubles: The age of transition into adulthood tends to increase, while age as a key-factor for adulthood – as a necessary and sufficient condition – tends to decrease.

Reflecting on Sgriffa's paper and the sources it builds on, as well as on the research evidence available, one could speculate that becoming an adult nowadays has become almost analogous to the ageing process. No longer are there any clear milestones marking the rite of passage into adulthood: for instance, like what the wedding used to mean in this context. When a person becomes older, there is no clear-cut rite of passage, either, despite such existing milestones as retiring at a certain fixed age. These practices are being put to the test, too (one good example being retirement procedures at US universities). The process of people being 'put out to pasture' at an earlier age is becoming apparent. The question currently being raised comes under the heading of 'discrimination', meaning that *age as such*, by itself, is increasingly regarded as an invalid criterion for whether or not people should be allowed to perform certain tasks – be they at work, in society or in the family. This development also relates to a new relationship between the public and private spheres.

In this respect, one might wonder whether not only the entry into adulthood but also its end have become less clear-cut, more complex, more confused and ambiguous. As a result, Sgriffa's very well-documented description of the contemporary transition into adulthood might well apply to other phases of the life course, too: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, older adulthood (young old age, or third age), and (very) old age (fourth age). Even the terms 'third age' and 'fourth age' convey no set boundaries.

The relative freedom of age constitutes one of the factors determining one's role in life at any given time. It involves more alternatives for the actors involved. Shana Han (2000) calls this 'new individualisation'.

Gender

In Sgriffa's paper, gender is acknowledged (in three tables out of nine, the evidence presented is broken down by gender). However, gender figures less prominently than does age. More importantly, gender is featured as an independent variable, as is the case in many of the research reports on the transition into adulthood. What is lacking – or more accurately, not focused on – is a gender perspective.

This is not necessarily an omission. It could be that gender differences (regarding division of labour/power and role allocation) have become less important than they used to be. Compare the situation now to the 1950s, when Parsons' paradigm of role division by gender was uncritically applied, i.e. expressive versus instrumental roles. Nevertheless, a discussion of the current situation with respect to coming of age, if seen from a gender perspective, might contribute to a better understanding of the current process of transition into parenthood.

Although this 'new individualisation' might turn into a new trend, it does not simply imply 'total freedom'. This 'new freedom' is open to reactions (both positive and negative) by relevant others and has even led to new debates, e.g. how young or how old a person has to be to have a baby.

Conclusion of Part Two

Introducing both an age and a gender perspective could prove adequate as a tool for understanding the process under consideration: the transition into adulthood.

General Conclusions

Theory

Sgriffa's key paper is entitled *Family and Welfare Systems in the Transition to Adulthood*. Indeed, it treats Italy as a special case (though referring to analogous situations in other Mediterranean countries, Spain in particular). Moreover, it implicitly tends to rank Italy somewhat lower on the scale of welfare states when applying an adequate family-based paradigm (in this case, Millar's).

Nonetheless, I see the Italian case as quite valuable for gaining insight into the process of transition to adulthood – not only in Italy but also in Central and Northern Europe. Italy may not be such a deviant case after all. It may simply represent the general shift in the transition to parenthood not just in Italy (despite its being seen as an extreme case) but occurring likewise (under somewhat different conditions) not only in the other EU Member States but also in all post-industrial, bureaucratic, post-modern societies.

Given the above, two aspects could prove of strategic importance: One could view entry into adulthood from a broader perspective of (static) demarcations between the generations or (dynamic) life-course transitions: childhood, youth, adulthood, young old age (third age) and old age (fourth age). Consequently, one should look not only at 'pull factors' (such as work/family formations) but also at 'push factors' (or the lack thereof) (i.e. it might be better to stay young).

Methodology

A comparison of EU Member States (Tables 1, 2, 3 and 8) might be wise when proving strategies, since welfare systems tend to be country-specific. Yet one might wonder whether regional differences within countries might not be just as important as differences *across* countries. Conversely, some regions in different countries could be more similar than regions *within* a country. In this aspect Sgriffa, (and other authors dealing with Italy, such as Billari (1998), pay explicit attention to the North-South divide. However, their conclusion is that general trends tend to outweigh regional differences. Such an approach might be valid not only for methodological reasons but also for contextual reasons – particularly because European welfare policies are becoming more and more decentralised. This is especially true where the family is concerned. Hence, it might be worthwhile to take such an approach into consideration when designing research proposals on the transition into parenting.

The task allocated to the author of this key paper concerns the triangle of youth-family-welfare. The term 'welfare' is adequately conceptualised in a broad sense: unemployment (Tables 1 and 3), source of income (Table 2), being at the core. I wonder whether it would be a good strategy to introduce, along with economic variables, those variables referring to such cultural elements as one's stance on the so-called new, non-materialistic issues, e.g. ecology, new social movements, etc. If these new cultural elements prove to be more pronounced among the younger sector of the population than among the older one, it might make sense for these variables to play a role in the transition to adulthood, particularly in connection with the postponement syndrome.

Society/Family

Sgriffa's position of focusing on family is very well taken. Yet it might prove strategic to also focus on how young people build relationships. The old dichotomy of 'family of orientation versus family of procreation' is becoming obsolete. As social actors, young people tend to live simultaneously within a family while at the same time building a new type of (sexual) relationship not characterised by setting up one's own household.

The relationship between family and welfare focuses on family and state; yet strategically it might be a good idea to acknowledge two more actors: the market and the third sector. This is all the more important in recognising youth as a social group that, by virtue of its behaviour *vis-à-vis* a certain issue (family formation / entry into adulthood), is actually behaving in accordance with the new relationship between the public and private domains.

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Acquiring Responsibilities and Citizenship: Social Participation and Social Responsibilities

RUTH LISTER

Introduction

Young people's transitions to adulthood can be understood as a process of developing citizenship in which, over time, young people become eligible to enjoy the rights and to exercise the obligations and responsibilities associated with citizenship. It is also a pivotal period in the process of 'citizenship-identity formation', a period during which (children and) young people have been described as 'learner citizens' (Arnot & Dillabough 2000: 12) or 'citizens in the making' (Marshall 1950: 25 / Hall & Williamson 1999). Such labels should not be read as a denial of young people's citizenship status but more as indicator of the ways in which, more than at other points of the life-course, the relationship to citizenship is in a state of flux. For young people, in particular, therefore, citizenship can be understood as 'as much a transitional process as an outcome status achieved at a particular stage of life' (Bynner 1997: 238). It is a process that young people actively negotiate but within structural constraints, which shape citizenship as an exclusionary as well as an inclusive force.

The paper aims to provide an analytical framework for thinking about how young people in Europe become citizens and acquire the responsibilities associated with citizenship. It draws on both theoretical work and on empirical evidence about young people's participation, in particular from an on-going longitudinal study of 110 young people aged 16 to 23 in the East Midlands city of Leicester¹, which is part of the UK ESRC *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change* programme.

The paper begins with a discussion of citizenship as a status (involving formal rights and obligations) and as a practice (involving political participation in both formal and informal modes of politics and the responsibilities associated with unpaid forms of work in the home and community). These conceptions reflect the two main historical citizenship traditions of rights-based liberalism and political participation-promoting civic republicanism, as well as a more recent, third, communitarian strand, which has provided the basis for a more generalised appeal to citizenship obligations and responsibilities.

The paper then argues for a synthesis of rights and participation approaches based on the notion of 'agency'. This encourages a construction of young people as active agents, negotiating the processes of developing citizenship and citizenship-identity formation, but within the constraints created by economic, social and cultural divisions. These negotiations can be understood through the lens of what Hall & Williams describe as 'lived citizenship', that is "the meaning that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens" (1999: 2).

Thus, the nature of 'lived citizenship' will vary within societies and also between societies, reflecting their particular citizenship traditions. As Birte Siim puts it in her recent book on *Gender and Citizenship*, "citizenship is a contextualised concept" (2000: 1). The reading of young people's citizenship in this paper is heavily coloured by the UK context, although it attempts to paint in the shades of young people's experiences of citizenship in other European countries for which information was available.

¹ ESRC project award no. L134 25 1039, carried out by Ruth Lister, Sue Middleton, Noel Smith and Lynne Cox (and during the first year, Jill Vincent). The project is a three year, qualitative, longitudinal study. Findings reported here refer to the first wave only, when the young people were aged between 16 and 23. Thanks are due to Noel Smith for his helpful comments on the first draft of this paper.

Citizenship as a Status

Rights

The notion of 'lived citizenship' is important when considering citizenship as a status conferring rights, as it reminds us that there can be a gap between *de jure* and *de facto* rights, that is between formal rights and their enjoyment in practice. Following T. H. Marshall, the status of citizenship is conventionally understood in terms of civil, political and social rights. Today, theorists and activists argue for new forms of rights such as reproductive and cultural rights and the right of participation in decision-making (which forms a bridge to citizenship as a practice). Young people access different citizenship rights at different ages in different countries and even within countries². The distinction between formal rights and their realisation as part of what Maxine Molyneux (2000: 122) terms 'really existing citizenship' is likely to be of particular significance for young people who will be trying to exercise these rights for the first time.

Obligations

The relationship between the rights and obligations of citizenship has become a critical issue in the face of the increasing dominance of 'a duties discourse' (Roche 1992: 49) in political debate. In both Anglo-Saxon and Continental European countries, paid work obligations are to a greater or less extent being elevated to the status of *the* citizenship obligation, upon which social rights are conditional. Work has also been described as "a major form of social participation" (Leisink & Coenen 1993: 6). In an essay on work and citizenship in the New Europe, Leisink & Coenen argue that "through their very work individuals constitute themselves as members of society. However, significant differences which go into the make-up of work, notably the difference between paid work and unpaid work as well as the internal differentiation of paid work, determine the differential nature of social membership through work" (ibid: 8).

A central question for young people's citizenship is their relationship to a labour market, which offers many of them little prospect of secure, long-term employment. According to the European Commission, "for the Union as a whole and in most Member States, young people less than 25 years of age are more than twice as likely as people aged 25 and over to be unemployed", the one exception being in Germany (Eurostat & European Commission, 2001: 86). The Commission also draws attention to how generally young people enter the labour market at a later age than previously. Both these aspects of young people's relationship to the labour market have implications for the economic independence traditionally associated with adult citizenship (Jones & Wallace 1992) and hence for the speed of the passage from adolescence to mature citizenship.

Research suggests that negative experiences in the labour market can, not surprisingly, lead to negative attitudes among young people towards paid work and towards the idea that it represents an obligation of citizenship (France 1998 / Bentley & Oakley 1999). Yet, in our study in Leicester, we found a positive stance towards paid employment, even among a majority of those in a marginalised economic situation. Moreover, the majority recognised and agreed with the notion of responsibility and in particular the responsibility to be in employment, training or education. Only a small group saw employment not as a responsibility but as necessary to avoid the 'crap lifestyle' associated with unemployment or experienced the idea of work obligations as coercive.

Citizenship as a Practice

Unpaid Work

The preoccupation of many governments with paid work obligations has been criticised by feminists and others as devaluing the contribution to citizenship made by unpaid forms of work, namely family care work

² For an account of the inconsistencies in the ages at which the rights and responsibilities associated with adult citizenship are conferred in a British context see Jones & Bell (2000).

and voluntary and community work. In some countries young mothers tend to be constructed as a problem or even a threat, rather than as young citizens raising the next generation of citizens (Duncan & Edwards 1997 / Lewis 1997). The extent to which young carers of disabled family members are shouldering adult citizenship responsibilities is all too often overlooked. Yet, according to an exploratory cross-national European study, in many families across Europe, children and young people help to provide care in the community (Becker 1995).

My focus here, though, is voluntary and community work, as an important expression of social participation, which arguably in some cases can, like care work, represent a more valuable contribution to society than some forms of paid work. In the UK, the Government extols the virtues of voluntary work as an expression of good citizenship especially for young people. The Home Secretary has, for example, recently argued that volunteering "is one of the most important aspects of citizenship" (Blunkett 2001: 4). Earlier in 1998, the Lord Chancellor suggested in a speech that "one of the best ways of putting the theories of citizenship into practice is through voluntary work in the community. ... Volunteering can foster young people's sense of belonging; belonging to the community, developing their understanding of the rights and duties they have as citizens". However, the Government also makes it clear that volunteering should not be regarded as an alternative to paid work and the benefit regulations are designed to ensure that it does not function as such.

A study in nine European countries in the mid-1990s found considerable variation in levels of volunteering among under-24 year olds, ranging from only 5% in Slovakia to 42% in Ireland. The average overall was 25% (Gaskin & Davis-Smith 1995). Research in the UK reveals relatively high levels of involvement in and support for voluntary activities, among young people, not all of which is always picked up in official volunteering statistics (Roker et al. 1999). A study of over 1,100 young people, undertaken in three schools in different parts of England, indicated "a high level of involvement in volunteering and campaigning activities", which, the researchers claim, "refutes the stereotype of young people as uninvolved and apathetic" (Roker et al. 1999: 49). One in eight was involved regularly and over three-quarters overall were classified as having some involvement. Roker et al. comment that "what was common to the vast majority of volunteers and campaigners, regardless of what activity they were actually involved in, was the way in which their activity stimulated social and political thought, and contributed to identity development". In this way such participation contributed "to the development of citizenship understanding among young people" (Roker et al. 1999: 53-4).

In our own study in Leicester, about three-quarters of participants had experience of some kind of voluntary activity, although current engagement was more widespread among the younger than older participants³. The suggestion that the Government is equating voluntary work with 'good citizenship' drew mixed responses, which tended to reflect more general attitudes towards voluntary work. Reasons given for non-involvement in voluntary work tended to focus on demands of work and study as well as sports and social activities amongst those who were in higher education or graduate-type jobs. Some of those without post-school education and in a marginalised economic position said that they were not willing to work without payment, expressing incredulity or even anger at the thought of working for nothing.

Those who participated in voluntary work saw it as good for communities, the environment and society generally and many found it personally satisfying. There was a belief that it provided an opportunity to take action on social issues, often with real constructive effect. There was, in some cases, a sense of personal agency, which was more evident than when talking about the formal political process. This echoed the findings of an earlier, synthesising, national study in which a consensus emerged among young people that the best way to change things in society was through voluntary organisations. These were seen as offering "a route to social and political action, distinct from and vastly preferred to mainstream politics" (Gaskin et al. 1996: 14).

³ A national poll, conducted for the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, likewise found that a higher percentage of 16-18 year olds than older young people gave their time to charity (NCVO press release, 9 February, 2000).

Here, voluntary action shades into informal politics and points to a broader notion of politics than in more traditional formulations, which have focused on the formal political system. Such narrow constructions of politics have been challenged for some years by, among others, feminists and those concerned with young people's political participation. It is important, therefore, to consider both formal and informal modes of politics.

Formal Politics

It appears to be a common refrain across European societies that young people are opting out of participation in the formal political system. For example, in Germany discussion "about how young people relate to politics has been dominated by the thesis that the young generation had become disenchanted with politics and unwilling to get involved" (Gaiser 1999). In Finland "there has been a drastic decline in young people's voting activities during the last decades. The turnout of voters aged between 18 and 30 participating in national elections has plummeted" (Paakkunainen undated). In the UK there has been considerable concern about what is perceived as young people's political apathy. This concern has intensified following the 2001 General Election in which only 39% of those aged 18 to 24 voted (compared with an overall turn-out of 59%, which itself was the lowest since full universal suffrage) (*The Independent*, 4 July 2001).

There is some disagreement as to whether young people's disengagement from formal politics is primarily a generational or a life-cycle phenomenon. On the basis of the annual *British Social Attitudes Survey*, Alison Park concludes that "it is premature to assume that a significant generational shift in political engagement is taking place" (1999: 37). However, she points to possible evidence of a shift in attitudes in relation to voting as a civic duty. The BSAS found only a third of under-25 year olds believed voting is a civic obligation compared to around two-thirds of those aged 25 to 55 and nearly four-fifths of the over-55s.

There was little support for treating voting as a social obligation in our own study. One of the most forcefully made arguments was that it is more irresponsible to vote in ignorance than not at all. One 16-year old young woman of Indian origin, for instance, said that "if I was a bad citizen, I'd go to the voting poll and just tick any names. Not knowing what I was ticking – that would make me a bad citizen". What also came across quite strongly was the widespread lack of political knowledge, both in terms of what the political parties stand for and the basic mechanics of voting. There was a tendency to see politics as only relevant to adults and in particular adult taxpayers.

Those who had remained in education or entered graduate-type employment were generally more positive about voting than those who had left school with few or no qualifications, although they also expressed fairly high levels of ambivalence. Nevertheless, they were more likely to perceive the vote as giving them a say and to argue that those who do not vote cannot then complain about the government. Some also referred to historical struggles for the vote.

Those with few or no qualifications tended to link their lack of belief in the importance of voting with dissatisfaction with the political system (see also White et al. 2000). They saw politics as boring, irrelevant and confusing and they lacked faith in the effectiveness of the vote and in politicians and government. As one white 22-year old young man put it: "You might as well be voting for the wind itself. It does a lot more for people than the government ever will."

This sense of disengagement from the formal political system appeared to reflect more general feelings of marginalisation as citizens. A number of those with few or no qualifications identified with the label of 'second-class citizen' and they were more likely not to identify themselves as citizens at all. At the same time, the denial of the vote until 18 was itself perceived as exclusion from full citizenship by some of the young people. One 16-year old suggested that if they could vote, under-18-year olds would be more likely to "feel like they belonged to something". Following the 2001 election, the Carnegie UK Trust called for the lowering of the voting age to 16, pointing to a survey that found that 71% of 16 to 24-year olds want a greater say in decisions that affect them (*The Guardian*, 27 June, 2001).

Overall, the picture painted is not one of apathetic youth but of serious disengagement from the political system, particularly among economically marginalised young people who have little knowledge about or

confidence in the formal democratic process. Henn et al. (forthcoming), on the basis of another study of young people's political participation in the East Midlands, likewise conclude "that young people today are 'engaged sceptics' – they are interested in political affairs, but distrustful of those who are elected to positions of power". Such interpretations are reinforced by the greater interest shown in informal community-based politics.

Informal Politics

Only three of the 110 young people in our study had played an active role in party politics. In contrast, approaching three-fifths had some experience of informal political action, broadly defined, including involvement in informal community or single issue politics, even if this was often only on a sporadic or one-off basis. Examples were activities in the Asian community; participation in women's or environmental groups and youth councils; advocacy for disabled people; petitions and demonstrations and some examples of local direct action, such as sit-ins to campaign for safer roads. Young, economically marginalised, women were particularly likely to have had some involvement.

In general the young people were much more optimistic about community or campaign politics than about voting as a means of effecting change. The contrast was most marked among those with few or no qualifications and Asian participants were particularly likely to express confidence in the effectiveness of informal politics. Formal politics was more likely to be seen as hindering than facilitating the ability to make a difference, because of the perception that government does not respond adequately to people's efforts to bring about change.

A Youth Survey in Germany likewise found that "more directly problem-oriented and non-institutionalised" forms of participation "play a very considerable role in the young citizens' repertoire of political activities" (although it found stronger support for voting as a means of exerting political influence than is suggested in the UK) (Gaiser 1999). In Finland, it has been suggested that young people's "commitment to politics and conventional political participation may not be so strong or active as their parents' but their readiness for political protest and unconventional expression has grown. Young people are clearly more prepared for radical forms of action – even illegal demonstrations – than the mythical young people of the 1960s" (Paakkunainen undated). Such forms of action have been described as 'dissident citizenship': the practices of marginalised citizens who publicly contest prevailing arrangements of power by means of oppositional democratic practices that augment or replace institutionalised channels of democratic opposition when those channels are inadequate or unavailable. Instead of voting, lobbying, or petitioning, dissident citizens constitute alternative public spaces through practices such as marches, protests, and picket lines; sit-ins, slow-downs, and cleanups; speeches, strikes, and street theatre (Sparks 1997: 75).

As we have seen with recent anti-globalisation protests, some young people are more likely to practice dissident citizenship than conventional ballot-box citizenship.

Agency and Identity

Agency

Citizenship political participation, in various forms, can be understood as an expression of human agency. The notion of human agency is, I have argued elsewhere (Lister 1997), pivotal to bridging the traditional divide between an understanding of citizenship as a status and a practice⁴. Citizenship as rights enables people to participate in the practice of citizenship, both individually and collectively. Rights are not fixed. They

⁴ For an alternative attempt to bridge this divide through the notion of 'republican liberalism' see Dagger (1997).

remain the object of citizenship struggles to defend, reinterpret and extend them. Examples with particular significance for young people include the voting age and the age of consent for young gay men. Who is involved in those struggles, where they are placed in the political hierarchy and the power and influence they can yield will help to determine how rights develop. In this way, citizenship as a status and a practice interact dialectically.

However, citizenship as a status is not dependent upon citizenship as a practice. We need therefore to distinguish between what it means, on the one hand, to *be* a citizen in the formal sense, i.e. to enjoy the rights of citizenship and, on the other, to *act* as a citizen, i.e. to fulfil the potential of the status through the exercise of agency. Some young people act as citizens before they enjoy the full panoply of citizenship rights; some others, like adults, do not fulfil the potential for a variety of reasons (although they may do so at other points in their lives). They do not, however, cease to be citizens as a result.

This dialectical relationship between citizenship as a status and a practice is shaped by the constraints and opportunities created by economic, social and political structures. The interplay between structure and agency is a recurrent theme in the literature on youth transitions to adulthood (Banks et al. 1992 / Jones & Wallace 1992 / Coles 1995 / Furlong & Cartmel 1997). There has been a discursive shift from a metaphor of 'trajectories', with its structuralist connotations, to that of 'navigations', which places greater emphasis on individual negotiation of risk and uncertainty (Evans & Furlong 1997). The challenge now is to understand the interaction between individual agency and structural factors such as divisions of class, gender and 'race', which advantage some and disadvantage others as they negotiate the transitions to adult citizenship⁵.

Moreover, the nature of this interaction will vary according to the cultural, institutional and citizenship context of different European societies. As Nagel & Wallace point out, "young people in different parts of Europe face different kinds of 'structure' in terms of institutionalised traditions in education and training systems and also in terms of labour markets [to which we might add political systems]. Different familial and cultural expectations impinge upon them and the degree of agency or scope for progressive individualisation may differ" (1997: 42).

Identity

Culture and the expectations it engenders "mediates between the personal level of agency and the structural level of social institutions and processes" (Pugh & Thompson 1999: 25) in the weaving of the fabric of 'lived citizenship'. Indeed, the concept of 'cultural citizenship' has become increasingly prominent in the citizenship literature (see, for instance, Stevenson 2001 / Isin & Wood 1999). It represents, according to Jan Pakulski, "a new set of citizenship claims that involve the right to unhindered and legitimate representation, and propagation of identities and lifestyles through the information systems and public fora" (1997: 80).

How young people see themselves represented in the 'adult world' is likely to impact on their sense of themselves as emergent citizens during what can be understood as a pivotal period in the process of citizenship-identity formation. This process has implications for their sense of belonging to or membership of a particular citizenship collectivity, which in turn is likely to impact on the nature and extent of their participation as citizens.

Conover et al. have described citizenship as "a fundamental identity that helps situate the individual in society. ... To say that people think of themselves as citizens is to suggest that they have a self-schema which intricately links their sense of self to their notion of what it means to be a citizen" (1991: 805). Insofar as traditional formulations represent citizenship as an identity it is a universalistic, civic, rather than particular identity. According to Derek Heater, this means that it is "political identity par excellence", overlaying potentially divisive particular identities (1990: 184). Yet, like other identities citizenship identity is constructed and evolves in particular communities (local, national and supra-national) and it is possible to identify

⁵ Other divisions that are likely to have an impact are those associated with disability, sexuality and, in some societies, religion.

processes of differential and multiple citizenship identity formation, which reflect particular group identities and structural locations (Hobson & Lindholm 1997 / Isin & Wood 1999 / Stevenson 2001).

Citizenship is not a free-floating identity but is rooted in specific locales and institutional bases. Hall et al., for example, draw attention to “how young people’s need for space, and their emergent sense of place, are aspects of a citizenship identity which young people ‘learn’, work at and negotiate over in their leisure time” (1999: 501, 1998). For some young people, local rather than national communities may be more important as the locus of citizenship identity and participation (Hall et al. 1999 / France 1998).

Moreover, how young people feel as citizens or as ‘citizens in the making’ may shift according to institutional context, such as educational institution, the workplace, the social security system, community organisations, social movement groups. Schools, both generally and more specifically through citizenship education, have an important role to play in the construction of citizens and citizenship identities (Arnot & Dillabough 2000 / Lister et al. 2001). In the Leicester study we found that, for the most part, the schools had done little to prepare the young people for participation as political citizens and a number of them said that they wished they had learned about voting at school.

Overall, of 56 who expressed a view, 32 identified themselves as citizens, five as partial citizens, six were uncertain and 13 said that they did not feel like citizens. As noted earlier, those in a marginalised economic situation were less likely to identify themselves as citizens than were those who had stayed in education. There was a broad gender balance. Although numbers were small, Asian participants appeared rather more willing to identify themselves as citizens, sometimes with reference to being a ‘British citizen’.

When asked about national identity, all Asian participants described themselves as British but most also referred to their Indian background. White participants found it harder to talk about national identity and what it meant to them and frequently used ‘British’ and ‘English’ as interchangeable terms. Other research in the UK has indicated how many young people from minority ethnic groups and also lesbian and gay young people describe themselves in terms of ‘a combination identity’ such as British Asian (Industrial Society 1997). Similarly, it reveals “a widespread sense ... of there being different levels of belonging and identification”, rather than a strong sense of national identity as such among young people (Bentley & Oakley 1999: 53).

This sense of different levels of belonging and of combination or hyphenated identities can also be understood as an expression of increasingly multi-tiered notions of citizenship, embracing the local, through the regional to the national and from there to the supra-national (such as the European Union) and the global. The making of EU citizenship is in part about the promotion of a European identity (Wiener 1999) and a number of programmes are directed specifically towards encouraging young people to see themselves as active European citizens (European Commission 1998). Eurobarometer indicates, however, that age is not a significant factor in whether or not people consider themselves to be European (Kohli 2000).

In an earlier European Value Study, people generally were more likely to say they belonged to the world than to Europe. As Martin Kohli observes, “Europe as a focus of attachment is increasingly pressured by what lies beyond: by a global or universal human identity” (Kohli 2000: 123). It is possible that the young people who participate in supra-national campaigns, such as those around globalisation and world poverty issues, are more likely than other people to identify themselves in this way. As such they may represent emergent global citizens (even if they do not themselves necessarily use a discourse of global citizenship). However, the idea of globalism did not spark any interest among the young people in our own study.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to throw light on the question of young people’s acquisition of responsibilities and citizenship drawing on both citizenship theory and empirical evidence, mainly from the UK. Both theory and empirical research need to acknowledge the importance of ‘lived citizenship’ (Hall & Williams 1999) to understanding how young people themselves make sense of and negotiate their transitional status as ‘citizens in the making’. They do so within structural constraints, which exist within all European societies but the exact impact of which will reflect national and cultural particularities and those associated with a range of social divisions such as class, gender, disability and ‘race’.

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Comments on Ruth Lister's Paper

EVA BERNHARDT

I am a family demographer, and citizenship is not an analytical concept with which I am very familiar. However, as is usual when you enter relatively unknown terrain, you learn a lot. Being familiar with life-course analysis and having studied the transition to adulthood from a family-demographic point of view, these were the glasses that I put on when reading this paper. The starting point for this seminar on *Family Forms and the Young Generation in Europe* is the well-known fact that young Europeans today make the transition to adulthood considerably later than previous generations did, and the transition process is more extended than it used to be. Does this have any implications for the way in which young people acquire the responsibilities associated with citizenship? This is the main question that this paper is trying to answer.

Ruth Lister develops an analytical framework for studying the process of 'citizenship-identity formation' and the way in which young Europeans go through the passage from adolescence to mature citizenship. What are the crucial steps in this process through which young people become eligible to enjoy the rights and exercise the obligations and responsibilities associated with citizenship? Ruth Lister does not provide any clear-cut answer to this question but rather tries to develop the tools with which the question can be answered, for different countries and for different cultural contexts. She argues for a synthesis of the two prevailing approaches to citizenship, namely the rights and participation approaches, using the concept of 'human agency'. The crux of these two approaches is that young people take an active role by negotiating this process within the constraints created by economic, social and cultural divisions.

Looking at citizenship as a status, the paid-work obligation is often considered as the crucial component, the *sine qua non* for mature citizenship. In many countries – for example, in Sweden – it is paid work that forms the basis for other social rights. In order to qualify for most requirements of the social insurance system, the individual has to earn an income, i.e. to be gainfully employed. Ruth Lister finds a positive stance towards paid employment in her ongoing longitudinal study of young people in England. The young people who participated in her study were between the ages of 16 to 23: that is, young people at the beginning of their transitional process. I myself conducted a mail-questionnaire survey of young adults in Sweden, in which the respondents were between 22 and 30 years of age. I found that in this age range, the overwhelming majority, i.e. 80% of the respondents, considered the ability to support oneself as the most important condition for being regarded as an adult. Having left the parental home – i.e. residential independence – was also considered to be of considerable importance, much more than family formation. The question was not framed in terms of citizenship but rather in terms of adulthood. However, it appeared clear that paid employment and 'economic independence' are currently regarded as necessary conditions for successfully completing this transitional process.

We know that all over Europe, young people tend to enter the labour market at a later age than they did previously. I would also like to emphasise that 'entering the labour market' is less of a clear-cut one-time step in a young person's life than it used to be. It is becoming more and more common that this transition takes place over an extended period, during which young people have a rather tenuous labour-market attachment. I am thinking not only of the risk of unemployment but also of the increasing prevalence of temporary jobs. To the extent that paid employment and a firm attachment to the labour market are defined in terms of having 'a permanent job', qualifying for 'social membership through work' has become a goal that is, if not unattainable, at least much more difficult to reach than was previously the case.

As was stated above, Ruth Lister emphasises the role of human agency, in particular in bridging the divide between citizenship as status and as practice. This dialectical relationship is shaped by the constraints and opportunities created by various structural factors. Ruth Lister mentions the importance of taking into account such divisions as class, gender and 'race' when analysing the interaction between individual agency and structural factors. There is also a discussion on the relative importance of paid versus unpaid work in developing citizenship. We know that family care work is more important in the lives of women than in the

lives of men, and *vice versa* with regard to paid work. I would like to argue that even young women who have not yet started a family probably see a greater role for family care work in their future life than do young men without families. The question is whether this influences the process of negotiating citizenship. Ruth Lister argues that instead of using a structuralist approach and talking about 'trajectories', one should place greater emphasis on the individual negotiation of risk and uncertainty and subsequently talk about ' navigations'. I think that young men and young women navigate quite differently because they anticipate different future life-course patterns – because, in many ways, they set different priorities in life, at least in relative terms. I would like to stress 'the importance of gender' for the negotiating process, especially with regard to paid and unpaid work. It is clear that women show a more tenuous attachment to the labour market for a substantial part of their life course, and that they put greater importance on family care work in their life, be it as a reality or as an anticipated future situation. Does this then make their 'citizen-identity formation' more difficult, or at least more drawn out, than is the case for men?

My final comment is with regard to age. Lister refers to age at different places throughout her paper. Nowadays young Europeans pass from adolescence to mature citizenship at a later age, and the process is indeed more drawn out, meaning that young people are in a state of transition for a longer period of time than used to be the case. Nevertheless, does this alter the nature of the transition? Does it affect the final outcome if individuals start negotiating at age 22 rather than at age 16, or if mature citizenship is reached by age 30 instead of age 25? Perhaps a later transition means a more thorough acquisition of responsibilities and citizenship. This is perhaps more a comment on the underlying theme of the seminar than on Ruth Lister's paper. However, framing it in terms of citizenship, do we really need to worry about whether the transitional process takes place later in a person's individual life course rather than earlier? Does it really matter?

Assessing the Quality of Life of Young Europeans: Methodological Issues

The Transition to Adulthood in Three European Countries as an Empirical Test of Various Theories on the Condition of Today's Youth

ANTONIO SCHIZZEROTTO

Introduction

Being responsible for an international team commissioned by DG Education and Culture of the European Commission to carry out research on youth policies and the situation of young people in 18 European countries, I recently became aware that much of the data on European youth refer to cultural aspects. Conversely, relatively little information is available on structural conditions *vis-à-vis* youth. Moreover, most of the data on structural conditions are cross-sectional in nature, though some time series do exist, at least in the area of economics. But what is really missing are analyses that rely on panel data or, at the very least, on data from repeated cross-sectional surveys. This is a problem from at least two perspectives:

- ▶ First, it is problematic because the social conditions of young people cannot be understood solely by examining their current position regarding educational level, labour-market participation, occupational stratification, etc. The durations and features of the trajectories that lead young people to their current position in the social structure are equally, if not more, important. In fact, many intergenerational disparities consist of inequalities in life course rather than in the position finally reached. Unfortunately, life-course disparities can neither be detected nor studied using traditional cross-sectional surveys.
- ▶ A second reason requiring the use of longitudinal data in analysing conditions faced by youth relates to the fact that most scholars maintain that these conditions are rapidly changing over time. Nevertheless, also in this case, cross-sectional data constitute a rather poor and unreliable basis to test whether the position of today's youth in the social structure is really different from the past.

However, when carrying out the research for the EU Commission, what really struck me was seeing that several of the more important recent theoretical contributions to understanding European youth conditions dealt with the transition to adulthood, at the same time ignoring panel surveys and longitudinal data. As I will explain later, I am fully convinced that the transition to independence really is a central topic to any analysis of youth conditions. This is because, even in contemporary societies, youth represents a temporary step in the life course of human beings who spend most of their life as adults. However, because becoming adult is a process, it cannot properly be analysed without longitudinal data.

It is in the light of the above conviction that I wrote this paper. Despite the session theme, my paper does not concentrate on methodological questions only. I think that, in scientific reasoning, methodology is like a scaffolding, which has to be removed before a person can decide whether a building is nice and comfortable. Therefore, this paper aims at being both substantive and methodological. First, I will shortly review three well-known approaches to the study of youth conditions in contemporary societies, all quite recently developed. Second, I will argue that two of these approaches are rather weak, mainly because they either do not pay close attention to empirical data, or alternatively because they rely mainly on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal information. Third, I will try to show – by means of a comparative analysis regarding the transition to adulthood in Great Britain, Italy and Sweden – that panel data can shed light on the condition of youth in contemporary society. It can also help scholars develop sounder theories on the topic and on how it changes over time and across cohorts.

Theories on the Conditions Faced by Youth

Youth and the Underclass

The first approach to the study of youth conditions upon which I have decided to comment maintains that young people are currently an important part of the underclass. The main arguments made by theorists in support of this approach are as follows. An increasing proportion of young people is currently exposed to such social and economic risks as educational failure, unemployment and homelessness. This deterioration of young people's material well-being in turn engenders a deterioration of their mental well-being. As a consequence, today's youth runs a greater risk of alcoholism, drug dependency and psychological dysfunction. In deprived areas, several young men and women displaying symptoms of such psychological distresses and material hardship end up engaging in irresponsible sex, thus showing high rates of teenage pregnancy and fatherless children. Such children will grow up without proper control and role models. Hence, they are prone to follow in their parents' ill-begotten footsteps. Consequently, this abets the formation of an underclass that reproduces over time (Murray 1990).

I find the above thesis to be not really convincing. In particular, this same notion of underclass seems hardly appropriate to describe the social situation of youth in most European countries. Surveys regarding poverty, social exclusion and unemployment suggest that young people who fall into such deprived conditions will not necessarily become permanently trapped in them. In other words, the experience of socio-economic exclusion and psychological distress quite often represents a mere episode in an individual's life history. Moreover, recent research actually records a decreasing tendency, self-reported among young people themselves, to engage in non-conformist behaviour. Furthermore, the remarkable rates of childbearing outside marriage recorded in Northern Europe have not produced high levels of anomie or deviant behaviour.

Individualisation of Life Courses and the Disappearance of Youth as a Social Group

The second approach to the study of the current situation faced by young people states that youth as a specific social category and as a separate stage in the life course is disappearing from the scene both in contemporary societies and in individual life histories.

The main argument of this theory is that there are no longer any 'normal' biographies, i.e. typical sequences for the transition from youth to adulthood. Life courses have become increasingly fragmented and individualised, and it no longer makes any sense to distinguish between youth and adulthood. Most life choices are now reversible, and people can autonomously decide how to shape their own destiny. The early stages of an active life no longer need to coincide with the end of all contact with the educational/training system. At almost any moment, any individual may decide to interrupt his/her working career and return to being a full-time student. What is more, lifetime jobs no longer exist. In the same way, couple relationships have become increasingly unstable and no longer necessarily lead to having children. Indeed, people are increasingly deciding to have children even if they have no stable relationship. In sum, the ties that used to bind the various stages of the life course have weakened increasingly; and specific life events are no longer associated to a specific age (Beck 1986, 1999 / Giddens 1990, 1999 / Castells 1997 / Furlong & Cartmel 1997).

The individualisation of life courses and the disappearance of youth as a socially-visible category are viewed as a consequence of four processes:

- ▶ first, the fragmentation of social inequalities due to the institutional isolation of most spheres of social life (Beck 1986, 1999);
- ▶ second, the diffusion of the risks of unemployment and economic negative events over classes of origin, levels of education, genders and ethnicities because of the globalisation of economy and the flexibilisation of labour markets (Giddens 1990, 1999 / Castells 1997);
- ▶ third, the retreat of the welfare systems and, above all, their inability to cope with the increasing social and economic weakness of young people (Wallace & Kovatcheva 1998);

- ▶ fourth, the inability by young men and women to identify priority hierarchies among the goals they intend to achieve during their lifetimes because of the high degree of uncertainty about their future (Leccardi 1999).

Although it is perhaps more persuasive than the hypothesis of youth as a component of underclass, the theory of life-course individualisation and the destructuring of youth as a social category has its problems. My impression is that many of its statements are not based on close scrutiny of empirical data and, moreover, that its supporters are rather unfamiliar with longitudinal data regarding individual life histories. Let me give some examples of the scant attention paid to empirical data. It is true that the economic situation and institutional arrangements of most contemporary European societies are such that they strongly penalise the younger generations. However, it is not true that, among the latter, social inequalities have become independent of social origin, educational attainment, gender and the like (Breen & Goldthorpe 1997 / Shavit & Müller 1998). This also holds true for unemployment and economic hardships (Gallie & Paugam 2000 / Bernardi 2001). It is a fact that today's welfare systems are far less generous with young people as compared to the past. Yet many European countries do have specifically youth-oriented public policies. However, what really fails to convince is the central idea of the individualisation thesis, namely that there is a linear trend towards the disappearance of any social clock and socially-structured sequence of transitions to adulthood. Later on I will try to prove that this statement is not true. For the moment, suffice it to say that some recent studies based on panel data and event-history analysis have shown that the variations over time and across cohorts in the transition to adulthood (Sanders & Becker 1994 / Iedema et al. 1997) lend less credence to the individualisation thesis and much more to the generation theory of Mannheim (1928), Inglehart (1977) and Becker (1989) – i.e. the theory of non-monotonic changes of life-course features among age cohorts.

A New Life Stage: Post-adolescence

In a sense, when it comes to the third approach to youth conditions considered in this paper, the authors who developed it display convictions contrary to those held by those espousing the individualisation thesis. Not only do the former think that youth, as a social category, is much more visible and internally homogeneous today than it used to be. They also think that a new stage – post-adolescence – needs to be added to the life course of young men and women living in contemporary societies.

Three major hypotheses underpin this approach to youth conditions: First, the extension of educational processes heightens expectations towards one's working career and life. These expectations, however, are not satisfied by the economic and social reality, due to the inflation of educational degrees, the flexibilisation of the labour market and high levels of unemployment. Second, this gap between educational levels and jobs as well as opportunities for social integration obliges individuals to experience a longer waiting period before they can assume all the responsibilities of adulthood, thus obliging them to redefine their personal system of expectations. Third, the chances of enjoying this waiting period are becoming greater, in that today's parents are more willing to grant their children ample autonomy, even if they are not economically independent. Life courses are thus enhanced by a new age – post-adolescence – during which contemporary youth may experience a number of jobs, living arrangements, couple relationships, etc., and thus build adult destinations that are less definite than before (Galland 1990, 2000 / Cavalli & Galland 1995).

In my opinion, this approach is much more fruitful and closer to reality than the two approaches illustrated earlier. In addition, however, the theory of post-adolescence as a new life cycle presents elements of weakness. There can be no doubt, for instance, that the reality of young people no longer living with their parents even though they have not established a new family is more widespread today than in the past. Nevertheless, this experience is not common to every young man and woman. On the contrary, it seems to be strongly dependent on social origin and educational level. Therefore, one has to check carefully, by means of longitudinal data, whether post-adolescence is really a new stage in life or simply a postponement of the transition to adulthood experienced by middle-class people due to more time spent in school. Scholars supporting this theory would say that insecure jobs and a stagnant economy should also slow the transition to

adulthood of poorly-educated children of working-class origin. However, in this case, the question arises as to whether post-adolescence is really a permanent phenomenon or a temporary one produced by a negative economic situation. In fact, it can be shown that in the past, a high unemployment rate and a stagnant economy also tended to dramatically increase the age of a person's first union.

The Need for Longitudinal Analyses of Youth Conditions

I am stressing the importance of the transition to adulthood when studying youth because adulthood represents its upper boundary. Examining the process of entering adult roles – or those positions long treated as adult roles – could shed light on today's youth conditions. I think that this is precisely the reason why two out of three approaches focus their attention on the transition to adulthood. If this is true, though, one arrives at the peculiar realisation that the scholars subscribing to the above approaches have very seldom studied this topic using longitudinal data. Entering adulthood is a process; many authors state that this process has undergone fundamental changes, moving from older to younger age cohorts. Hence, data from panel studies should be one of the most privileged sources for analyses on youth conditions. However, as far as I know, in the best case only retrospective data from repeated cross-sectional surveys have been used to study changes in the youth conditions (Galland 2000)¹.

This is why I decided to try to analyse the transition to adulthood by means of panel studies on *individuals*. Using biographical data from large-scale surveys, I have tried to study the variations over time of *age* and *sequence of completing the four main steps of transition to adulthood*, namely leaving school, getting the first job, getting married (or forming a consensual union) for the first time and having the first baby. Obviously, the age at which these transitions are accomplished, as well as their sequence, are likely to be affected by the social and economic features of a society. Therefore, as said earlier, I compared data from Great Britain, Italy and Sweden. These countries were selected to represent three very different types of institutional arrangements, which focus on the market, the family and the state, respectively. In other words, I could say that each country is placed in a different position on the three *continua* expressing the institutional and functional importance of market, family and state in social life.

The data used in the analyses are taken from the *British Households Panel Study*, the *Italian Household Longitudinal Survey* and the *Swedish Level of Living Survey*. They refer to people born between 1900 and 1978. However, in the case of Sweden, some information regarding the oldest and the younger respondents is lacking. The English and Italian samples consist of about 10,000 people each, while the Swedish interviewees numbered around 3,600. The data were analysed by means of event-history analysis techniques. The latter included Kaplan-Meier estimates of the median age at each transition and multivariate regression models to estimate the net effect of time factor, as well as a set of predictors expressing micro- and macro-characteristics of the instantaneous transition rate, again for each transition.

Postponement of the Transition to Adulthood and Persistence of Normative Clocks

Descriptive Analyses

I will show the main results of the above analyses starting with some descriptive remarks. As is well known, the 20th century was characterised by the expansion of the school system, the growth of enrolment rates and the lengthening of the period spent in education. In fact, the median age for leaving school has increased monotonically across cohorts in Italy, Great Britain and Sweden. In Italy, one can observe a more pronounced lengthening of the formative calendars in comparison with Great Britain and Sweden. This difference is

¹ Obviously, I am ignoring studies regarding the transition to adulthood as such. But also in this case, sociological analyses relying on panel data are indeed rare – and even rarer are those of a comparative nature (Blossfeld & Nuthmann 1990 / Iedema et al. 1997 / Sanders & Becker 1994).

simply attributable to (1) the higher proportion of dropouts from compulsory school recorded at the beginning of the century in Italy; and (2) the longer duration of Italian upper secondary school and university.

**Table 1: Kaplan-Meier estimates of median age for leaving school
(by country, gender and birth cohort)**

Country and Gender	Birth Cohort						
	Until 1917	1918–27	1928–37	1938–47	1948–57	1958–67	1968–78
Italy							
Men	10.8	11.7	12.4	14.3	16.7	18.2	19.5
Women	10.4	10.8	11.2	13.2	14.9	17.5	19.6
Great Britain							
Men	14.2	14.3	14.9	15.5	16.4	17.1	17.2
Women	14.2	14.3	15.0	15.6	16.2	16.9	17.2
Sweden							
Men	13.4	13.6	16.9	18.0	19.0	19.0	17.9
Women	12.7	13.9	15.0	17.0	19.0	19.0	18.4

In all three countries, it seems that the rising level of schooling has caused a delay in entering the labour market. And what counts even more is that, in each country, the median age for getting one's first job is higher than the median age for leaving school – or at least, very close to it.

**Table 2: Kaplan-Meier estimates of median age at first job
(by country, gender and birth cohort)**

Country and Gender	Birth Cohort						
	Until 1917	1918–27	1928–37	1938–47	1948–57	1958–67	1968–78
Italy							
Men	14.9	16.0	16.6	17.6	18.7	20.3	21.9
Women	14.6	15.3	16.5	17.7	18.5	20.3	23.9
Great Britain							
Men	14.3	14.4	15.2	15.8	16.6	18.1	18.9
Women	14.4	14.4	15.2	15.9	16.4	17.9	19.3
Sweden							
Men	n.a.	15.9	16.5	17.8	18.9	18.7	n.a.
Women	n.a.	16.3	17.0	17.2	19.0	19.0	n.a.

n.a. = not available

This result can be viewed as preliminary, though indirect, proof that the traditional social norm stating that work life should begin after schooling has been completed is still in force among the younger generation. And more than that, it seems that in Italy and Great Britain the effect of this norm is strengthening over time. In fact, between the two youngest generations, the gap between the median age for the first job and that for leaving school is greater than its equivalent among cohorts born between 1938 and 1947. Of course, these statements are somewhat paradoxical. The pronounced delay in the transition to one's first job among the youngest cohorts depends mainly on the worsening of economic conditions and the rising levels of unemployment since the mid-1970s. Yet the result I am dealing with casts a shadow on the theory of increasingly individualised life courses, and the data from Sweden do not support this thesis either. In the case of Sweden, the closeness of the two transitions found with younger cohorts mainly depends on rather recent changes in the institutional arrangement of the school system, which allows – and, in a sense, promotes – easy transitions from classrooms to work and *vice versa*.

Table 3: Kaplan-Meier estimates of median age at first union (by country, gender and birth cohort)

Country and Gender	Birth Cohort						
	Until 1917	1918–27	1928–37	1938–47	1948–57	1958–67	1968–78
Italy							
Men	28.8	27.9	27.8	26.9	26.3	28.6	n.a.
Women	23.7	24.0	23.7	23.6	22.6	25.0	n.a.
Great Britain							
Men	26.2	25.7	24.0	23.5	23.1	25.2	n.a.
Women	24.6	23.1	21.8	21.3	21.0	22.4	n.a.
Sweden							
Men	26.6	26.6	25.4	24.1	24.0	23.8	n.a.
Women	24.1	23.3	23.0	22.0	21.2	21.4	21.5

n.a. = not available

The distribution across cohorts of the median age for a first union and first child contrasts even more strongly with the theory of increasing heterogeneity in life courses. In fact, in every country and cohort, the median age for first union turns out to be higher than the median age for a first job and lower than the median age for the first reproductive event. In other words, most people continue to get married after finding a job and to have children after getting married. Once again, it seems that in Italy, Great Britain and Sweden two widely-shared social norms still exist:

- ▶ The first union should take place when education has been completed and a secure job has been found that guarantees minimum economic independence (Blossfeld & Huinik 1991 / Iedema et al. 1997).
- ▶ The first reproductive event should only happen when a reasonably stable union has been attained².

Table 4: Kaplan-Meier estimates of median age for having first baby (by country, gender and birth cohort)

Country and Gender	Birth Cohort						
	Until 1917	1918–27	1928–37	1938–47	1948–57	1958–67	1968–78
Italy							
Men	30.6	28.8	29.3	28.4	27.8	32.1	n.a.
Women	25.3	25.1	25.3	25.0	24.3	28.3	n.a.
Great Britain							
Men	29.3	27.0	26.9	26.4	27.1	30.2	n.a.
Women	26.5	25.2	24.4	23.8	24.4	26.9	29.4
Sweden							
Men	28.2	28.3	26.9	26.2	28.0	29.9	n.a.
Women	26.0	24.2	24.3	23.4	24.3	27.1	n.a.

n.a. = not available

However, the distributions across cohorts of the median age at first union and first baby give some more interesting information about changes over time in the transition to adulthood. Despite the expectations of the individualisation thesis, median ages do not vary from older to younger cohorts following a linear trend, but show a non-monotonic, U-shaped trend. Older cohorts used to get married and to have their first child at a higher age than people born between 1938 and 1957; but also, subsequent cohorts have postponed both the formation of the first union and the first reproductive event. Swedish median age at first union is the only exception to these regularities. The second interesting information contained in the above data refers to

² Variations across genders of median age at first union show that a third social norm regarding the appropriateness of the above transition exists in all the countries studied. This norm states that husbands have to be older than wives.

the increasing gap in all countries between median age at first baby and median age at first union. In other words, recent cohorts are strongly inclined to widen the time span between marriage/consensual union and their first assumption of parenthood. From this point of view, the post-adolescence thesis proves to be much sounder than the life-course individualisation theory. Nevertheless, the soundness of the post-adolescence thesis does not extend to the younger cohorts postponing their first union and first reproductive event, as these are not completely new phenomena.

I think that a weak economy, high unemployment rates, difficulties in finding stable jobs, a shortage of suitable housing and welfare-state retrenchment can all help explain why people born since the second half of the 1950s have delayed their first union and the birth of their first baby. Many of these elements characterised the social and economic situations of the oldest cohorts who, in fact, waited to get married and assume the parental role as late as today's young people do. On the contrary, individuals born from the late 1930s to the late 1950s took advantage of a booming economy, a full-employment situation, a rather protective regulation of labour markets and welfare systems that were quite generous. In fact, they were able to get married and have a baby much earlier than their parents and children. Hence, I repeat that changes over time in structural constraints and opportunities can explain a great deal about the peculiar U-shaped distribution of median age at first union and having the first baby across cohorts. However, similarities between the oldest and youngest cohorts should not be exaggerated. The proponents of the post-adolescence thesis are correct in maintaining that today's parents are far more supportive of their children and that social norms regarding movements from the parental home to independent living are far less stringent as compared to the past.

What has changed since the 1960s, however, is the condition of women. On the one hand, modern young women are allowed to study as long as their brothers. Consequently, they are much more inclined to participate in the labour market than were their mothers and grandmothers. With the partial exception of Sweden, the division of domestic chores between men and women is not yet egalitarian. Moreover, the residualistic Italian and British welfare regimes do not help young women reconcile their work obligations with domestic/parental concerns. This is even more the case in Italy, where part-time jobs are rather uncommon. Difficulties in combining domestic and work schedules make it far less desirable now to assume the role of wife or mother than it was in the past. This is all the more so because contemporary family and couple relationships tend to be rather insecure and unstable. As a consequence, young women are inclined to take their time in assuming either a conjugal or a parental role. From an economic point of view, this decision is absolutely rational. Without family obligations, a woman has a better chance to take advantage of her human-capital investments and to enjoy greater career opportunities. In addition, one has to consider that delaying reproduction can also have positive effects on a young couple's budget, since they do not have to bear the costs of caring for and rearing children. In my opinion, these contradictory changes in the features of gender inequalities can explain in a few words why, among the youngest generations, the postponement of the first child birth is much more pronounced than the delay of the first union – or to put it another way, why the gap between first union and first reproductive event is so wide among late cohorts.

Multivariate Longitudinal Analyses

I cannot exclude that composition effects bias all my previous remarks. In order to control for them and to move from descriptive to explicative analyses, I used logistic regression models for duration data. To be more precise, the four transitions discussed so far have been analysed by means of piece-wise constant exponential models. As a consequence, the units of analysis are no longer individuals but rather *episodes*. Some control or explicative variables in the models are time-constant, that is to say they display the same value during the entire episode, while others vary over time. In order to deal with these time-varying variables, the technique of episode splitting has been used. This means that each episode has been divided in periods lasting a maximum of one year.

For the sake of brevity, I will not present the model regarding school leaving. Models referring to the three remaining transitions are attached. My comments will concentrate on some selected parameters expressing the effects of (a) birth cohorts, and (b) possible intertwined events. An intertwined event can be defined

as a condition belonging to a specific step towards adulthood that, at time t , can be achieved or has not yet been achieved and that, in both cases, can interfere with the probability of making a transition. For instance, when looking for one's first job, being/not being a student is an intertwined event, as school and career can reciprocally interfere. These events bear a special importance when it comes to understanding the mechanisms underlying the passage from youth to adulthood, because they shed light on the presence of socially-shared norms regarding the appropriateness of a specific transition.

Starting with the transition to one's first job, models show that people in every country who belong to the younger cohorts find the occupational transition more difficult compared to those born between the late 1930s and the mid-1950s (Table 5). This result agrees with both the post-adolescence thesis and the theory on the individualisation of life courses. However, contrary to the expectations of the latter theory, people who are still studying display very low chances of finding their first job (Table 5). To put it another way, ending school enhances the probability of being employed, and getting a degree still represents an important requirement for successful participation in the labour market. Being married represents a characteristic that increases the probability of having a job among British, Italian and Swedish men, but lowers it among Italian and Swedish women (Table 5). This means that, at least in the case of men, mechanisms aimed at repairing a sequence error – namely getting married when being unemployed – is at work. The reason why the same mechanism can seemingly be observed among British women but not among their Italian and Swedish counterparts has to do with differences between countries both in the strength of gender asymmetry and welfare-system support. Gender asymmetry is much stronger in Italy, so that a lot of Italian women leave the labour market as soon as they get married. State transfers to young couples are much more generous in Sweden, thus allowing both married women and those in a consensual union to live for a given period without working. Similar results were obtained from the parameter expressing the effect of having babies on the transition to one's first job (Table 5). In all three countries, taking care of children is still seen as women's work. As a consequence, being a mother decreases a woman's chances of getting a job in Italy, Great Britain and even Sweden.

Table 5: Maximum likelihood estimates of parameters for piece-wise constant exponential models regarding transition to first job (by country and gender)

Covariates	Italy		Great Britain		Sweden	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Duration of episodes						
Period 1: fewer than 180 months	-5.03*	-5.07*	-5.85*	-5.84*	-5.82*	-7.27*
Period 2: 180–240 months	-4.97*	-4.88*	-3.72*	-3.96*	-4.63*	-5.83*
Period 3: 240–300 months	-4.99*	-5.31*	-4.57*	-4.93*	-5.06*	-6.33*
Period 4: 300–360 months	-5.11*	-5.74*	-5.12*	-6.32*	-5.54*	-7.17*
Period 5: over 360 months	-5.21*	-5.39*	-4.95*	-6.60*	-6.04*	-6.80*
Age	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*
Birth cohort						
Before 1928 (reference)						
1928–1937	0.19*	-0.01	0.04	0.07	-0.04	-0.08
1938–1947	0.39*	0.17*	-0.19*	-0.28*	-0.08	-0.01
1948–1957	0.42*	0.36*	-0.57*	-0.42*	-0.37*	-0.10
1958–1967	0.33*	0.12	-0.77*	-0.78*	-0.45*	-0.18
1968–1978	0.19*	0.08	-0.83*	-0.84*		
Class of origin (EG)						
Service class (I+II)	-0.09	-0.06	-0.00	-0.00	-0.29*	-0.14
Routine non-manual employees (IIIab)	-0.10	-0.00	0.09	0.26*	-0.15	-0.10
Small proprietors (IVab)	0.07	-0.00	0.25*	0.11*	-0.08	-0.08
Small farmers (IVc)	0.02	-0.09	-0.07	0.05	-0.35*	-0.13
Foremen and skilled working class (V–VI)	0.04	0.11*	0.52*	0.35*	-0.00	0.22*
Unskilled working class (VIIab) (reference)						
Education (CASMIN)						
Tertiary (3ab)	-0.03	0.67*	-0.66*	-0.97*	-1.10*	-0.74*
General higher secondary (2c)	-0.28*	0.10	-0.69*	-1.02*	-0.75*	-0.47*
Technical or vocational higher secondary (2ab)	-0.03	0.33*	-0.38*	-0.43*	-0.66*	-0.49*
Basic vocational (1c)	0.27*	0.34*	-0.06	-0.47*	-0.21*	0.42*
Lower secondary (1b)	0.07	-0.04	-0.24*	-0.60*	-0.41*	-0.26*
Elementary (1a) (reference)						
Still studying						
Yes	-2.05*	-2.44*	-0.14*	-0.07*	-1.67*	-1.70*
No (reference)						
Vocational training						
Yes	0.12	0.45*	0.95*	0.83*		
No (reference)						
Civil status						
Married/consensual union	0.15	-0.50*	0.54*	0.14	0.47*	-0.17
Single (reference)						
Number of children						
	-0.19	-0.22*	0.23*	-0.56*	-0.76*	-1.46*
Yearly unemployment rate						
	-0.04*	-0.07*	-0.02*	-0.04*	-0.10*	0.03
Area of residence						
North-western Italy	0.54*	0.66*				
North-eastern Italy	0.48*	0.72*				
Central Italy	0.30*	0.48*				
Abroad	0.21	0.39*				
Southern Italy and islands (reference)						
Number of episodes (before splitting)	4,292	3,968	5,315	5,831	1,874	1,779
Number of events	3,865	3,329	4,982	5,430	1,863	1,769
Chi-squared	5,898	5,422	7,520	8,868	3,612	3,790
Df	30	30	26	26	24	24

* p < 0.05

Table 6: Maximum likelihood estimates of parameters for piece-wise constant exponential models regarding transition to first union (by country and gender)

Covariates	Italy		Great Britain		Sweden	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Duration of episodes						
Period 1: fewer than 240 months	-10.69*	-9.39*	-9.92*	-9.75*	-10.32*	-10.60*
Period 2: 240–300 months	-8.19*	-8.50*	-8.41*	-9.32*	-8.97*	-10.56*
Period 3: 300–360 months	-7.57*	-9.11*	-8.84*	-10.64*	-9.40*	-12.00*
Period 4: over 360 months	-8.06*	-10.5*	-9.91*	-12.11*	-10.77*	-14.21*
Age	0.01*	0.02*	0.01*	0.02*	0.01*	0.02*
Birth cohort						
Before 1928 (reference)	-0.09	-0.09	0.13	0.29*	0.01	-0.16
1928–1937	0.20*	0.26*	0.24*	0.51*	0.30*	0.49*
1938–1947	0.53*	0.67*	0.38*	0.69*	-0.07	0.39*
1948–1957	0.16	0.40*	0.05	0.40*	0.12	0.48*
1958–1967	-0.30*	0.10	-0.70*	-0.16	0.18	0.37*
1968–1978						
Class of origin (EG)						
Service class (I+II)	0.00	-0.06	0.02	0.06	0.17*	0.04
Routine non-manual employees(IIIab)	-0.19*	0.05	-0.24*	-0.06	0.14	0.13
Small proprietors (IVab)	0.02	-0.06	0.13	0.07	0.09	0.03
Small farmers (IVc)	-0.14*	-0.03	-0.29*	-0.18	-0.16*	-0.03
Foremen and skilled working class (V–VI)	-0.00	-0.04	0.11*	0.17*	0.11	0.08
Unskilled working class (VIab) (reference)						
Education (CASMIN)						
Tertiary (3ab)	-0.27*	-0.30*	0.03	-0.28*	-0.42*	-0.72*
General higher secondary (2c)	-0.46*	-0.42*	-0.08	-0.18*	0.05	-0.20*
Technical or vocational higher secondary (2ab)	-0.27*	-0.38*	0.05	-0.20*	-0.02	-0.20*
Basic vocational (1c)	-0.23*	-0.21*	-0.02	-0.17	0.25*	0.52*
Lower secondary (1b)	-0.14*	-0.10*	0.02	-0.14	-0.10	-0.19*
Elementary (1a) (reference)						
Still studying						
Yes	-0.68*	-1.34*	-0.63*	-0.91*	-0.21*	-0.56*
No (reference)						
Vocational training						
Yes	0.01	-0.08	-0.02	0.11*		
No (reference)						
Occupational status						
Employed	0.67*	-0.25*	0.77*	0.72*	0.30*	0.01
Unemployed (reference)						
Number of children	0.32*	0.06	0.15*	0.11*	0.61*	0.43*
Yearly unemployment rate	-0.08*	-0.09*	-0.04*	-0.04*	-0.12*	-0.17*
Area of residence						
North-western Italy	-0.11*	-0.01				
North-eastern Italy	-0.09	-0.04				
Central Italy	-0.08	-0.03				
Abroad	-0.21	-0.08				
Southern Italy and islands (reference)						
Number of episodes (before splitting)	4,335	4,811	4,122	4,154	2,541	2,509
Number of events	3,208	3,823	2,830	3,121	2,085	2,220
Chi-squared	10,534	8,950	8,936	9,432	5,860	6,024
Df	29	29	25	25	24	24

* p < 0.05

Turning to the transition to one's first union, I wish to stress that the parameters expressing the net effect of birth cohort clearly display – as expected – an inverse U-shaped trend both in Italy and Great Britain, while they show less fluctuation in the case of Sweden. To be frank, I have to admit that I cannot explain this latter result. At any rate, the presence of social norms regulating the sequence of transitions to adulthood clearly results from the parameter expressing the effects of being a student, being employed and having children. In fact, being a student drastically decreases one's chances for forming a union anywhere, while having a job strongly increases these opportunities everywhere³, with the same holding true for those who have babies. In the latter case, a mechanism repairing sequence error is apparently at work.

³ When commenting on the transition to the first job, I already explained the reason why employment has a negative effect on Italian women's chances of getting married.

Table 7: Maximum likelihood estimates of parameters for piece-wise constant exponential models regarding transition to first reproductive event (by country and gender)

Covariates	Italy		Great Britain		Sweden	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Duration of episodes						
Period 1: fewer than 240 months	-10.13*	-9.03*	-9.26*	-9.89*	-9.36*	-9.87*
Period 2: 240–300 months	-7.76*	-8.68*	-8.49*	-10.44*	-8.65*	-10.29*
Period 3: 300–360 months	-7.71*	-9.03*	-8.67*	-11.08*	-9.04*	-11.07*
Period 4: 361–420 months	-7.69*	-9.43*	-8.89*	-11.54*	-9.56*	-12.36*
Period 5: over 420 months	-7.48*	-9.41*	-8.88*	-12.04*	-9.80*	-12.86*
Age	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.02*
Birth cohort						
Before 1928 (reference)						
1928–1937	-0.07	-0.04	0.09	0.42*	-0.02	0.63*
1938–1947	-0.03	0.00	0.31*	0.68*	-0.11	0.97*
1948–1957	0.01	0.13*	0.08	0.57*	-0.48*	0.51*
1958–1967	-0.36*	-0.20*	-0.22*	0.31*	-0.91*	0.08
1968–1978	-0.21	-0.09	-0.12	0.54	-1.36*	-0.48*
Class of origin (EG)						
Service class (I+II)	-0.03	-0.06	-0.13*	-0.19*	-0.10	-0.34*
Routine non-manual employees(IIIab)	-0.13	0.05	-0.10	-0.14	-0.22*	0.05
Small proprietors (IVab)	0.08	-0.06	0.23*	0.02	-0.08	0.01
Small farmers (IVc)	-0.08	-0.03	-0.10	-0.03	0.02	-0.16*
Foremen and skilled working class (V–VI)	-0.10	-0.04	0.07	-0.04	-0.11	-0.13
Unskilled working class (VIIab) (reference)						
Education (CASMIN)						
Tertiary (3ab)	-0.20*	-0.09	-0.36*	-0.29*	-0.52*	-0.63*
General higher secondary (2c)	-0.20	-0.20*	-0.26*	-0.30*	-0.30*	-0.59*
Technical or vocational higher secondary (2ab)	-0.16*	-0.20*	-0.11	-0.21*	-0.27*	-0.28*
Basic vocational (1c)	-0.20*	-0.03*	-0.10	-0.30*	-0.15	0.48*
Lower secondary (1b)	-0.14*	-0.10*	-0.21*	-0.04	-0.32*	-0.04
Elementary (1a) (reference)						
Still studying						
Yes	-0.40*	-0.77*	-0.80*	-0.81*	-0.18*	-0.80*
No (reference)						
Vocational training						
Yes	-0.05	-0.16*	-0.10	0.09		
No (reference)						
Occupational status						
Employed	0.12	-0.25*	-0.03*	-0.23*	0.25*	-1.48*
Unemployed (reference)						
Civil status						
Married/consensual union	4.51*	4.42*	2.96*	3.15*	2.79*	2.91*
Single (reference)						
Yearly unemployment rate						
	-0.04*	-0.04*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.10*	-0.12*
Area of residence						
North-western Italy	-0.36*	-0.23*				
North-eastern Italy	-0.22*	-0.16*				
Central Italy	-0.24*	-0.15*				
Abroad	-0.13	-0.12				
Southern Italy and islands (reference)						
Number of episodes (before splitting)	4,165	4,684	3,730	4,566	2,415	2,411
Number of events	2,837	3,477	2,831	3,724	1,679	1,856
Chi-squared	15,514	17,236	11,112	13,964	6,756	7,824
Df	30	30	26	26	25	25

* p < 0.05

Moving on to the transition to the first reproductive event, one can notice that the parameters expressing the net cohort effect do indeed vary, following the usual inverse U-shaped trend among Italian and British men and women. Swedish men and women display a linearly decreasing probability of having a baby when we move from older to younger cohorts. This is the only case in which no real discontinuity between generations can be detected. However, I do not think that it supports the individualisation thesis. Rather, it depicts a secular trend towards the reduction of fertility rates deriving from a continuously increasing number of women participating in the labour market.

As far as intertwined events are concerned, I wish to briefly reiterate that being a student and being an employed woman will slow down the probability of becoming a parent, in a way rather similar to that observed in the case of the transition to a person's first union. Much more interesting are the results regarding the net effect of civil status. Even in very liberal and post-modern Sweden, the chances of having a baby displayed by married women are 18 times higher than those of single women. I think I can safely conclude that the social norm prescribing that both men and women have to get married (or to be in a consensual union) before having a baby is still very much in effect in all the countries studied.

Table 8: Proportion of typical sequences and variability index (weighted heterogeneity)^a (by country, gender and birth cohort)

Country and Gender	Birth Cohort				
	Until 1917	1918–27	1928–37	1938–47	1948–57
Italy					
<i>Men</i>					
Proportion	0.744	0.781	0.745	0.726	0.737
Variability index	0.650	0.530	0.550	0.590	0.700
<i>Women</i>					
Proportion	0.796	0.726	0.752	0.706	0.702
Variability index	0.800	0.790	0.730	0.720	0.760
Great Britain					
<i>Men</i>					
Proportion	0.676	0.686	0.604	0.617	0.636
Variability index	0.670	0.650	0.670	0.720	0.730
<i>Women</i>					
Proportion	0.692	0.646	0.664	0.610	0.663
Variability index	0.710	0.670	0.620	0.690	0.700
Sweden					
<i>Men</i>					
Proportion	0.629	0.445	0.484	0.502	n.a.
Variability index	0.730	0.800	0.790	0.820	n.a.
<i>Women</i>					
Proportion	0.634	0.570	0.469	0.454	n.a.
Variability index	0.720	0.730	0.800	0.820	0.700

^a V.I. = $[1 - \sum(p_i/P)^2]$; where p_i is the number of persons following a specific sequence i , and P is the sample size.

n.a. = not available

One could object that the above results are artificial in that they derive from models referring to individual transitions and do not take into account the whole sequence of events towards adulthood. In my opinion, considering entire sequences should not lead to conclusions different from the above. I will try to prove this briefly. Let us define as typical or traditional the following three sequences of events: (1) leaving school, getting one's first job, entering into a first union and having one's first baby; (2) leaving school, getting one's first job, entering into a first union; (3) leaving school and getting one's first job. Let us define as atypical any different complete or partial combination of the above four events. Then let us compute the proportion of typical sequences for every birth cohort. The results of this exercise are shown in Table 8. In Italy and Great

Britain, most trajectories to adulthood are typical and their weight is rather stable across cohorts. In Sweden, on the contrary, atypical sequences dominate. The reason for this seems to be the already mentioned greater institutional flexibility of the Swedish school system, in that a lot of atypical sequences come from men and women who start work before ending school. But even in this case, changes over cohorts are not pronounced. Indeed, it is more so when looking at the variability index (Table 8). Hence, very few signs of increasing heterogeneity in the transition to adulthood emerge from my longitudinal analyses, even when paying attention to the trajectories as a whole.

Conclusions

On the basis of previous analyses, I would say that youth conditions in Europe are worsening. This is not only because young people find it more difficult to get a stable job and because current welfare systems are far less generous with young unemployed, young homeless couples and young single mothers. At any rate, I have not been able to detect any sign, at least within the countries compared, of a widening underclass as a consequence of the greater economic hardships and subsequent psychological distress of young people. Currently, the overall situation of most young Europeans is worsening mainly because their transition to adulthood is becoming slower and more difficult. I have shown that a delayed completion of the transition to adulthood is not an entirely new experience. What is really new is that today's young generations are the first to be unable to improve their chance to become full members of their society, in comparison to their parents and elder brothers or sisters. On the one hand, this delayed and difficult transition to adulthood is certainly a product of the current low rates of economic development. On the other hand, it is a consequence of the persisting presence of normative clocks regulating the expected sequence of steps towards adult roles. In shady economic circumstances, conforming to such requirements has become harder and harder. Moreover, young people have to face the consequences of contradictory changes in the configuration of gender inequalities. While disparities between men and women in school have been strongly reduced, when it comes to chances on the labour market and dividing work at home things have not yet changed that much. To be more precise, I should say that for most European young women it has become increasingly difficult to reconcile a career with conjugal/parental demands, even in a really open society like Sweden. As a consequence, an increasing proportion of young women are pushed to postpone both first union and first baby, i.e. to postpone their transition to adulthood. From this point of view, it can be maintained that generational baggage is one of the major social divides in today's European societies. Currently, young people – far from being more free and independent of their parents in shaping their own life courses – are subjected to more stringent constraints.

Turning to the methodological implications of my latter remarks, I would repeat that in order to improve the scenario of youth conditions in contemporary Europe, more frequent use should be made of longitudinal data and event-history analyses. The need for longitudinal analyses is even greater when one has to deal with life trajectories and their supposed variations over time. This aim can be achieved more easily than in the past, since panel surveys, repeated cross-sectional surveys and individual information from social registrars are now available in most European countries – not to mention specific statistical procedures for processing longitudinal data and user-friendly software for formulating statistical models. I think that following this track can improve the sociological analysis of youth conditions. The results can fruitfully strengthen the links with other important relevant branches of sociology, such as the sociology of life courses, social inequalities and social change.

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European Welfare Regimes and the Transition to Adulthood: A Comparative and Longitudinal Perspective

JOACHIM VOGEL

Introduction

This paper deals with behavioural adaptation to institutional conditions, focusing on the transition from youth to adulthood in different Member States of the European Union. Four separate stages of this transition are empirically studied: leaving school, leaving the parental home, getting married and becoming a parent. Our empirical analyses of these transitions point at a prolonged route towards adulthood for each of the four transitional stages, as well as an increased generation gap with respect to general material living conditions. This seems to be the general pattern in comparative and national studies alike (e.g. Vogel (1998a) for the European Union at large; and Vogel (1994a) for the Swedish case). Empirical studies indicate prolonged youth education, increased youth unemployment, delayed entry on the labour market, increased job insecurity, a delayed and more unstable income, young people leaving their parent's household at a later time, and postponed partnering and fertility. The institutional background shows a recent destabilisation of welfare regimes and disrupted opportunity structures (jobs, earnings, public transfers and services), as well as a redistribution of living conditions between generations in favour of the older generations.

This paper links recent *regime research* (the configuration of the labour market, welfare state and family support systems) and *social indicator research*, interpreting transitions to adulthood as a coping behaviour. These transitions tend to maximise living conditions; and their timing reflects the efficiency of the three institutions in supporting one's establishment into adult society. There is a vast variation in institutional forms and opportunity structure within the European Union, which accordingly produces a large variation in behavioural adaptation and timing of transitions. In fact, the European Union can be seen as a natural laboratory, where labour-market performance (providing jobs and earnings), welfare-state support (social services, transfers, labour-market policies, family policies), and family support systems (family formation and structure) should explain the timing of transitions to adulthood. Empirical studies indeed indicate large variations in timing as well as trends (Vogel 1998b, 2002).

The agenda includes a discussion of the variation of institutional preconditions, individual coping behaviour and, finally, the resulting variation in living conditions. First, we need to *identify the relevant elements of the opportunity structure* (or welfare regimes) that have an impact on the transition to adulthood. Second, we need to *compare a larger set of advanced industrialised countries* in order to identify a broader variation of institutional arrangements as well as behavioural adjustment. In particular, the Nordic countries have to be compared to the South European countries, as there is strong evidence of a rather diverse and changing pattern of transition to adulthood. Third, by expanding the analysis from national case studies to a wider range of nations, we will be able to *identify transition regimes*, i.e. major ideal-typical routes to adulthood characterised by timing, sequence, and the social background of young adults, using nations as units of observation. The objective is to *identify clusters of nations* displaying similar behavioural adaptation (or coping behaviour) to similar institutional institutions, with respect to the transition to adulthood.

The perspective of these studies is *comparative* (comparing 14 EU Member States) as well as *longitudinal* (Sweden 1963–1998). The analysis is based on the *European Community Household Panel* (ECHP) and co-ordinated Nordic surveys (a cross-sectional sample of 143,000 interviews in 15 countries, collected around 1994), and 156,000 interviews in Sweden (1975–1998).

The European Welfare Mix

The welfare-regime concept applied in this paper is not restricted to *welfare-state* arrangements, but rather is focused on the *welfare mix* (the institutional configuration of labour market, welfare state and family). The following discussion is based on a series of reports (Vogel 1998a, 1999, 2002) exploring the link between these institutions and its *distributive outcome* (income inequality, material living conditions, poverty, social exclusion) with respect to various *social cleavages* (social class, generation, gender, region, family). The basic assumptions of this approach are as follows:

- ▶ The three welfare-delivery institutions represent a functional *division of responsibility for welfare delivery* between the labour market, the welfare state and the family.
- ▶ The character of the distributive outcome (level of inequality and impact of social cleavages) will correspond to the welfare mix.
- ▶ In various proportions, the overall distributive structure displays the imprint of each of the three institutions, reflecting the distributive principles of the labour market (competition, competence), welfare state (collective solidarity) and family (reciprocity).
- ▶ The institutional configuration (the welfare mix) should be reduced to a limited number of logical combinations or welfare-production models.
- ▶ We should designate the major role to the labour market: Malfunctioning of the labour market will exhaust the welfare state as well as the family. Welfare state and family are two alternative corrective mechanisms; 'efficient' labour markets (jobs, earnings) will relieve the welfare state as well as the family. In the other direction, a generous welfare state requires an efficient labour market; and it promotes emancipation from the family.
- ▶ The *driving forces* behind the current welfare mix come from both external and internal factors, such as global competition, national resources, infrastructure, historical and ideological traditions, power relations and ideological struggles.
- ▶ The welfare mix will change over time and differs among nations. The welfare mix will accommodate economic change, political cleavages and power relations. Recent economic change involves major malfunctions of the welfare mix, related to the labour market (global competition, mass unemployment, job and wage flexibility), the welfare state (recovery policies), and the family (fragmentation). Thus, such change also implies a changing institutional configuration, as well as decreased overall institutional efficiency in providing good, equal living conditions.
- ▶ At the micro level, people will adapt to whatever available options there are. *Coping behaviour* is aimed at avoiding poverty and social exclusion and maximising general living conditions. It relates to the labour market (e.g. job seeking, training), welfare state (adjusting to available transfers and services), and family (family formation, including the age of leaving the parental home, partnering, having children and severing partnerships).

The European Union appears to be divided into three rather distinct and homogeneous clusters, with three different models of welfare production:

- ▶ The *Nordic cluster* ('institutional welfare states') exhibits high employment rates and social expenditure, but weak family ties. It shows lower rates of poverty and income inequality.
- ▶ The *Southern cluster* ('family welfare regimes') is characterised by low employment, lower social expenditure, and strong traditional families. It shows higher rates of poverty and income inequality.
- ▶ The *Central European cluster* ('mixed welfare regimes') finds itself in an intermediate position concerning both welfare mix and distributive outcome. The UK joins the Southern cluster, with its high levels of poverty and income inequality.

Three Models of European Welfare Production

The following series of graphs serves to demonstrate the institutional homogeneity within these three country clusters. The institutional configuration between labour market, welfare state and family is displayed by combining three central indicators (for each institution) pair-wise in Figures 1–3 for the 15 countries surveyed.

The Member States in each of these three clusters fall almost exclusively into the same institutional categories, with relation to all three institutions. This means that the Member States *within* each cluster exhibit about the same welfare mix, with very few exceptions from this general pattern. First, Figure 1 sorts the nations by the labour-market *enrolment rate* (market) and *social-protection expenditure* (welfare state). Portugal is an ‘outlier’, i.e. lying outside the norm, when it comes to employment, thus falling in the central cluster in this respect. Sweden and Finland were in a deep recession in the early 1990s; thus, the data from 1994 (the year of the survey) are not representative of the employment situation in the long run. Around 1990, and again towards the end of the 1990s, both countries show much higher enrolment levels and, accordingly, a sharper differentiation from the other clusters.

Figure 1: The European welfare mix: the interrelationship between labour market and welfare state

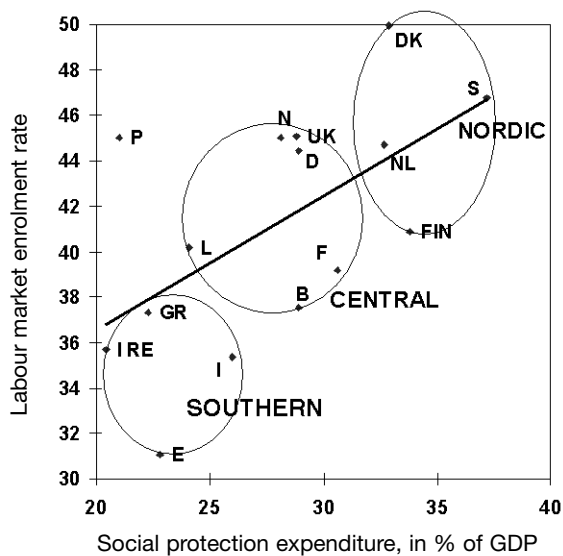


Figure 2 indicates how the *enrolment rate* (market) is related to *traditional family index* (a composite index), once again displaying a clear-cut pattern of three homogeneous clusters in a similar welfare mix. The outliers are Portugal again, which has already been discussed, and Ireland. Ireland seems to be close to the Southern cluster when it comes to female employment, as well as the role of family. The Netherlands, again, is close to the Nordic cluster with respect to family formation. Finally, Figure 3 sorts the nations by *social-protection expenditure* (welfare state) as opposed to the ‘*traditional family*’ index (family). Again, the Netherlands approaches the levels of the Nordic cluster.

Figure 2: The European welfare mix: the interrelationship between labour market and family

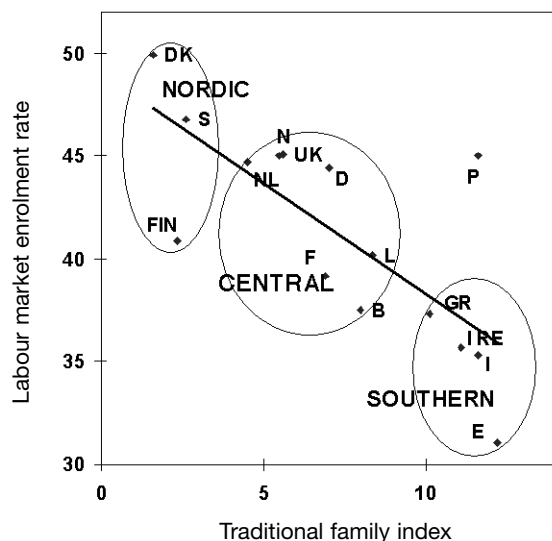
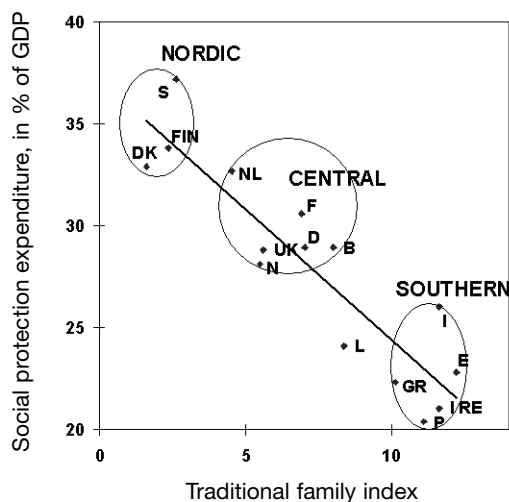


Figure 3: The European welfare mix: the interrelationship between welfare state and family



In summary, these findings underscore the functional relationship between the three welfare-delivery institutions. The impact of the welfare state is greatest in the Nordic region. All the Nordic welfare states also have the most efficient labour markets when it comes to their role in contributing to the material welfare of the entire population. Hence, the Swedish model (or rather, the Nordic model) combines a generous welfare state with extensive labour-market policies promoting full employment and equal opportunities. In fact, it is in the Nordic region where the market plays its most efficient role as a welfare-delivery system. In the Nordic countries, the market also supports generous welfare-state arrangements, since it broadens the tax base and also limits the need for social intervention.

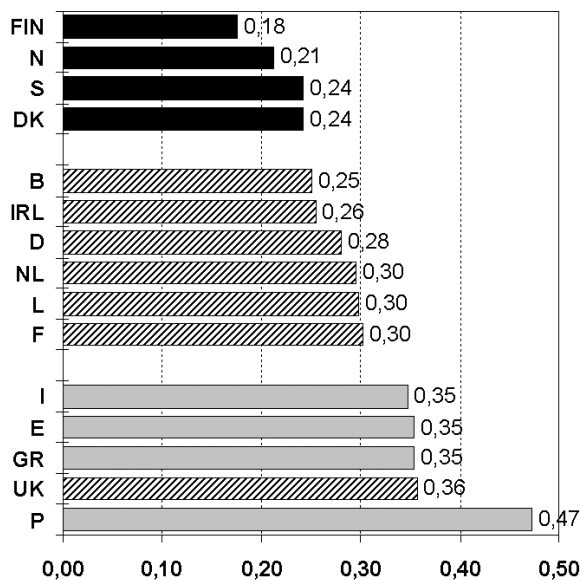
In the same vein, the Southern cluster combines a weak labour market as well as a weak welfare state, with strong family traditions. There is certainly a need for social network support and strong families.

It should be noted that the Nordic and Southern clusters represent two poles in the way in which welfare is produced. These data also indicate that all of the Nordic countries show low rates for traditional family support, which can be interpreted as a result of a strong welfare state and market that opens up opportunities for a pluralisation of family forms. In the Southern cluster, the traditional family represents a functional alternative when the market and welfare state fail to deliver a basic living standard.

Living Conditions

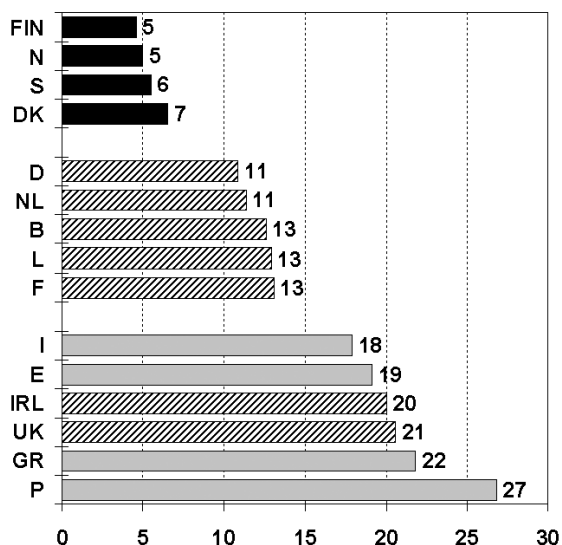
Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the overall distributive outcome of the three types of welfare production. We find that *income distribution* and *poverty* are related to a rather clear North-South clustering of nations, with distinct institutional configurations. Inequality and social exclusion are indeed a consequence of an inadequate welfare mix between poor labour-market and welfare-state performance. The same applies to a large variety of social indicators (Vogel 1997, 2002).

Figure 4: Inequality of equivalent disposable income (Gini coefficients) of persons 20–84 years of age



Source: ECHP/NSS

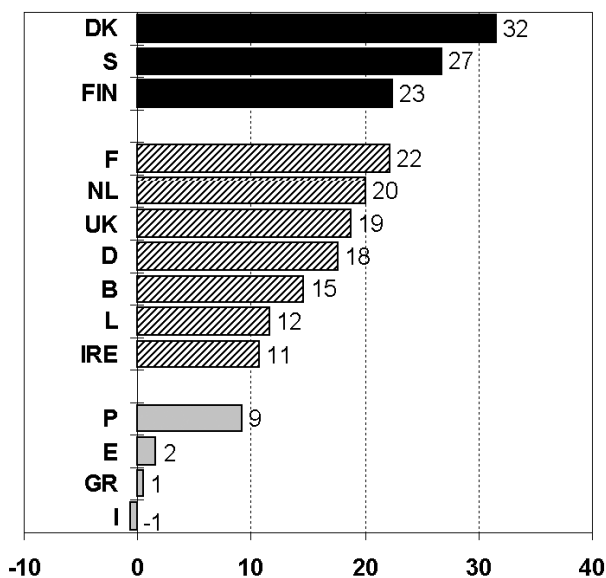
Figure 5: Poverty rates in the European Union (poverty limit = 50% of the national average equivalent disposable household income) (in %)



Source: ECHP/NSS

Next, let us take a look at the generation gap, comparing the general material living standards of the younger generation to the situation of the middle-aged generation. Here, we will calculate an inequality index based on a basket of 11 assets, comparing the average proportion in the two generations who have these assets. The index is an extension of logistic regression analysis, controlling for gender, social class, family structure and region. Figure 6 shows, again, that young adults are best off in the Southern countries and worst off in the North, relatively speaking. Again, the Central European Member States lie somewhere in the middle. It should be noted that the three clusters are perfectly separated.

Figure 6: Inequality between persons 20–29 and 45–64 years of age (average index score)



Source: ECHP/NSS

This should come as no surprise. This outcome is explained by the very different role of the family in the South as compared to the North. Young adults in Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal stay on with their parents much longer, especially when they are in school and before they establish themselves permanently on the labour market or in a stable partner relationship. This means that they share in the economic resources of the parental home in terms of material goods, housing conditions and the pooled disposable household income. The incorporation of young adults into the parental households is an advantage resulting from the economy of scale (both resources and costs and goods can be shared) and transfer of resources from the parental family. A special feature is the selective nature of young adults who leave home early; they are usually well established on the labour market and/or in a new family context of their own.

In the Nordic countries, young adults tend to leave their parents' home much earlier – even before they are established on the labour market, have sufficient income, and form their own family. Leaving at a certain age (around 20) and often continuing with their education is a common Nordic pattern. Therefore, as compared with the Southern part of Europe, there is a much larger number of young adults under the age of 30 who have a marginal income, are still in school and still live in single-person households. A closer look at Swedish poverty statistics reveals that the lion's share of Sweden's relatively low poverty rate is explained by such cases, while other age groups – including the elderly – display extremely low poverty rates, due to high employment levels and public income-maintenance schemes, including the public pension programme.

Hence, the role of the family explains why the generation gap is much more pronounced in the Nordic cluster with respect to living conditions. Welfare-state arrangements in the North do not sufficiently relieve these consequences of the early family-formation pattern of young adults. On the other hand, young adults in the North become independent at a much earlier age.

Transitions to Adulthood

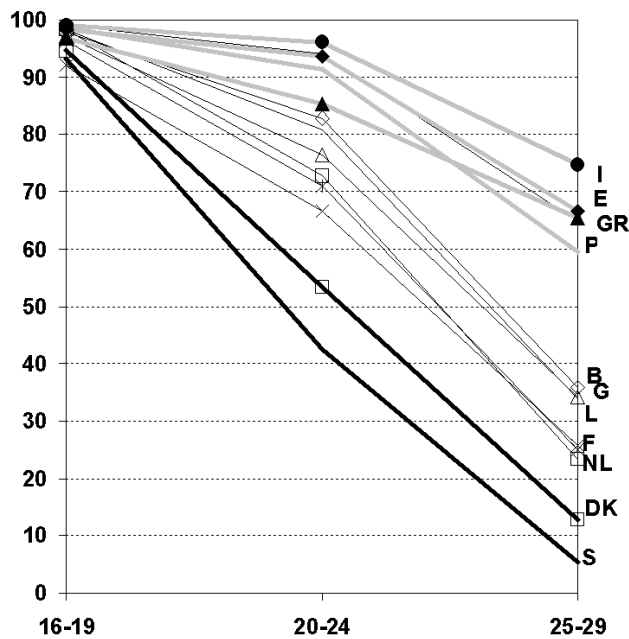
The role of the family also has implications for the transition to adulthood. Our findings indicate that household size is much larger in the Southern cluster, which is explained by the later exit from the parental home, a lower percentage of young people living in single-person households and a larger share of the elderly living with their middle-aged children. Hence, the Southern family tradition creates the opportunity to stay on longer in the parental home, which in turn delays other transitions as well. In addition, inadequate labour-market prospects and welfare-state performance both disturb and delay partnering and reproduction. The following series of figures will demonstrate this.

Leaving the Parental Home

Although there are only minor differences in the length of young people's education, young adults move out much later in the South and in Ireland, and much earlier in the Nordic countries, as compared to the intermediate Central European cluster (Figure 7) (as was already mentioned above). In the North, leaving home follows a straightforward pattern related to the end of secondary education or the first permanent job. In fact, a larger proportion even leaves before their education is over. Therefore, in the Nordic countries, young adults of very low age who are frequently still in school, constitute a large proportion of people falling below the poverty line. In contrast, in the South, a large proportion of young adults in their late twenties prefer to stay on with their parents, even after their education is concluded, and even after being established on the labour market.

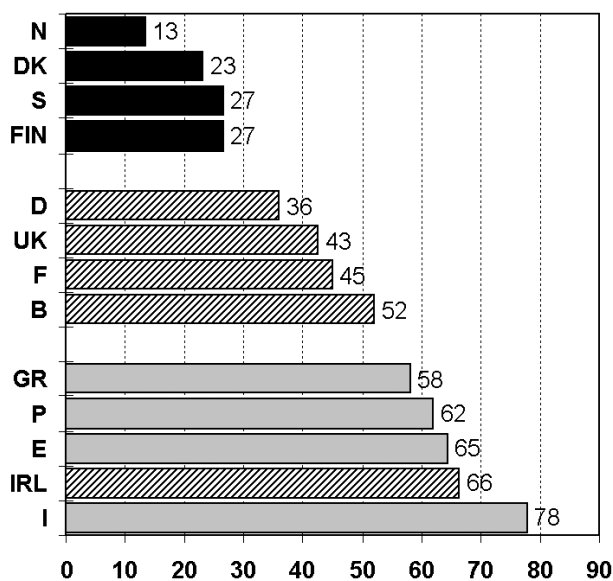
Recent research on the age of leaving the parental home indicates a sharp increase in Greece, Spain and Italy. This should be seen in the context of the changing welfare mix, with prolonged youth education and persistent youth unemployment being an incentive for further training, in order to be competitive on the labour market. Later exit would be the proper and logical coping strategy, if there are supportive family traditions. Our data support this interpretation (Figure 7), again displaying sharp differences between the three clusters.

Figure 7: Percentage of young men living with parents (by age group)



Source: ECHP/NSS

Figure 8: Percent of unemployed persons 16–30 living with their parents



Source: ECHP/NSS

Figure 8 underlines the supportive role of the parental household in softening the consequences of inefficient labour markets and poor welfare-state provisions, by incorporating young adults currently unemployed. The proportion of young adults below age 30 who are not employed and who are still staying with their parents varies between 13% (Norway) and 78% (Italy). Again we can identify the very diverse Southern (or Catholic) and Northern clusters, and the intermediate Central European cluster. The much larger levels of youth unemployment in the South (Vogel 1997) are well buffered by these family arrangements. In fact, a

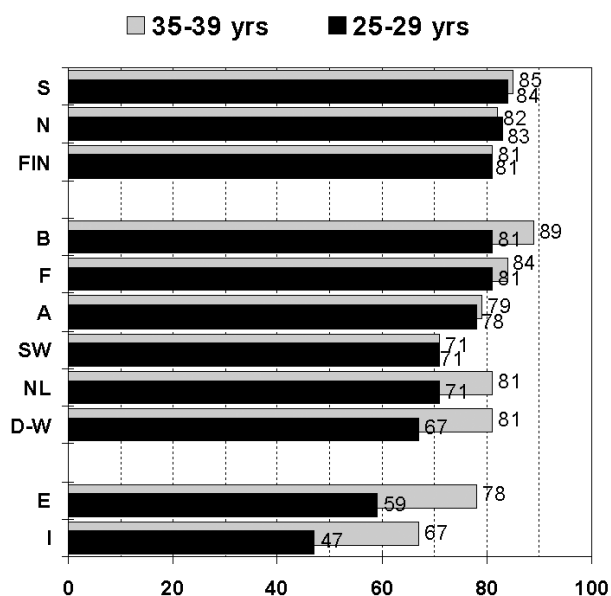
large proportion of already *employed* young adults in the South, some up to 30 years old, are in fact still living with their parents. This indicates that staying on in the parental home is not only a matter of economic necessity, but also a matter of traditional role expectations for parents as well as adult children. The parental family appears ready to take on extended responsibility, and the children seem prepared to utilise these arrangements as well. Again, this family tradition will delay other transitions to adulthood.

Partnering

Late partnering will invariably follow late exit, as is demonstrated in Figure 9. When labour market and welfare provisions provide the opportunity, partnering as well as fertility will come earlier, as in the Nordic cluster. Recent research based on a comparative study of early partnering (before 25 years of age) surveyed the experiences of two birth cohorts of women interviewed in the early 1990s (with an age difference of ten years). Figure 9 indicates that early partnership is indeed a Nordic tradition, which has remained unchanged, while the opposite coping arrangement (postponing partnering) has in fact occurred in the South. The proportion of females who have entered partnership by age 25 is just above 80% in the Nordic countries in both cohorts, and there has been no change in this respect over the previous decade (measured by comparing women currently ages 25–29 and 35–39, respectively).

In the South, Italy and Spain display much lower levels of early partnering (before age 25) in both cohorts. Furthermore, there has been a clear decline over the last decade (though data for Greece and Portugal were not available). West Germany and The Netherlands show a similar decline, though at a higher level. Again, our interpretation points at (increased) coping behaviour in the South (with postponed partnering), in reaction to less favourable opportunities offered by the labour market and welfare state.

Figure 9: Percentage of females who had entered partnership by age 25



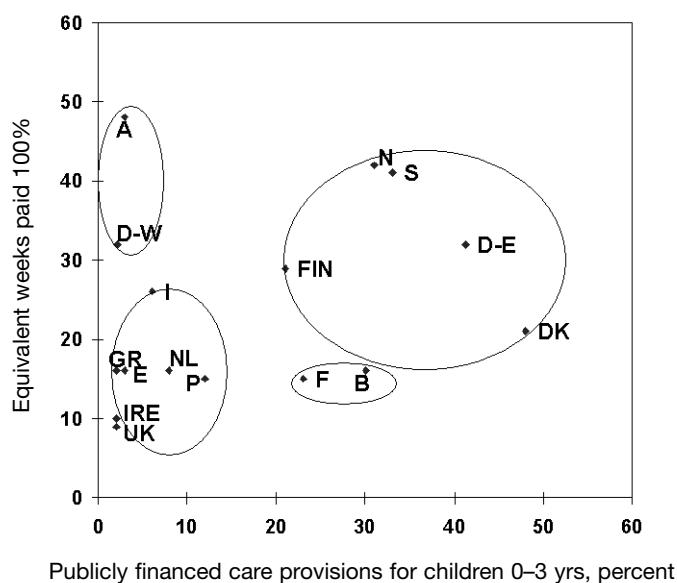
Source: Klijzing & Macura 1997

Fertility

Current comparative welfare studies indicate a distinct uniformity within the three clusters of EU Member States when it comes to the age of leaving the parental home, partnering, choosing a partnership form, and severing a partnership (Vogel 1997, 1999, 2002). The variation between clusters in these respects corresponds to a variation of institutional configuration between the performance of the labour market, the welfare state and the family. We proceed in the search for coping behaviours by interpreting the variations in reproductive behaviour. The indicators concern the spacing and timing of having children, with special focus on the fertility of young women.

Again, the crucial issue here is the welfare regime, or the opportunity structure offered by the labour market (employment, earnings) and the welfare state (family policies). If we assume that a large and growing majority of young women expect to have a career as well as children, adopting the two-breadwinner model, this then implies demands on the infrastructure: job opportunities are needed as well as family policies supporting fertility. With this in mind, we should expect an increasing mismatch between opportunity (labour demand, family policies) and career ambitions, particularly in the South. If the opportunity structure is not available, there will be an increased postponement of childbearing or going on strike with regard to fertility, thus resulting in decreasing fertility.

Figure 10: Public child-care support: paid maternity/paternity leave (equivalent weeks paid 100%) and publicly funded child-care provisions for the first child (percentage of children attending/available places)



Source: European Commission 1998

Figure 10 gives an account of the variation between clusters with respect to the corresponding family policies. In order to support the reconciliation between maternity and gainful employment for women, family policies should offer affordable child-care facilities as well as provisions for time off, including the right to leave – particularly the right to *paid* leave. A recent study carried out by the European Commission has recalculated the *full payment period* (weeks with 100% pay) from existing replacement rates and the length of the leave period for the first child. This indicator, as seen in Figure 10, is related to the second precondition, i.e. available *public care provisions for children aged 0–3*. Here, we again find a distinct Nordic cluster (including Eastern Germany) delivering both provisions, and a Southern cluster rating low on both. The UK, Ireland and The Netherlands also belong in this group, with the UK displaying the worst conditions in the European Union. Western Germany and Austria have as good financial provision for time off as do the Nordic countries, but they fall short on child-care facilities.

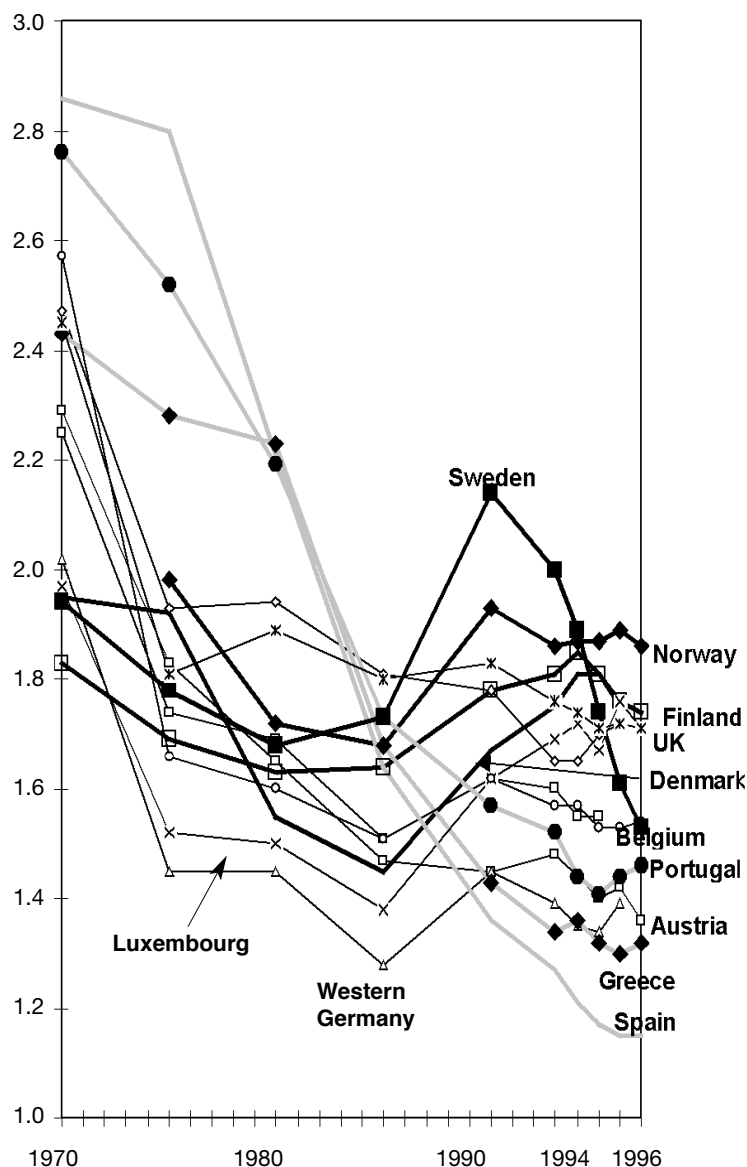
These variations will certainly have a consequence on fertility levels, particularly for the decision to embark on *early* childbearing. Poor family policies will lead to postponing fertility until a career is established and the family economy is stabilised. This type of coping behaviour especially shows up with younger women in the Southern cluster.

When looking at European statistics, we find a common trend towards decreasing fertility and increasing age of childbearing. This general trend corresponds to the common increase in youth education, later labour-market entry and insecure income; and it also relates to trends in family policies. Decreased as well as delayed fertility should be interpreted as a general coping behaviour to the current welfare mix. In the South, with its much higher levels of youth unemployment, this constitutes a stronger incentive for continuing one's education and postponing childbearing.

Overall data concerning trends in fertility levels (Figure 11) exhibit a dramatic change, though with great variance among countries. Furthermore, these trends are dissimilar between clusters but similar within the three clusters. In the 1970s, the Southern countries had much higher fertility rates than did the Nordic and Central cluster. A rapid decline brought Italy, Portugal and Spain to extremely low rates, far below the level of population replacement. Meanwhile, the fertility rates in the Nordic countries increased, reaching their peak around 1990–1993 in all the Nordic countries. However, since then, Nordic fertility has again declined or levelled off. Sweden had the largest fluctuation. After reaching the highest level of European fertility at 2.1, fertility in Sweden declined sharply to 1.6 within just a few years.

These complex international trends can be interpreted with reference to the changing welfare mix as well as the changing opportunity structure. Detailed analysis of the Swedish case (with a changing welfare mix moving in a different direction) offers a key to understanding fertility fluctuations. At the end of the 1980s, Sweden had extremely favourable labour-market conditions, coupled with mature welfare-state arrangements (child-care facilities and paid maternity/parental leave). The improved public arrangements supported the double career model of motherhood and paid work. Hence, for a few years, Swedish fertility increased sharply. However, in the beginning of the 1990s, a new chapter began in the Swedish economy. The impact of a deep international recession and changing domestic economic policies created a sharp decline in employment (by 10 percentage points), a fourfold increase in unemployment and a rapidly growing budget deficit, soon to be followed by recovery policies and cutbacks in public-sector employment and transfers. This was a huge shock for the labour-market prospects of young women, one which triggered a new decrease in fertility corresponding to the downward movement of the Southern countries, as is shown in Figure 11. Hence, with respect to the 1990s, Swedish women had experiences similar to the women in the South, with a similar downward fertility trend. Tendencies in Finland and Denmark, though less pronounced, show a similar trend. It should be noted that all of the Nordic countries showed a common increase in fertility in the second half of the 1980s, with good labour-market conditions and an increasingly favourable welfare mix.

Figure 11: Total period fertility rate 1970–1995 (estimated average number of children a woman will bear in her life time)



Source: *Newchronos*

Next, let us shift our attention from the general fertility levels towards (first) childbearing, as the (last) major transition towards adulthood. Having your first child is nowadays normally a matter of considerable planning, one taking into consideration a large variety of factors. Factors affecting young women's views on the timing and spacing of their fertility include increasing youth education (which leads to a higher level of expectations regarding work and career), changing values in the matter of gender equality, and access to and knowledge of contraceptives. Women will evaluate their partner accordingly, and they may choose to wait for the right partner and father for their children. They will plan their fertility to fit in with their other interests and find strategies to reconcile conflicting roles in life. They may choose to give priority to motherhood or to refrain from motherhood altogether, or they may temporarily delay motherhood. While such conscious and complex decisions are probably on the increase in most developed countries, the opportunities offered by institutional arrangements may look very different in the different Member States, as was already discussed.

There are two possible types of coping behaviour. One is to prioritise early motherhood and wait with employment. The opposite is to postpone childbearing. The overwhelming experience speaks for the latter.

Figures 12 and 13 provide a comparative picture of fertility levels in the most crucial age group, i.e. young women aged 25–29¹. This is the period in life when most transitions to adulthood are completed, when youth education has ended but one's establishment on the labour market is still in progress. When looking around the European Union, we note that Figure 12 displays a *positive correlation* around 1990 between employment rates (among young women) and fertility rates. Furthermore, there is again a distinct difference in employment levels as well as fertility rates among the three European clusters: The countries with the highest female employment also had the *highest* fertility levels. With lower employment levels, as in the Southern cluster, we also find much lower fertility levels.

It should be noted that all three clusters are dispersed along the Southwestern to Northeastern axis in Figure 12. Except for Portugal (with rather high female employment levels, closest to the Nordic countries), we again find the same three clusters, and they are well separated. The explanation for these extraordinary clear differences is complex. It relates to a whole bundle of family- and gender-friendly policies successfully implemented in the Nordic countries and less so in the South, as well as efficient labour markets that, by and large, are poor in the Central and Southern clusters. By 1990, the Nordic cluster, especially Sweden, peaked concerning opportunities offered by the labour market (providing job opportunities, and minimising youth unemployment and job insecurity) as well as by the welfare state (with high levels of public care for children and subsidised paid maternal/parental leave). This coincidence of all three factors provided a good opportunity as well as incentives for early, high fertility, as opposed to the Central and Southern cluster. Hence, the Nordic welfare-state arrangements and labour market successfully supported the consolidation of work and family during this period.

In Figure 13, we move 20 years back in time, about one generation ago, to the corresponding relationship of employment and fertility levels with European women 25–29 years of age (with figures drawn on the same scale to facilitate comparison). The year 1970 came well before the large expansion of the public sector in the North, with its large increase of new female jobs, progressive family policies and support for the two-breadwinner model. Accordingly, in 1970 there was a completely different correlation between employment and fertility. There was a *negative correlation* between employment rates and fertility rates, which indicates different underlying opportunities and/or different behavioural reactions by potential mothers.

If we compare the two figures, we will find that female employment was generally much lower in 1970. Fertility levels were generally higher in 1970, which should not be surprising since this was the traditional normal role expectation within the male-breadwinner model. Already by 1970, in the early phase of Nordic family policies, we can observe that the Nordic countries formed a separate cluster well separated from the rest of Western Europe, with the highest female employment levels. However, in 1970 the Nordic cluster had the *lowest* fertility rates in Europe; family policies were then less developed and the chances of combining work and family were poor. Some 20 years later, we can see that the three clusters had *moved in different directions*; and even *changed places with respect to fertility*. With the ambitions of an increasing group of well-educated young women, the Southern and Nordic cluster had changed places with respect to early fertility. Sweden, Finland, and Denmark moved in a Northeasterly direction. The Nordic cluster had now arrived at the *highest* fertility levels in the European Union, which should be attributed to the new family policies and excellent job opportunities in accordance with the two-breadwinner model. Meanwhile, the Southern cluster² moved in a Northwesterly direction, with slightly higher employment accompanied by a decline in fertility, which can be explained by poor opportunity levels (jobs, family policies). This was also the dominant trend for the Central cluster over this 20-year period.

¹ Annual fertility of women aged 25–29.

² Unfortunately, complete information for all four Southern countries was not available for 1970.

Figure 12: Employment and fertility rates of women ages 25–29 (1990)

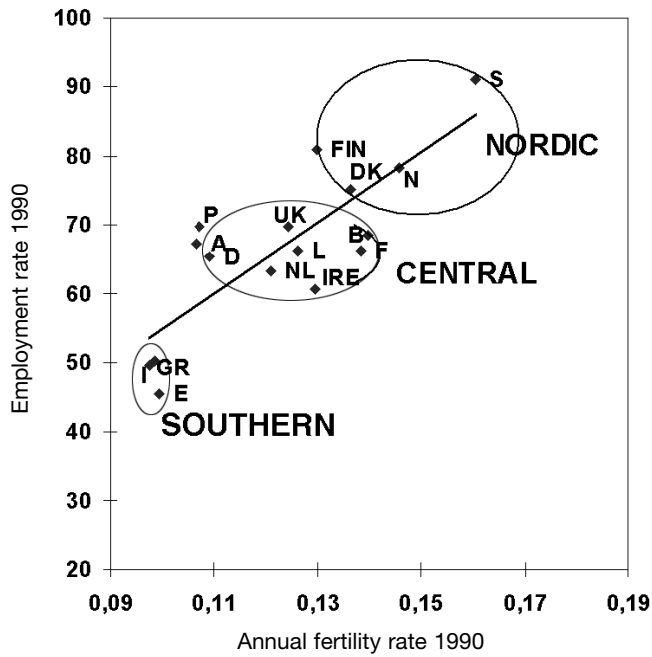


Figure 13: Employment and fertility rates of women ages 25–29 (1970)

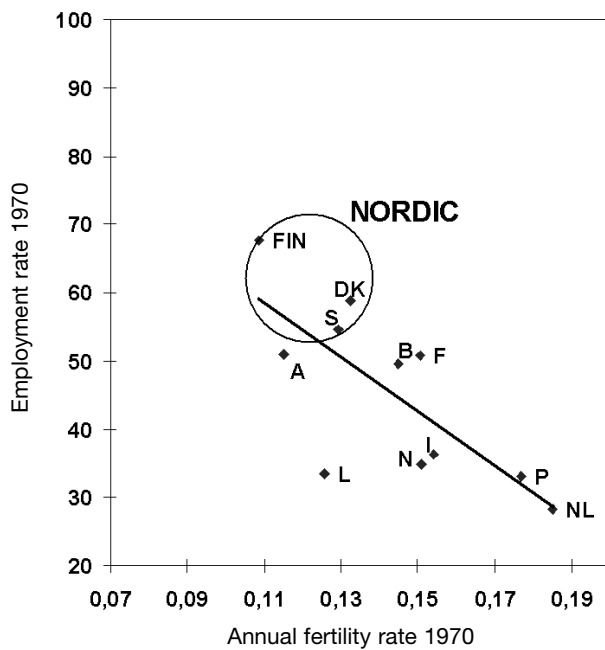
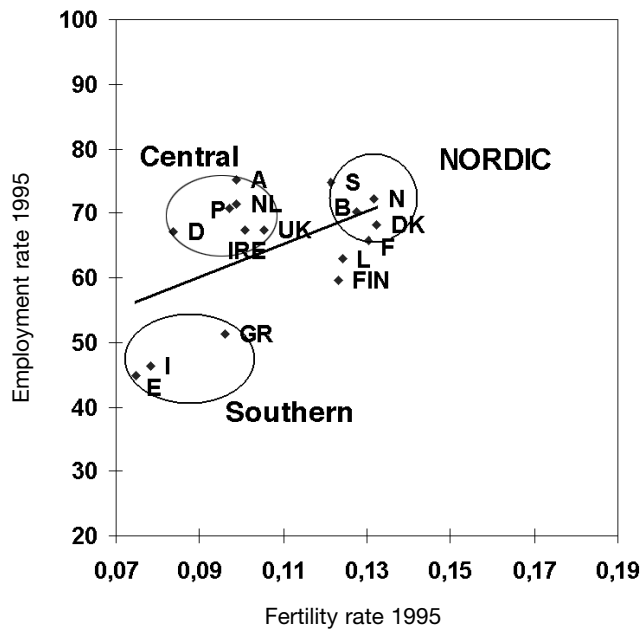


Figure 14: Employment and fertility rates of women ages 25–29 (1995)

However, the profound recession of the 1990s, particularly in Sweden and Finland, again changed the relationship between employment and fertility. Figure 14 shows that in 1995, the Nordic countries had again regressed in a Southwesterly direction, with decreased employment and fertility in this age group. Youth unemployment increased dramatically in Sweden and Finland, with delays in job entry and in arriving at a secure income between 1990 and 1995. Job security decreased, and recovery policies reduced the efficiency of the welfare state in supporting high fertility. It should not be surprising that Sweden, with the largest decline in employment, also suffered the largest decline in fertility. For the Southern Member States, we find continued low female employment, coupled with decreased fertility.

The following three figures will further clarify the diverse fertility patterns in the three clusters during the period between 1970 and 1995. First, Figure 15 shows the positive relationship between employment and fertility within the *Nordic* cluster over the period 1970–1995. We plot each of the four countries for the years 1970, 1990 and 1995, with respect to employment and fertility levels. For the Nordic countries, a high fertility level accompanies high employment. When employment increases, fertility also increases. This is illustrated by Figure 15, which shows the movement of the Nordic member states from Southwest to Northeast. The interpretation should be that female employment, as well as fertility, was increasingly supported by welfare-state arrangements (child care, paid parental leave). Hence, career and maternity can be combined, and fertility comes as a consequence of better job opportunities. However, in the recent deep recession (particularly in Sweden and Finland during the early 1990s), a drop in job opportunities again brought about a decrease and delay in fertility. Figure 16 displays the corresponding trend for the *Southern* cluster³. Here, we find that these countries are moving from Southeast to Northwest, with increased employment accompanied by lower fertility (Italy and Portugal). This is the logical consequence of a scarcity of child-care and maternal-leave provisions. Finally, Figure 17 shows the corresponding trend for the Central cluster. The general picture is the same as for the Southern cluster: With increased female employment, we get decreased fertility.

In summary, these findings underline the importance of the dual effect of job opportunities and welfare arrangements (subsidised child-care facilities and paid maternal leave). All three structures have to be in place

³ Data for 1970 is incomplete.

in order to produce high fertility levels. This combination is also productive in limiting poverty and freeing resources for more generous welfare provisions in other areas.

Figure 15: Trajectories for employment/fertility rates of women ages 25–29 (1970–1995) (Northern cluster)

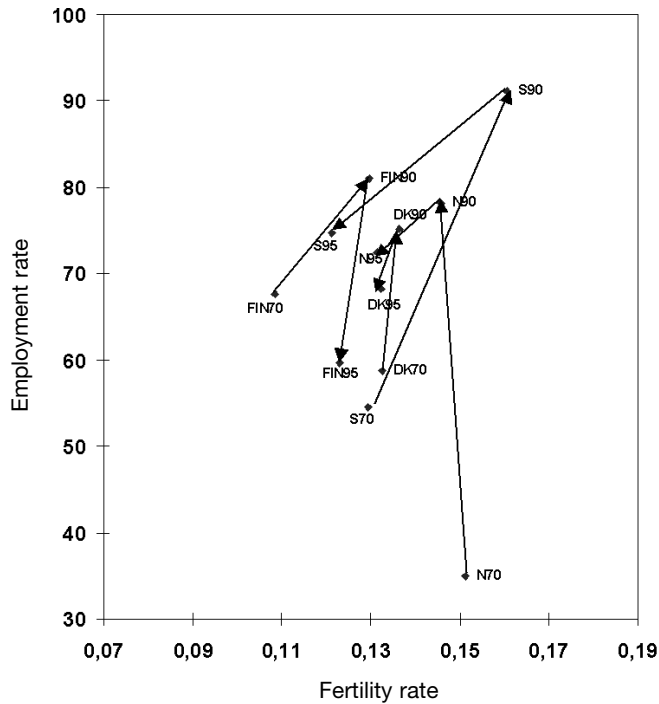
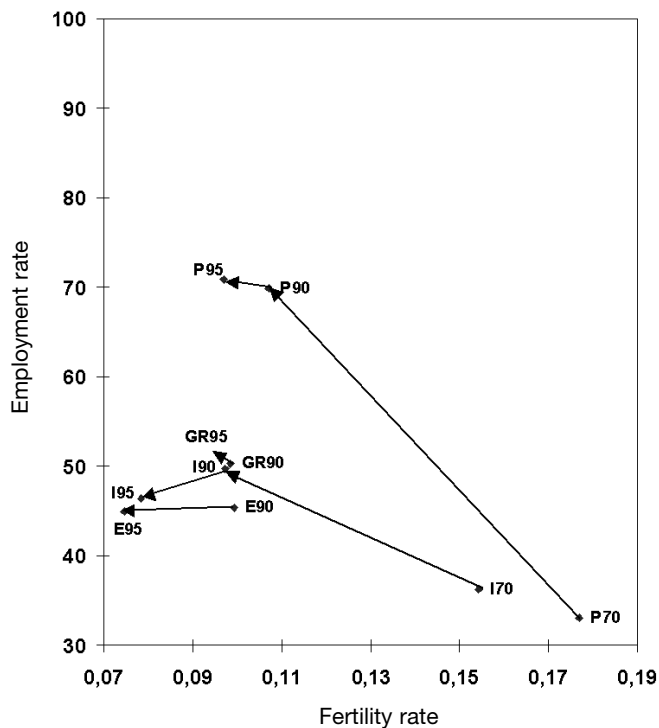
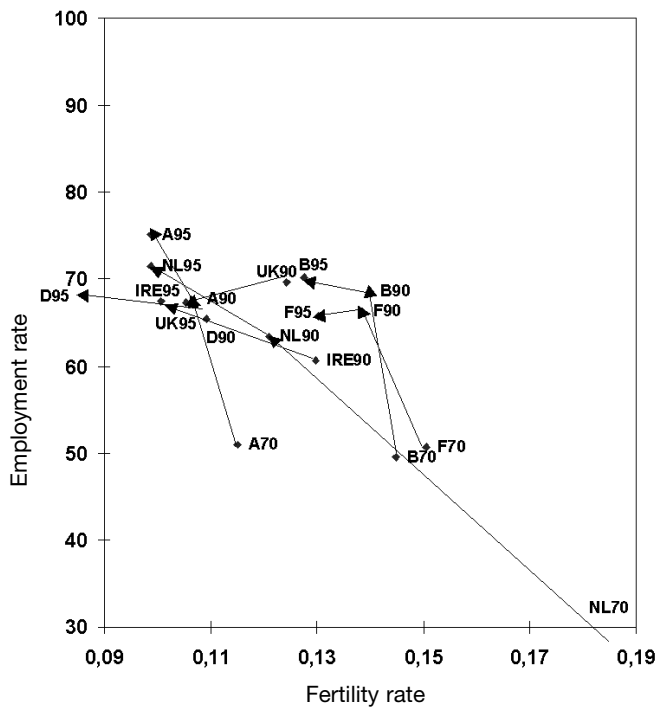


Figure 16: Trajectories for employment/fertility rates of women ages 25–29 (1970–1995) (Southern cluster)



**Figure 17: Trajectories for employment/fertility rates of women ages 25–29 (1970–1995)
(Central cluster)**



Concluding Remarks

In summary, these findings show the relationship between the opportunity structure, or welfare mix, as defined by the configuration of labour market, welfare state and family characteristics, as well as by the timing and sequence of the transition to adulthood. There is sufficient evidence to justify a typology of transitional models, common to clusters of EU Member States. The details of these transitional models require further research combining several sources, including life-history data, welfare surveys and regime research focusing on the relevant infrastructure for the transition to adulthood.

These findings have important policy implications. They underline several major factors:

1. The shared responsibility of the three institutions.
2. The consequences of poor institutional infrastructure when monitoring the transition to adulthood.
3. The consequences of the ongoing destabilisation of the
 - ▶ labour market (global competition, flexibility, insecurity, labour protection),
 - ▶ welfare state (recovery policies), and
 - ▶ families (divorces, singlehood).

Variation in the timing and sequences of transitions helps to identify underlying structural conditions. The task is to identify *transition regimes* and crucial bottlenecks holding up the transition to adulthood.

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Researching the Lives of Young Europeans Using the ECHP: Data, Issues and Findings

MARIA IACOVOU

Introduction

I envisage this paper as having three main purposes. First (and I apologise in advance to anyone for whom this is going over old ground), I will briefly present the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) and discuss what it can offer to people interested in researching the lives of young Europeans. Second, I will present a range of findings about young people's lives which have arisen from my research over the past few years using the ECHP. And finally, I will discuss several important methodological issues facing researchers carrying out this type of international comparative research: issues which are also important for anyone reading, interpreting or using such research.

I should mention at the start that although I was invited to talk about the quality of life of young Europeans, I believe that it is actually very difficult to draw inferences about the quality of life from the sort of data which are available from surveys like the ECHP. The ECHP can tell us a great deal about what young people *do*, and how they *live*, but it is not clear that a straightforward link can be made between these measures, and young people's *quality of life*.

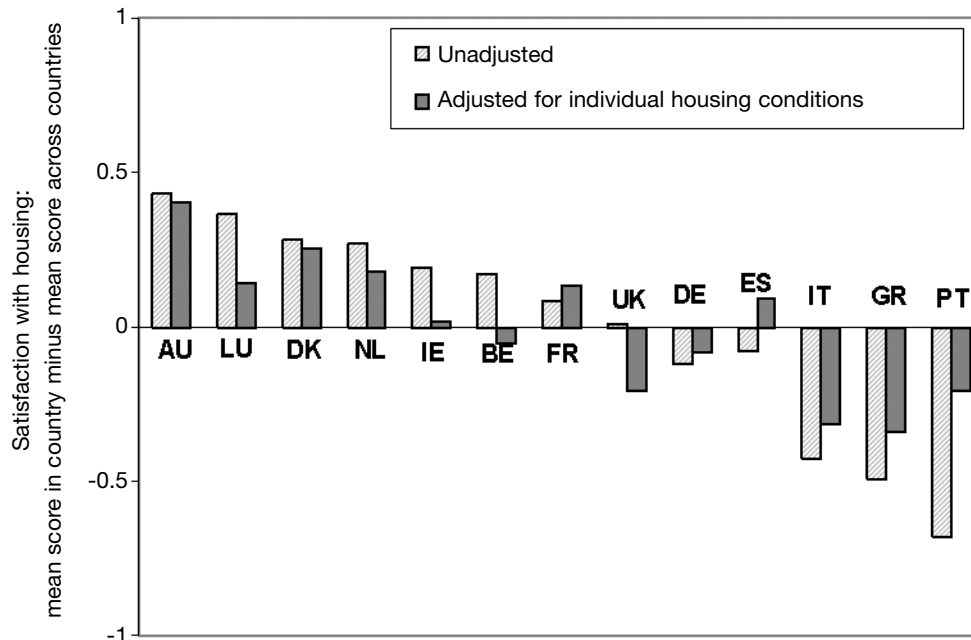
For example, we shall see that young people are far more likely to spend an extended period of time living in their parents' home in Southern European countries than in Northern Europe. However, it is completely unclear whether this fact yields any information at all about the quality of life in different countries. Certainly, in countries where it is very much the norm to move out of the parental home some time during the late teens, living with one's parents into one's twenties or even thirties may be seen as a deeply unsatisfactory state of affairs associated with a severe level of disadvantage, dysfunction, or onerous family responsibility. However this *cannot* be used to infer that young people in Southern Europe have a lower quality of life than Northern Europeans in terms of their housing experiences, because in countries where extended residence in the parental home is the norm, early home-leaving may be seen as undesirable and a sign of friction within the family.

There are of course some areas in which one can say with a degree of certainty, that one state of affairs is unequivocally better than another. For example, wherever you live it is preferable to have a higher rather than a lower income. It is better to have a job than to be unemployed, and it is usually considered more desirable to have a university degree than not to have one. Even here, though, a modicum of care is called for. The safety net of the close, co-resident family in Mediterranean countries may cushion young people from the worst effects of early misfortunes such as unemployment or low-paid insecure work, and comprehensive welfare systems may do the same in the Scandinavian countries. Because of this, we may expect that these early misfortunes would have the most serious impact on the quality of life in countries where neither of these support systems are present, and less of an impact where one or the other system is in place.

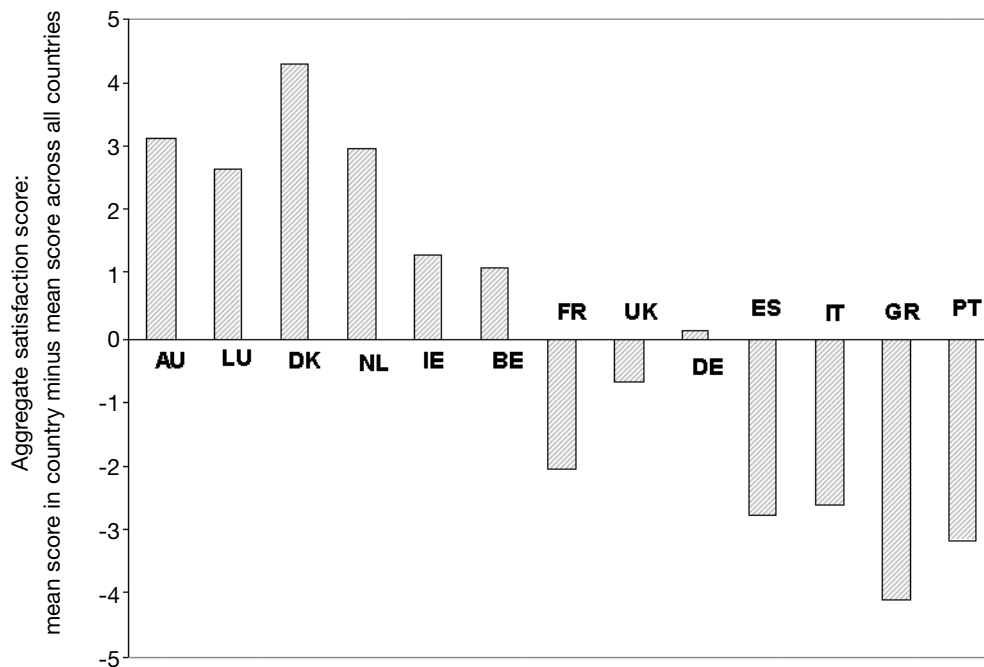
Even the subjective measures of life satisfaction contained in the ECHP may not be very informative about inter-country differences in the quality of life. All respondents in the ECHP were asked to rate their satisfaction, on a scale of 1 (not at all satisfied) to 6 (fully satisfied), with the following: their main activity, their financial situation, their housing situation, and the amount of leisure time available to them. In addition, those with a job were asked to rate several aspects of their job satisfaction, on the same scale. Figures 1 and 2 show the difficulty in interpreting these measures as quality of life measures. In Figure 1, mean housing satisfaction scores for each country (expressed as deviations from the EU mean) are plotted for young people aged 17–25. The paler bars show 'raw' scores, while the darker bars show scores adjusted for actual housing conditions: housing tenure; the size of the house relative to the number of inhabitants, the type of

the house; lack of amenities such as a bathroom or a garden. The adjusted scores also control for sex, age, income and employment status of individuals.

Figure 1: Housing satisfaction among young people aged 17–25



It is clear from Figure 1 that actual conditions explain some, but not all, of the cross-country differences in housing satisfaction. Should the residual differences be taken as indicative of other, unmeasured, differences in conditions, which affect satisfaction? Of differences across countries in the way material circumstances impinge on satisfaction? Or are they simply indicative of cultural factors which mean that questionnaires are answered differently in different countries: that Mediterraneans are less inhibited than Northern Europeans when it comes to grumbling about their lives? Analysis across all measures of satisfaction in the ECHP suggest that there are indeed systematic differences in the way people answer subjective questions on satisfaction, with Mediterraneans far more likely to report the lowest possible levels of satisfaction on all criteria. This is illustrated in Figure 2, which plots an aggregate measure of seven different satisfaction scores for older people aged 30–60, and which mirrors the patterns in Figure 1 quite well.

Figure 2: Aggregate life satisfaction scores, people aged 30–60

It is impossible to say for certain that cultural factors do not affect the way individuals report satisfaction. Thus, although subjective measures of satisfaction may be useful in comparing the quality of life *within* countries, there are serious problems in using measures of satisfaction to compare quality of life *between* countries.

The examples just given highlight the difficulties in using the indicators in the ECHP to make inferences about the quality of life in different countries; and I hope they constitute an adequate justification for this paper to focus on what young people *do*, rather than trying to say anything about their quality of life.

The European Community Household Panel (ECHP)

The ECHP was set up and funded by the European Union. The first wave of data was collected in 1994, and the same respondents have been interviewed every year since then. At the start, the data set covered 12 countries: Germany, Denmark, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, the UK, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy. Other countries joined in later: Austria in 1995, Finland in 1996, and Sweden in 1997. At the time of writing, four years of data have been made available to researchers.

Table 1 gives an idea of the scale of the ECHP, showing the total number of respondents in each country, as well as the number of respondents aged 17–35. This demonstrates one advantage of the ECHP over some other data sets, namely that it is relatively large compared to other surveys – for example, it is considerably larger than the Young Europeans surveys of 1990 and 1997.

Table 1: Number of respondents at wave 1

	Ages 17–35	All
Germany	3,177	9,490
Denmark	2,019	5,903
Netherlands	3,269	9,407
Belgium	2,411	6,710
Luxembourg	789	2,046
France	5,104	14,333
UK	3,459	10,517
Ireland	4,014	9,904
Italy	6,734	17,729
Greece	4,058	12,492
Spain	6,516	17,893
Portugal	3,777	11,621
Austria	2,518	6,999
Finland	2,717	8,067
Sweden	3,044	9,597

Figures are from respondent files at wave 1. For late joining countries, figures are from respondent files at wave 4.

Table 1 also demonstrates one defect of the ECHP as a resource for studying young people, namely that it only carries out detailed personal interviews on individuals aged 17 and over. However, that is not to say that the ECHP cannot tell us anything at all about people under age 17. Because the ECHP is a *household-level* survey, collecting information on *all* members of responding households, detailed personal interviews are available for all household members over 17, and basic information on age, sex and employment for younger members. Thus, the survey can be used to derive complete information on the living arrangements of those under age 17, and is a good source of detailed information on the parents of young people still living at home. Given that young people's lives are so much influenced by the circumstances and activities of their parents, this information arising from the household-level nature of the survey, is extremely useful.

Because the ECHP is a *panel* survey, it is designed to interview the same respondents year after year. This survey design is popular because it allows researchers to examine how people's lives evolve over a period of time, rather than simply taking a snapshot at one particular time. This is particularly useful when studying young people, since more important transitions occur at this time of life rather than at any other time. So, for example, it is possible to look not only at how many young people live at home, but to study the process of *leaving* home; it is possible not only to look at the numbers of young people unemployed in each country, but to look at moves into and out of unemployment and the reasons for them; it is possible not only to look at the proportions of young people in education, but also to look at the dropping-out process: who drops out, and when, and why.

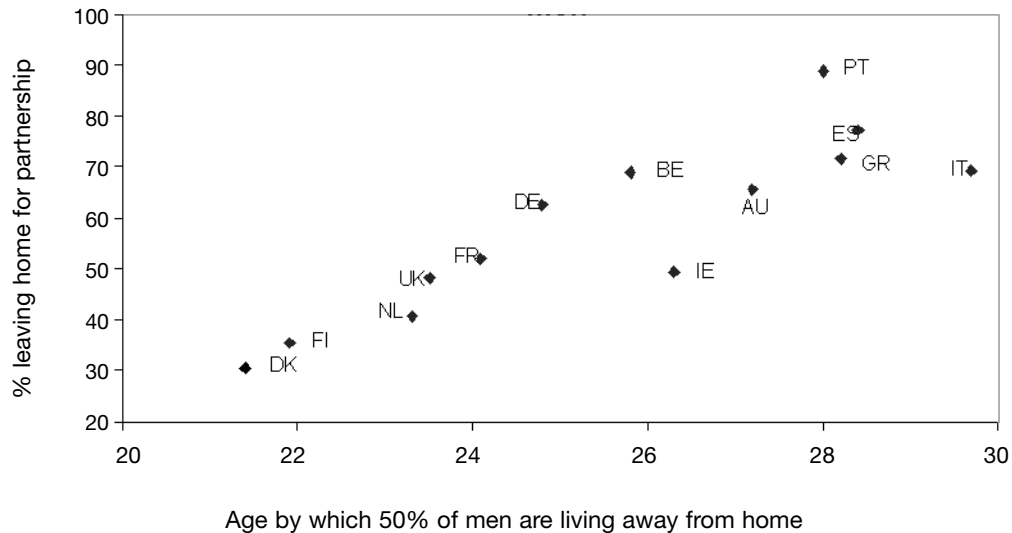
Figure 3: Age leaving home and partnership destination – men

Figure 3 gives a very simple example of how this panel structure can be of use. The horizontal axis gives a measure of the age by which 50% of men are living away from home, and illustrates the well-known finding that young people in the Scandinavian countries leave home earlier than in other Northern European countries, and Mediterraneans are the latest to leave. What the panel structure enables us to do, is to examine not just young people's living arrangements, but the living arrangements *they move to* after leaving the parental home. Plotting this on the vertical axis reveals a strong relationship between the age at leaving home and whether or not young people move to a partnership: a relationship which is far less clear if levels rather than transitions are examined. The same can be done comparing the age at leaving home with young people's first housing destinations.

One problem with a panel structure in general, and with the ECHP in particular, is attrition. In several countries, the ECHP failed to follow many young people who left home after the first wave, and failed disproportionately to follow those who left home to pursue their education. This means that the samples in waves after the first are not representative, and particularly if the data are to be used for descriptive purposes, this must be taken into account.

The ECHP was originally conceived as providing data which would be completely comparable across countries, which to a certain extent has been achieved. However, for various reasons, data are not completely comparable between countries. One reason for this is that some countries (for example, The Netherlands and Belgium), instead of using standardised ECHP questionnaires, adapted their existing national panels, with the result that some questions are coded differently and some are entirely absent, in these countries. Confidentiality rules are also an issue, meaning that in some countries, data have been anonymised or withheld altogether. And of course, even where data are fully available, direct comparisons between countries are not always easy: A good example of this is in the area of educational qualifications, which vary enormously between countries in their timing and their value, because of differences in educational systems. However, despite these problems, the ECHP does provide reasonably comparable data. So what is actually in the ECHP? It contains data in the following areas:

- ▶ Household-level characteristics (type of housing, tenure, etc.)
- ▶ Individual characteristics (sex, age, immigration status, etc.)
- ▶ Incomes and expenditure (incomes from a variety of sources; less detailed on expenditure)
- ▶ Education, employment and unemployment
- ▶ Measures of life satisfaction (including work, finances, housing)

Clearly, and quite reasonably, the questionnaires were designed to suit the European population in general rather than young people in particular. Inevitably therefore, there are certain areas of young people's lives which could be better covered than they actually are. One example is in the area of income. The ECHP questionnaire asks in great detail about the sources of respondents' incomes, including income from work, investments, benefits and so on. However, for young people, one of the most important sources of income are intra-family transfers, which are not investigated in such great detail. At the most basic level, in any analysis of the effect of money and family background on young people's behaviour, it is extremely important to know not only the amount of intra-family transfers, but also who they come from, and whether transfers take place in kind as well as in cash.

However, the fact that the ECHP was not designed specifically for young people has benefits as well as costs. First of all, a 'purpose-built' youth survey would generally sample young people up to age 25 or 30, but rarely beyond that age. However, if one understands 'youth' as being the phase of life involving the transition to adulthood, one is actually looking at a whole range of transitions in different areas, many of which actually occur rather late in life. For example, the ECHP shows us that by the age of 30, half of all women in The Netherlands and Italy have not yet become mothers; and in nearly all countries, well over half of all men do not become fathers until some time after age 30. Half of all men do not leave home in Italy until age 30, and men leave home nearly as late in Greece, Ireland and Spain. Less dramatically, but equally important, over a fifth of young men are still in education by age 24 in The Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Finland. Thus, a definition of 'youth' restricted to those under age 25 or 30, would actually miss many of the important transitions in many countries.

Another reason why it is extremely valuable to have older people in the ECHP even if one is interested in younger people, is that older people act as a useful benchmark for comparisons. Looking at the incidence of unemployment in the ECHP, one sees that young people in Greece are the most likely to be unemployed (Figure 4). However, this does not illuminate us as to whether this is because they are *Greek* (and Greeks of all ages are more likely to be unemployed), or because they are *young* (i.e., Greeks are not particularly likely to be unemployed, but young people do particularly badly in Greece).

Figure 4: Unemployment among young men (17–20)

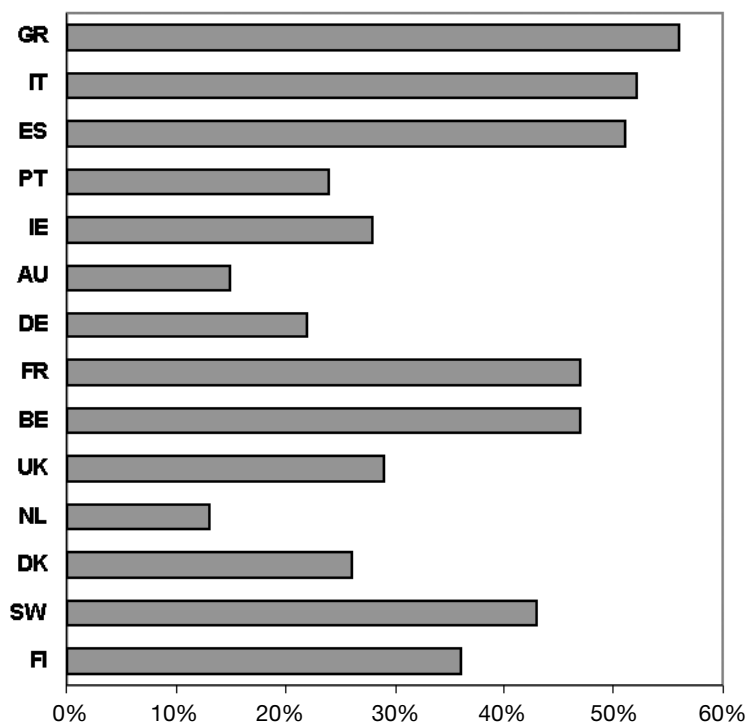
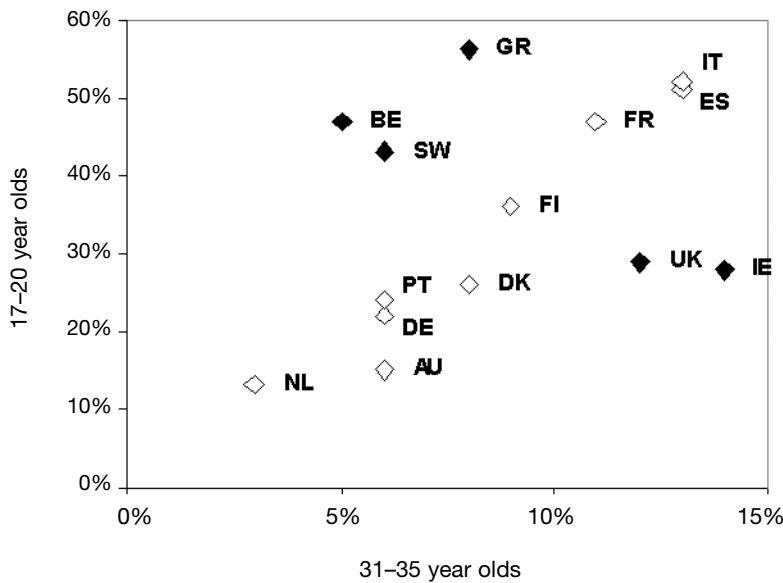


Figure 5: Unemployment among men aged 17–20 and 31–35

However, the presence of data on older age groups allows this question to be answered easily. Figure 5 plots unemployment rates for young men against rates for a prime-aged group (31–35), and shows that the difficult situation of young Greek men is primarily associated with being young, rather than with being Greek, since prime-age Greek males do not have particularly high levels of unemployment. By contrast, the other countries with high youth unemployment (Italy and Spain) are countries where prime-age employment is also high. Belgium and Sweden are the other countries where there appears to be a particular penalty associated with being young, while in the UK and Ireland, young people are less at risk of unemployment than prime-age males.

Methodological Issues

The Problem of Scale

Analytically, a data set with 15 countries falls rather uncomfortably between two ways of working. One way in which comparative research has typically been done is by examining how people's lives vary between a small number of countries, typically two or three¹. This type of research is able to take an in-depth approach, assessing how inter-country differences in people's lives are related to a wide range of economic, cultural, institutional and political factors. Although it is incorrect to make causal inferences about the effects of social policy from this type of research, or to extrapolate findings to the case of other countries, the depth of detail involved does mean that informed conjecture may be made.

Another strand of cross-national comparative research compares variation over a much larger number of units. For example, in the United States a good deal of research has used inter-state differences in outcomes such as employment, returns to education, and so on, to assess the effects of social policy or other differences in economic or social factors². In this case, inferences about the effects of social policy may be made and tested statistically, because of the large number of units involved, in this case 50.

The number of countries in the ECHP (at present, 15) is too large to be suitable for the first strand of research, and too small to be suitable for the second. With appropriate multi-level techniques, national-level

¹ For example, Holdsworth (2000) and Kerckhoff & Macrae (1992).

² For example, Card & Krueger (1992, 1996).

factors may easily be incorporated into analytical models. However, because European countries are so diverse, any model seeking to draw inferences about the effects of national-level factors on individuals' lives, would have to control for so many variables at the national level, that 15 countries in the sample would not generally provide enough degrees of freedom for the analysis. Because of this, it is extremely difficult for statistical inferences to be made about the effects of social policy or other national-level factors using the ECHP.

That is not to say that a certain amount of interesting and informative research on a Europe-wide scale has not been done: Work on this scale includes projects using the Young Europeans surveys (Kiernan 1986 / Commission of the European Communities 1992 and 1998); and work using the ECHP (Vogel 1997 / Iacovou 1998). However, there is a sense in which researchers working with data on an EU scale are still charting new territory; in the paragraphs which follow I will try to give an indication of some of the issues which I think are most relevant.

Presentational Considerations

Anyone who has used ECHP data will appreciate the difficulty of presenting data on 15 countries without producing extremely indigestible output. If one presents results in graph or table form for all countries, what order should be used to present the countries? Graphs and tables which present data separately for each country rapidly become very large and cumbersome; results which demand more detailed attention, such as regression estimates, are even more difficult to plough through when presented separately for 15 different countries. If these do not seem like important considerations, perhaps they will seem more important at the end of this paper.

One possibility is to perform analysis on a country-by-country basis, but only to present edited highlights relating to specific countries, which makes for readability but with a cost in terms of completeness. Another possibility is to present only a few findings on a country-by-country basis, and to present the bulk of one's work using groups of countries. A major problem with this approach is that any grouping of countries is virtually guaranteed to provoke criticism from a good proportion of one's audience. Grouping countries on the basis of divisions which exist empirically in the data, leaves the researcher open to the criticism of having little theoretical foundation for the chosen grouping; however, it is not possible to use any existing theory to underpin one's decisions, without adapting it substantially (for example, Esping-Andersen's categorisation of welfare states (1990), must be adapted to include Southern European countries, before it may be used to inform this type of work). Additionally, groupings of countries made on the basis of theoretical considerations often fail to fit the data well.

Weighting

If the researcher chooses to present data as Europe-wide or regional averages, the problem of how to weight observations arises, particularly for the purposes of descriptive analysis. Although in my opinion it is better to weight countries according to their populations rather than giving all countries equal weights, it is important to remember that weighted averages will inevitably be skewed towards larger countries, and may not reflect the experience of those living in small countries very well. As an example, Table 2 shows the proportion of men aged 21–25 who live with a partner (either married or cohabiting) for two groups of countries: Mediterranean, and Northern European. In this age group, Northern Europeans are much more likely to live with a partner than Mediterraneans; the 'extreme' cases here are Italy (which has the lowest levels of living with a partner) and Finland (which has the highest). Italy is as large as all the other Mediterranean countries put together, and thus the 'extreme' behaviour of young Italians dominates the Mediterranean group to an extent which may exaggerate the 'North-South' divide in Europe. The largest country in the Northern group is the UK, which is not an 'extreme' case and therefore does not exaggerate North-South differences in the same way; however, the large size of the UK dominates the Northern group of countries, meaning that the average for this group is not representative of young people's experience in the much smaller Finland.

Table 2: The proportion of men aged 21–25 living with a partner

	Population	Proportion living with a partner (%)	Group averages
Italy	56.9	3.48	
Spain	38.9	5.59	
Greece	10.2	5.60	
Portugal	9.9	9.88	
<i>Average for Mediterranean countries:</i>			4.9
Netherlands	15.3	21.13	
UK	57.8	23.29	
Denmark	5.3	26.72	
Finland	5.1	30.61	
<i>Average for Northern countries:</i>			23.6

Selecting a Model

In multivariate analysis, there are well-established procedures for selecting models. Fully-automated stepwise analysis is possible using programs such as SPSS or Stata; the majority of researchers would select models themselves, using a combination of theoretical motivation and empirical considerations. However, selecting a model becomes a great deal more difficult with the range of countries in the ECHP. The researcher invariably hopes that a variable which shows a large and significant effect in one country will do the same in a neighbouring country with similar socio-economic characteristics, although it may have a different effect in a group of countries over on the other side of Europe. Any variation in effects between countries, it is hoped, will occur in an orderly way, which is easily interpreted and just unpredictable enough to be new and publishable. Naturally, this never happens. Instead, more usually, a variable produces such a small and insignificant effect in 11 countries that any sensible researcher would not hesitate to reject it from the specification – except that it has a strong and significant positive effect in three countries and a strong and significant negative effect in one country. And this happens, not just with one variable, but with a whole range of variables.

What should the researcher do? It may be tempting to select a separate specification for each country, but this has a serious cost in terms of comparability between countries. Another alternative would be to estimate a common specification across all countries, including for each country all the variables which are not rejected for any country. This too has a serious drawback, namely that it can interfere with the precision of estimates in all countries. Another option is to perform regressions on groups of countries rather than on single countries; this makes the task of selecting a model easier, by reducing the number of units in the analysis. This works well where a grouping of countries is obvious and well-behaved, and can be justified in some way; however, all too often this will not be possible. A fourth approach is to perform a single regression, starting with a full set of explanatory variables interacted with country variables; and progressively, to exclude insignificant interaction terms. Methodologically this has a number of advantages; however, the demands on computing power can be enormous, and a standard stepwise procedure cannot guarantee that all the interaction terms which should be included, will make it into the final specification. The fifth and final approach which I identify, which to some extent may be combined with the others, is to confine oneself to a 'stripped-down' specification, focusing on a small set of variables which describe a single sphere of life. For example, a young woman's decision to have a child may depend on her age, her partnership status, her (and possibly her partner's) income, the security of her employment and housing situation, local labour market conditions, personal characteristics such as her educational level, and the characteristics of her family of origin. In a single-country analysis, it would not be unusual to include most or all of these variables in multivariate analysis to explain the age of entry to motherhood. However, with 15 countries, a better approach would involve examining the relationships between a single aspect of young women's lives and the transition to motherhood. This 'stripped-down' approach may mean examining the effect of housing tenure on transition to motherhood, or the effect of income, or education, but not all of these characteristics at once.

Significance and Hypothesis Testing

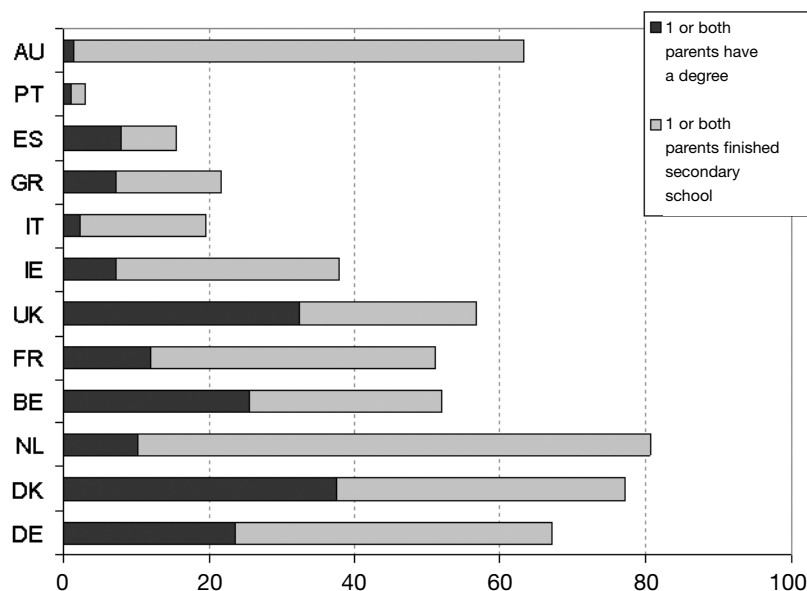
ECHP sample sizes vary enormously between countries, and this should be taken into account when interpreting the results of any analysis. Sample sizes in Italy and Spain are over twice as large as sample sizes in Denmark and Austria, and the sample in Luxembourg is particularly small. Where sample sizes are large, estimates are more precise, and therefore estimated relationships will appear to be more significant in countries with larger samples than in countries with smaller samples. Thus, when comparing effects between countries, as well as reporting actual standard errors or test statistics, it is useful to compute 'hypothetical' significance tests, which are the actual results adjusted to take account of the differences in sample sizes.

Interpretation

One of the biggest and most over-arching problems in inter-country analysis is the issue of how to draw meaning from the results of comparative research. I have already touched on this when discussing how the effects of unemployment or low pay may vary between countries. This question also arises in the context of multivariate analysis, as the following example shows. In order to test the effects of parental education on home-leaving behaviour, I included parental education as an explanatory variable in a multinomial logit equation with leaving home as the dependent variable.

The ECHP contains three categories for educational attainment: post-secondary education, secondary-level education, and less than secondary education. However, it soon became clear that even this rather broad classification was too detailed, since in three countries (Greece, Portugal and Austria) only one or two per cent of young people had a parent with a degree. I finally used a single variable in education: whether at least one parent had finished secondary school. However, this did not solve all my problems: the huge variations in parental education, illustrated in Figure 6, mean that having a parent with secondary or higher qualifications in Portugal means having parents who belong to an educational elite; while having a parent with secondary or higher qualifications in The Netherlands or Denmark simply means having a parent in the top three-quarters of the educational distribution.

Figure 6: Parents' education (men aged 17–35, living at home)



Findings from the ECHP

Over the past few years I have worked on three major projects using the ECHP. Two have been funded by the European Union under their Fourth and Fifth Frameworks, and have been undertaken in conjunction with colleagues in other European countries as the *European Panel Analysis Group* (EPAG) consisting of teams from Dublin, Tilburg, Berlin, Milan and Aarhus. These projects have had a very wide remit and have not been focused on young people; however, a good deal of the findings do relate to young people. The third project, now drawing to its close, is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK under its *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change* programme, and deals specifically with the transition to adulthood in the EU. The findings which I will present here are adapted from Iacovou and Berthoud (2001), which is a wide-ranging overview of young people's living arrangements, housing, education, employment and unemployment, incomes and living standards. As living arrangements have been covered in some detail earlier in the seminar, I will focus here on aspects related to education.

Figures 7 and 8 put young people's educational attainment across Europe into a historical context. Figure 7 shows that the proportion of people across Europe attaining secondary and higher qualifications has been increasing over the century, with a faster increase over most of the century in secondary qualifications than in higher education.

Figure 7: Education levels – Europe-wide averages, by date at which individuals turned 20

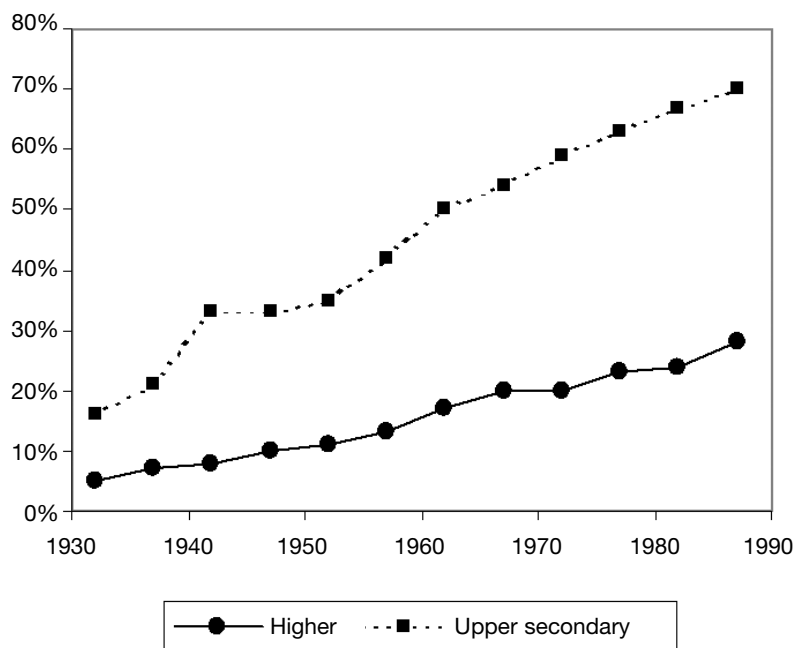


Figure 8: Educational attainment: four groups of countries, by date at which individuals reached age 20

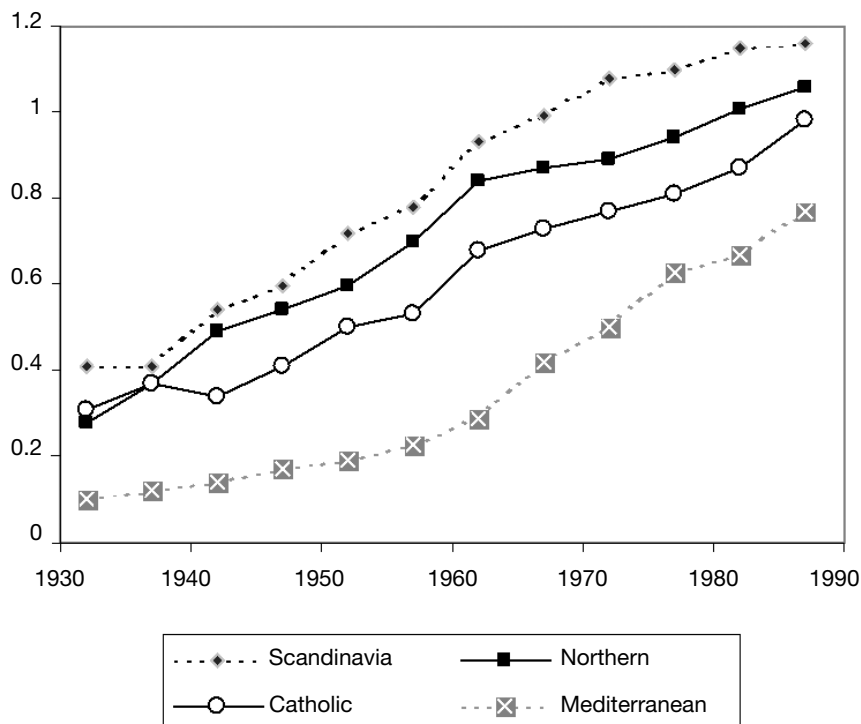
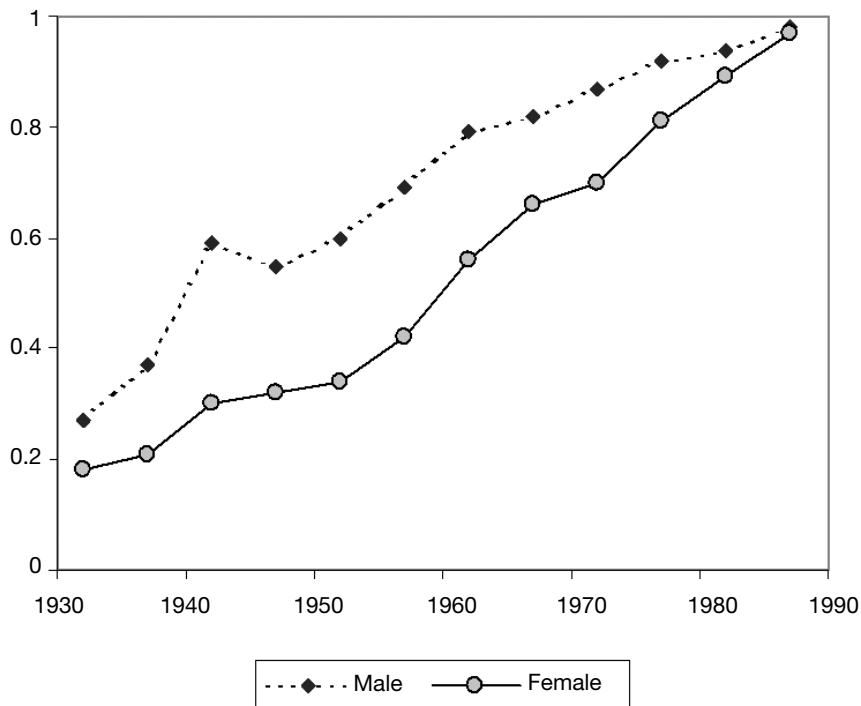


Figure 8 examines the growth in a single aggregate measure of education, composed of a score of 1 for secondary qualifications and 2 for higher education, across four groups of countries. Perhaps the most striking feature of this graph is the very low levels of qualifications in the Mediterranean countries among those who left school in the first part of the 20th century, and the rapid increase in educational levels in this group of countries in the second half of the century.

Figure 9 shows how the relative educational performance of men and women has evolved. Men have been better educated than women over most of the 20th century, although in recent years the gap has closed significantly – in many countries, young women are now better educated than young men. Interestingly, though, the gap between men and women has not closed monotonically over the century: men's advantage over women increased during (and very likely, because of) World War II, and peaked during the 1940s.

Figure 9: Educational attainment of men and women, by date at which individuals reached age 20



We now move on to look at educational participation and attainment among young people. Figure 10 shows the proportions of young people participating in education who are aged 17 (in the final years of secondary school) and 20 (in higher education). As expected, the proportion of people in education or training decreases with age. The highest proportions in education at age 17 are in Belgium, The Netherlands and Finland, while the lowest are in the UK and Portugal. Interestingly, however, Portugal does *not* have one of the lowest proportions in education by age 20, suggesting that there is some degree of polarisation in the education system coming into effect before the end of secondary school.

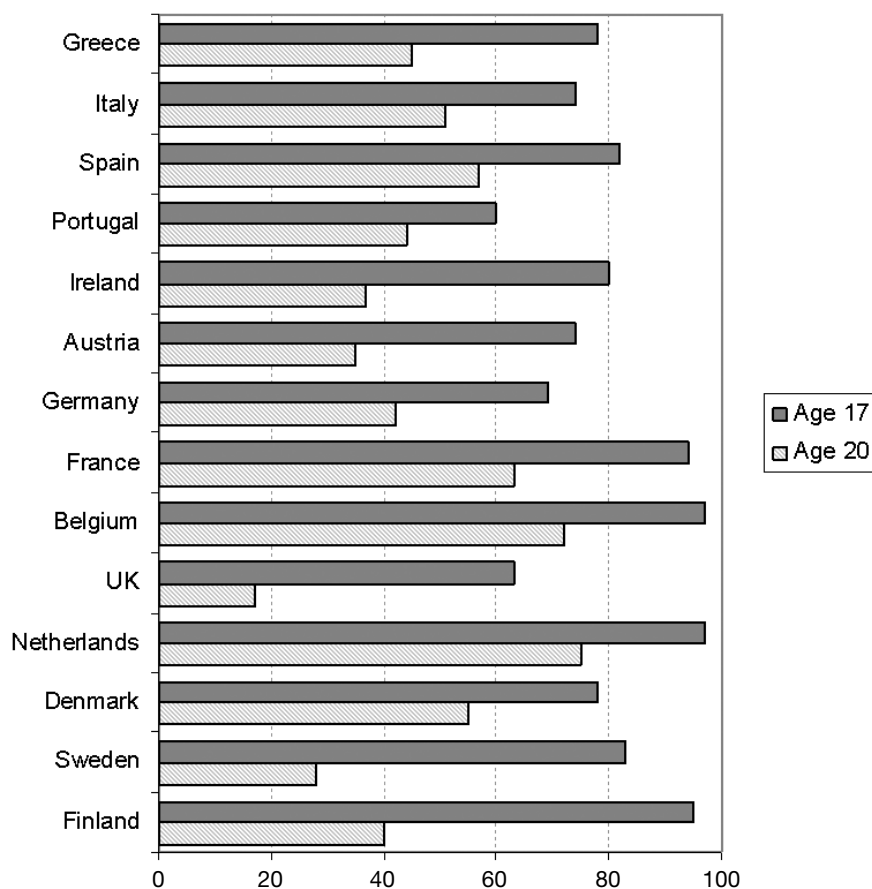
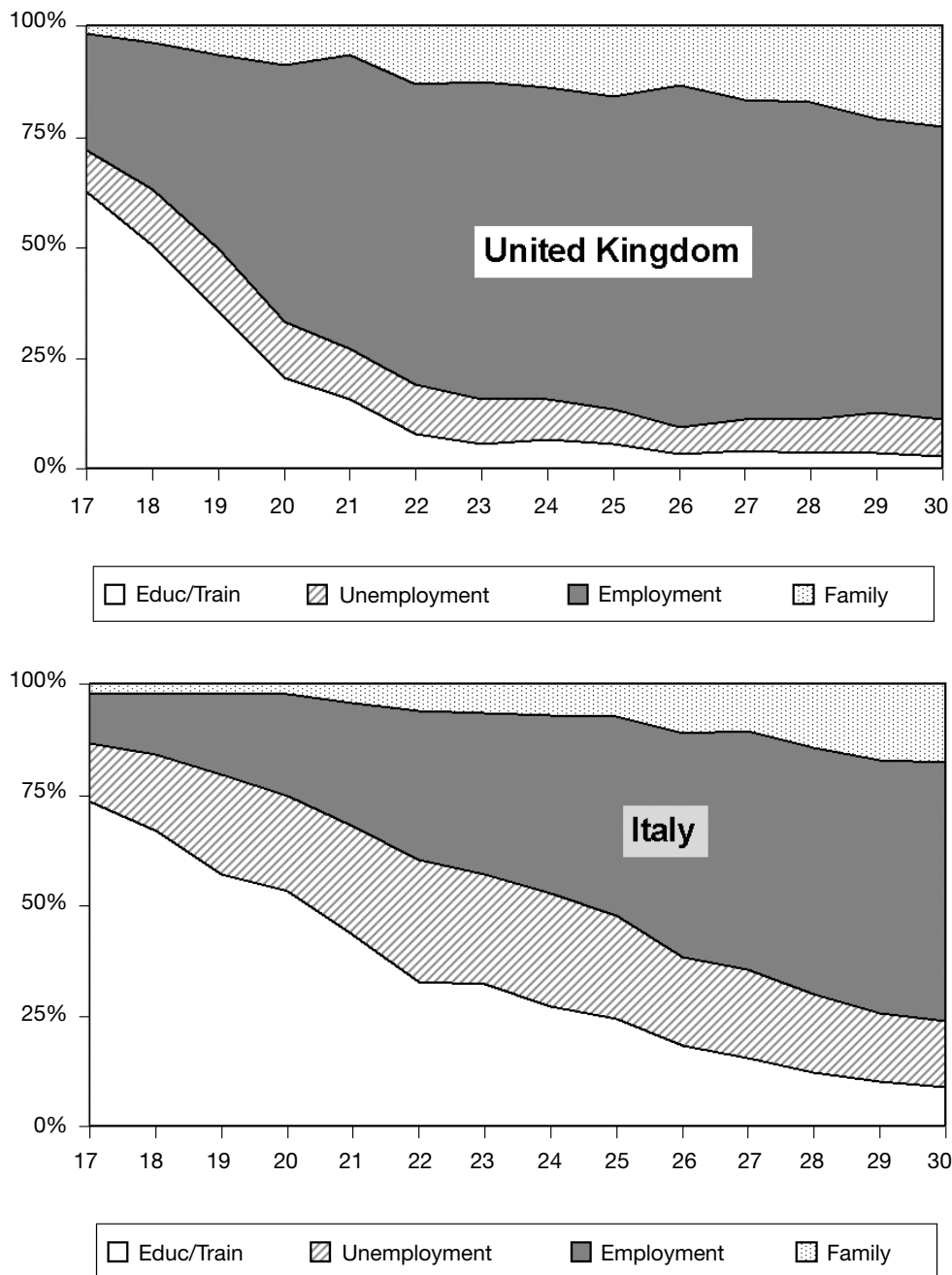
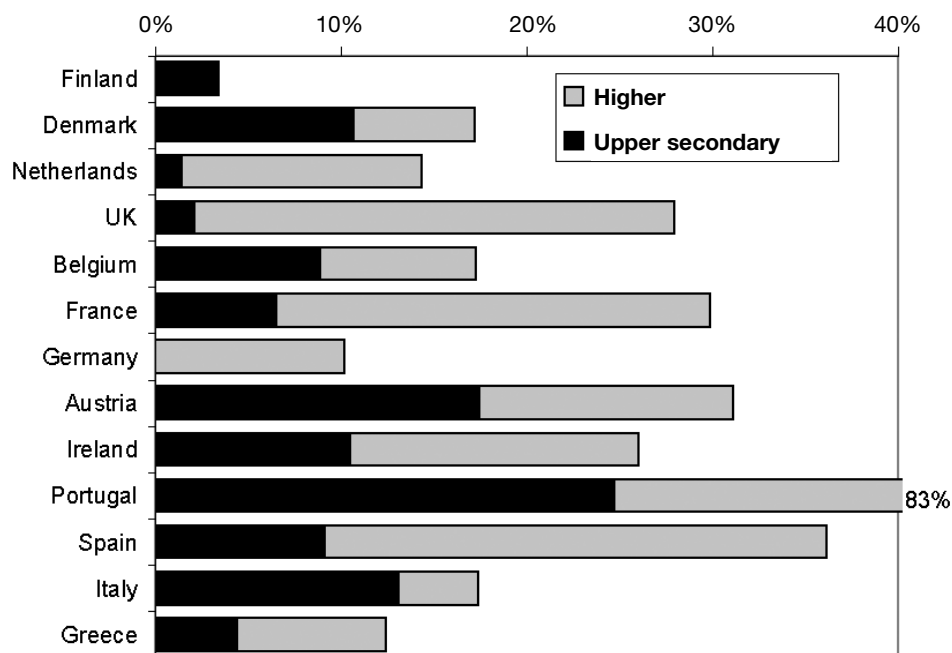
Figure 10: The proportion of 17 and 20-year-olds in education

Figure 11 gives an idea of how these education participation rates fit into the overall pattern of activity across Europe. Four types of activity are defined: education and training; unemployment; employment; and family-based activity. These graphs may be plotted for all countries and for men as well as women; here, for brevity only the UK (low educational participation, relatively early fertility) and Italy (high educational participation, relatively later fertility) are shown, for women.

The higher rates of educational attainment in Italy are seen to persist well into the late twenties; this, coupled with the higher rate of unemployment over the whole age range in Italy, means that a far smaller proportion of young Italians are in employment, throughout all the age range but particularly in the mid-twenties. The higher levels of family-based activity in the UK are largely a function of the higher fertility rate in this country.

Figure 11: Activity by age: women aged 17–30, UK and Italy

Finally, we will look at the earnings premium associated with higher levels of education, which varies greatly between countries. Earnings, expressed as a percentage of average earnings by age group and country, were regressed on age, sex and qualification levels; the premiums associated with secondary and higher education for people aged 23–27 are shown in Figure 12. The most striking feature of these results is that the wage premiums in Portugal (particularly the value of a degree, which is associated with an earnings premium of 83%) are far higher than anywhere else in Europe. These very high values clearly arise because of the low absolute level of earnings in Portugal and the scarcity of educational qualifications. Upper secondary qualifications are also relatively valuable in Austria and Italy, but are worth very little in Germany, The Netherlands and the UK. Apart from Portugal, degrees are associated with the largest increases in earnings in Spain, the UK and France; they are least valuable in Finland and Italy.

Figure 12: Percentage increase in earnings associated with educational qualifications, by country

Conclusions

In this paper I have given a brief overview of the ECHP, and outlined its strengths and weaknesses as a resource for comparative research within Europe, not only in the field of youth and the family, but also in other areas such as income and employment dynamics. As with all data sets, the ECHP is not without its problems: most importantly in the study of youth, attrition must be taken into account.

The original intention of the ECHP was to provide directly comparable data over a wide range of countries. The ECHP has made significant steps in this direction, yet comparability is by no means perfect. This must be a priority for the subsequent development of any European comparative data sets.

I have also attempted to give a flavour of the type of research which is possible with the ECHP, albeit rather briefly.

The point which I would most like to stress is that however good, accurate and comparable are the data at the researcher's disposal, there remain certain issues particular to cross-national comparative research which must be addressed at all stages in the research process. Almost all the questions which I have brought up in the paper, are questions to which I do not yet have answers. Of all the issues I have pointed to – methodological, presentational, statistical, analytical – the one which I believe is more important than all the others, is that Europe is economically, socially and culturally so diverse, and that it is essential to keep these national- and regional-level factors in mind in order to perform research which is meaningful, and to interpret its results usefully.

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Comments on Maria Iacovou's Paper

HEINZ-HERBERT NOLL

My deliberations will focus on three general issues that arise when assessing the quality of life of young Europeans:

1. the dimensions and domains to be covered when it comes to monitoring and assessing young people's quality of life;
2. the advantages and limitations of the *European Community Household Panel* (ECHP) as a data source to be used for assessing and monitoring the quality of young Europeans' lives; and
3. different perspectives to be distinguished for monitoring the lives of young Europeans.

Thus, except for a very short general evaluation and two comments on methodological issues raised in her paper, the presentation by Maria Iacovou on *Researching the Lives of Young Europeans Using the ECHP: Data, Issues and Findings* will be referred to and discussed more implicitly than explicitly.

In its first section, the paper introduces the ECHP as the database used and discusses its potential contribution towards a better understanding of the lives of young Europeans. The paper's second section deals with methodological issues and the third section presents results concerning young people's lives. Although the ECHP has already been used by others for such purposes (European Commission 2001 / Vogel 1997), the paper does not explicitly address the measuring and monitoring of quality of life in the strict sense. Rather, it tries to look at "what young people do, and how they live". The paper also uses only the first wave of the ECHP and therefore does not focus on changes over time.

My first methodological comment addresses the statement that the 15 countries covered by the analysis would be too small a number to draw statistical inferences. In my view, this perception may be misleading, since the unit of analysis in a micro dataset like the ECHP is the individual or the private household, not the country. Consequently, people's nationality or place of residence may be considered as a respondent trait in a way similar to age, educational level or income. The number of cases on which statistical inferences may be based thus equals the number of respondents within the sample, but not the number of countries covered.

My second methodological remark refers to the problem of weighting, and in particular the statement that "weighted averages will inevitably be skewed towards larger countries". In my opinion, it is just the other way round. It is not weighting that would cause averages to be skewed or biased towards smaller countries. Given the fact that the overall sample does not proportionally represent the population size of the different countries included, weighting simply ensures that the differences in population size are taken into account, thus avoiding giving the same weight to populations of different sizes when calculating an overall mean.

Quality of Life: Dimensions and Domains to be Covered

The task of monitoring the lives and the quality of life of young people is as yet far less developed than are social monitoring and reporting activities for the general population or for other subgroups, e.g. the elderly. This is true at both the national and the European level. The only monitoring and reporting activity at the European level that explicitly focuses on the young generation is the *Young Europeans* study carried out as part of the *Eurobarometer* Survey on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture. The latest study available is the one carried out in spring 2001¹. Similar studies were already conducted in 1997, 1990, 1987 and 1982. The *Young Europeans* study is not intended to comprehensively monitor young people's quality of life, although it does cover various aspects of their life situation and attitudes.

This is certainly not the place to extensively discuss the different notions of the quality-of-life concept or to go into detail on how it should be measured. Nevertheless, it may be useful to briefly consider which dimensions and domains should be covered when attempting to comprehensively assess the quality of life of young Europeans. Figure 1 specifies what welfare measurement is all about, paying particular attention to measuring the quality of life.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the European system of social indicators – levels, perspectives and dimensions

	Monitoring individual and societal well-being	Monitoring social change
Individual level	Quality of life o Objective living conditions o Subjective well being	o Values and attitudes - Work orientations - Family values - Political attitudes - etc.
Societal level	<i>Sustainability</i> o Preserving natural capital o Preserving human capital <i>Social cohesion</i> o Reducing disparities, inequalities, exclusion o Strengthening ties, fostering social capital and inclusion	o Social structure - Demography - Social class - Employment - etc.

Source: Noll (2002).

This framework, developed to construct a European system of social indicators (Berger-Schmitt & Noll 2000 / Noll 2002), distinguishes between two perspectives as well as two levels of measurement. The two perspectives of measurement are measuring welfare on the one hand, and monitoring general social change on the other. For both of them, an individual level and a societal level are to be distinguished. Welfare considerations in general – as well as quality of life assessments in particular – are always normative judgements, in the sense that the situation of a specific group or at a specific point of time is considered to be better or worse than the situation of another group or at another point of time. Within this framework, quality of life

¹ The survey was launched in all 15 current EU Member States, where a total of almost 10,000 young people aged 15–24 were interviewed. A summary of the results is available on the following website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg10/epo/eb/eb55/young_summary_en.pdf. The complete report (INRA 2001) is available in French at http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/studies/eurobarometer/eb55_fr.pdf

involves measuring welfare at the individual level, including both objective living conditions and subjective well-being of the whole population as well as specific population subgroups. Welfare measurement at the societal level covers several dimensions related to social quality, as they are derived from such concepts as sustainability and social cohesion that may also be relevant topics when monitoring young people's lives. The concept of sustainability, for example, stresses the idea of intergenerational justice and is thus particularly useful in this respect. Both objective living conditions and subjective well-being constitute the two major components of individual quality of life and may be studied across various life domains: employment, education, housing, health, leisure, etc.².

By assessing the quality of life of young people, some of these domains may be of greater or lesser importance than is the case for the general population or other age groups. The selection of measurement dimensions and domains may thus depart from general monitoring and reporting approaches. Nevertheless, at the same time there is a need to reflect on the particularities of the younger generation as a transitional social group, representing a specific stage within the life cycle. Moreover, a comprehensive approach of monitoring the lives of young Europeans must not exclusively focus on the measurement of individual and societal well-being but should also cover elements of general social change, e.g. attitudes, value orientations and lifestyles.

ECHP: A Database for Researching and Monitoring the Lives of Young Europeans?

Assessments of the quality of life of young Europeans may make use of various data sources. However, there is still a lack of integrated and harmonized databases at the European level to be used for such purposes. The *European Community Household Panel* (ECHP) is certainly among the most important sources of information for social monitoring and social reporting, but so far it has rarely been used to investigate the living situation of young people. What are the advantages and shortcomings of the ECHP for this purpose?

Advantages of the ECHP

A major advantage of the ECHP as compared to other international social surveys – for example, *the International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) – is the large size of its sample, covering most of the current EU Member States. Due to the huge sample and the fact that information is being collected for all household members who are at least 16 years of age, the ECHP may serve as a database for researching and monitoring the lives of young Europeans both as a specific subgroup within the population and in comparison with other age groups. Although the ECHP is a multi-purpose, general population survey not specifically designed for researching this particular group, it turns out to be a rich information source for monitoring the lives of young people, due to its broad coverage of information on objective living conditions and subjective well-being.

Shortcomings of the ECHP

The fact that the ECHP is a general population survey and thus does not place particular emphasis on the life situation of the younger generation, may also be considered a major shortcoming when it comes to researching and monitoring the lives of young Europeans. In particular, it does not focus on life domains of special relevance for this population group, such as education and training, leisure activities, friends and the like. Another down side of the ECHP is related to serious problems with non-response and panel attrition, which may have an impact on the data quality and thus limit its analytic potential.

² The European system of social indicators is supposed to cover 14 life domains, including the 'general life situation' (Noll 2002).

Moreover, the ECHP is a panel study designed to longitudinally monitor changes in living circumstances, well-being and such at the individual level over a limited period of time. Thus, the ECHP is not a database well suited to monitoring long-term or 'intergenerational' changes in the quality of life of young Europeans. Last but not least, the ECHP will soon be discontinued and replaced by another survey, the *Survey for Income and Living Conditions* (SILC).

Although there are good reasons for using the ECHP to monitor the lives of young people, it should not be considered the best of all conceivable sources for the respective information. A better option for future data-collection activities could be to create a special *European Youth Panel Study* similar to the *American National Longitudinal Survey of Youth*, launched in 1979 by the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics. When it comes to monitoring and analysing long-term and intercohort changes, life-history studies, e.g. the *German Life History Study* (Max-Planck-Institute for Human Development, Berlin) may constitute an alternative to such general household panel studies as the ECHP.

Perspectives for Monitoring the Lives of Young Europeans

With a view to systematically monitoring the lives of young Europeans, it may be useful to point out several relevant perspectives:

The first focuses on intergenerational changes in quality of life and general social trends. A significant question to be addressed within this perspective is, for example, how well or poorly young people are doing compared to other age groups and/or previous generations. This question may more specifically be coined in terms of the general material living standard, health situation, housing conditions, job opportunities and participation in the labour market, as well as subjective well-being. Other questions within this perspective concern young people's lifestyles, behavioural patterns and value orientations as compared to those of other age groups and/or previous generations, in terms of consumption patterns, political attitudes, attitudes towards work, etc. For analyses of this kind, a database is needed that allows for comparing age groups and birth cohorts across time with respect to various life domains and topics.

From a second perspective, focus may be put on youth-specific aspects of the life situation and their changes over time. Due to the specific stage within the life cycle, there may be life dimensions and domains, as well as processes and events, that are particularly interesting and important for this age group and should be addressed specifically. Examples are relationships with parents and peers, education and training, processes for entering the labour market, leaving the parental household and family formation, as well as leisure activities and youth-specific aspects of subjective well-being. Appropriate databases for such purposes could either be replicated cross-sectional youth surveys or youth panel studies.

From a third perspective, the young generation may be monitored from a prospective point of view and be used as a source of information on future trends in society. Such a view departs from the premise that the lifestyles, behavioural patterns and value orientations of today's young people may become the prevailing traits of our future societies. An example of such a perspective for researching and monitoring the young generation is the *Monitoring the Future Study* (<http://monitoringthefuture.org/>) carried out since 1975 at the Institute for Social Research of the University of Michigan. It is a year-by-year study of 50,000 8th-, 10th- and 12th-grade students that provides regular information on changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour of young people in the United States. "Much of our current upheaval in attitudes is especially concentrated, and often first seen, in today's youth. This study focuses on youth because of their significant involvement in today's social changes and, most important, because youth in a very literal sense will constitute our future society" (<http://monitoringthefuture.org/purpose.html>).

Conclusion

Monitoring and assessing the quality of life of young people is a task not yet well developed at the European level. At the moment there are only a few activities to systematically collect respective data. As yet, there exists no single regular, comprehensive report on the life situation and quality of life of young people. As a

precondition for improved youth monitoring and reporting, there is not only a need for more appropriate data that fit the specific demands of such purposes; there is also a need to develop a conceptual framework that distinguishes and determines the different perspectives relevant for systematically monitoring the lives of young Europeans. Thus, from such a point of view, any analysis of young people's lives based on the data of the ECHP as presented by Maria Iacovou should be considered a valuable and interesting step down a long, still-open path.

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Youth, Family Policies and Social Quality in Europe

Family Forms and the Young Generation in Europe

MARIA ANTONIA AVILÉS PEREA

Today's families are characterised by declining birth rates, fewer married couples, an increasing number of couples living together and out-of-wedlock births, as well as higher divorce rates.

The European Union has no jurisdiction over family policy. However, the situation families face and its possible effect on employment and social policy are major policy concerns in all Member States.

Both the European Commission and the European Parliament have invested time in examining current trends and changes. Their goal is to better understand the situation of families and thus help them to better reconcile work and family life. Reconciling these two aspects of daily life will have major repercussions on numerous questions. These concern society as a whole but young people in particular.

The following are all clear signs of the EU's commitment to assist women and men in their efforts to reconcile domestic tasks with an outside job, thereby helping them to assume this double responsibility:

- ▶ Maternity Leave Directive
- ▶ Parental Leave Directive
- ▶ Part-time Work Directive
- ▶ Council Recommendation on Childcare and
- ▶ Directive on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment and vocational training (currently under revision).

Concerning young couples, we have to consider the radical changes in women's activity rates and how this impinges on fertility behaviour. With growing economic independence, young women tend to marry later and have fewer children. Even if the majority of the population continues to set great store by the family, the young generation's ideas of family duties are not what they used to be. Single-parent families are on the rise, and so are children born out of wedlock.

The instability of couples is due, at least partially, to the growing economic independence of women. Women earning their own money are not forced to stay in relationships where they are no longer happy. Hence, a young couple's chances of staying together until a child's upbringing is completed are less promising than in the past.

For a few years now, we have been witnessing major changes in the demographic and social pattern of European youth. Current trends and tendencies differ greatly from those observed in previous generations.

The aforementioned decline in birth rates reduces the proportion of young people in the EU population. With rising numbers of people over 65, this demographic tendency is expected to become exacerbated in the forthcoming decades. Estimates say that by 2015, we will have 13 million less 15- to 29-year-olds than in 1995¹.

While their overall numbers are dropping, more young people tend to flock to urban zones. Young people will thus become an increasingly important source of renewal and innovation in European society as well as in the economy as we start this 21st century. Their full and democratic participation in society will be crucial. Society cannot afford to lose the creativity, skills and potential of youth.

In addition, young people now tend to delay their autonomy. This may be explained not only by extended schooling but also other factors such as the following:

- ▶ higher cost of living in many countries
- ▶ the need to finance one's education
- ▶ lack of social protection

¹ Communication by the European Commission: Towards a Europe for all ages. COM (1999): 221 final. p. 7.

- ▶ housing problems (unaffordable housing) and
- ▶ difficulties in breaking into the labour market.

Hence, many young people in a number of European countries are not yet financially independent by the age of 25 or 30 – a trend with both social and economic implications. These young people can neither fully assume their rights and responsibilities, nor can they enjoy financial autonomy.

Education is a major component in young people's lives, all the more so because they tend to remain within the educational system much longer than did previous generations. Also, education has a profound impact on young people's later lives in terms of personal development, social integration or participation in democracy; as such, it bears a major long-term influence on their employment, mobility and life-long learning prospects.

Despite growing globalisation and EU integration, there are still few opportunities for young people to study and master foreign languages or to work abroad. Within the European Union, new emphasis has been placed on improving the *quality of education and training*, as well as on widening people's access to life-long learning.

Young people's transition from the education/training system to the employment system is of great importance. A successful transition will allow them to become independent and lead autonomous lives. Average EU unemployment rates have dropped among youth in recent years. However, they are still higher than the average unemployment rates for other groups within the population. Moreover, young women continue to be more at risk of becoming unemployed than are their male counterparts. The same applies to young people from ethnic or religious minorities, young people with disabilities, etc., who are still victimised by discrimination in the labour market.

Transition from school to employment also involves a number of hazards. During this period, young people usually have almost no income and, as such, risk falling into poverty – and in extreme cases – even social exclusion, should their passage into the world of work be a rough one.

Hence, leaving school and taking a job may turn out to be a time of great vulnerability for young people. In quite a number of countries, they may have to wait a very long time until they find their niche in the labour market.

Moreover, young people are faced with all kinds of discrimination and inequality. In the case of women, although their level of educational attainment is often higher than men's, this does not raise their prospects in the labour market. There are still so many male-dominated professions where women's wages remain below those of men. In most European regions, fewer women participate in decision-making processes than do men. Other factors for which young people are subjected to discrimination are their age, sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or faith.

Consider that EU Member States include more than 50 million young people aged 15 to 25, and that this number is going to leap with EU enlargement. It is then easy to see how important it is for this European Union to pay greater attention to the needs and views of Europe's youth.

During the past five years, major Europe-wide changes have taken place with regard to youth. The European Commission judged it expedient to have a more comprehensive and in-depth policy debate beyond current EU programmes, one which addresses the need for a true policy of co-operation in decades to come.

The White Paper called *A New Impetus for European Youth*, to be presented at the end of November 2001, is one example of this commitment. As a specific and essential component of future-oriented policies, it puts emphasis on enhancing Community co-operation for the benefit of and with the assistance of young people. By highlighting this aspect, the European Commission indicates its will to define such a policy and give it a true Community dimension, in terms of both complementarity and close collaboration between local, regional and national governments of its Member States.

Not only does the forthcoming White Paper address the situation of youth in Europe; it also examines their wants, needs and concerns. It tries to identify lines of action suited to both respond to such concerns

and satisfy their wants and needs. This White Paper is by no means a programmatic document designed to package or simplify existing programmes. Rather, it is a response to young people's expectations.

On the other hand, the Luxembourg Process, Lisbon Strategy and Process of Social Inclusion have all defined policy objectives in areas that impinge on young people's lives, training and job conditions. In a society currently trying to regain the conditions for full employment – while at the same time grappling with the implications of an ageing population – citizens are becoming increasingly sensitive to the quality of their job, their social-protection systems and their industrial and social relations. This new 'quality' dimension is likely to become the benchmark, the new basis for designing and evaluating policies. More than ever, quality will be a powerful engine in moving towards a dynamic European economy.

Lisbon was inordinately outspoken regarding the inseparable link between raising employment rates and improving the quality of work. This quality is tantamount to competitiveness. It is based on high-quality products that in turn will depend on the skills and qualifications of the workforce.

The issue of skills, and thus of skills training for young people, is crucial at a time when workers and higher skill levels are becoming scarce in certain sectors. Hence, policy-makers are being faced with a comparatively new question: how to harmonise life-long learning with the creation of quality jobs as well as the promotion of geographic and sectoral mobility.

The notion of quality cannot be dissociated from the debate on how to strengthen and modernise the European social model. Europe's transition to a knowledge-based economy² will only succeed if we are able to ward off new forms of precarious living and effectively combat exclusion (which, unfortunately, has taken root in our countries in the short space of one generation). This transition will only last if we are able to generally ensure economically and socially viable pension and social-security systems, since they constitute an essential safety net for individuals in a changing and increasingly unstable world.

Prioritising the quality of education and training has thus become an essential component within our efforts to improve the EU's competitive strength and maintain its social model. This is where we have to define Europe's identity for the new millennium.

² The Lisbon European Council set a new strategic goal for the European Union: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The attainment of this goal will enable the Union to regain the conditions of full employment.

Young People and Children in EU Policies

Closing Statement on behalf of Anna Diamantopoulou Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs

BARBARA HELFFERICH

At the end of this thoughtful and stimulating seminar it is my task – on behalf of Anna Diamantopoulou, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs – to place the issues just discussed in a context of present EU policies.

You do not need me to remind you that family issues still fall within the national competence of each different Member State. At the same time, though, we are all aware that we now may use the new articles of the Amsterdam Treaty to include activities in relation to children and youth. More specifically, the Treaty of Amsterdam, in Title XI on Social Policy, Education, Vocational Training and Youth, provides a solid legal framework for such action.

Within this context, the development of the European Employment Strategy has been one of the major European policy achievements over the past five years. Here, the Commission has been working closely with all Member States to promote measures and policies aimed at achieving a better reconciliation between work and family life. In relation to young people, the aim is to avoid youth unemployment, bring about a smoother transition from education to working life, and better integrate young people into it. Such policies are part of a broader process of managing the structural changes that are taking place in the world of work, from new types of jobs, and new forms and patterns of work to the application of new technologies.

I would also particularly like to mention Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty, which provide for the development of quality education and training in favour of youth. In relation to young peoples' issues in general, the Commission is preparing a White Paper on European Youth Policy, for adoption in November 2001. The paper will aim at "deepening the Community co-operation to the benefit and with the involvement of young people, as a specific and essential element of a policy, which is resolutely directed towards the future".

Moreover, in the objectives agreed upon at the European Council in Nice in relation to the fight against social exclusion and poverty, explicit reference is made to the family and the need for action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms, to eliminate social exclusion among children and to give them every opportunity for social integration.

More recently, the European Council in Stockholm invited both the Commission and the Council to develop indicators by 2002 on providing care facilities for children and other dependants as well as on family benefit systems. This means that certain issues related to family affairs could become a matter of common concern in the near future, even if they are unlikely to become a priority issue in EU social policy.

At the same time that these developments in policy co-ordination have been occurring, we have learned to constantly watch over established legislation. We need to proceed purposefully, but with prudence, too. The Maternity Directive, the Parental Leave Directive and the Part-time Work Directive all reflect the European Union's commitment to supporting both women and men in their role as parents. Likewise, the Recommendation on Child Care has encouraged the provision of services for the care of children whose parents work or are in training. It recommends that the workplace become more responsive to the needs of workers with children; and it encourages men to become more involved as carers, providing support for them.

Under the Fourth Medium-term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996–2000), the Commission has also supported projects, studies, networking and consultations dealing with the issue of reconciling work with household life. The Commissioner intends to ensure that this type of support continues in the future.

For their part, both the *Employment-Now* initiatives and the mainstream Structural Funds have developed and supported programmes and actions that combine training and care. The Commissioner has indi-

cated that she intends to ensure that the new *Equal* Initiative take this process further, and that we build an even stronger European dimension into these actions.

For the future, Commissioner Diamantopoulou wants the Commission to strengthen its work to mainstream equal-opportunity policies and practices, and to support the achievement of a balance between family life and working life. During the past year, we have seen an evolution along these lines within the Employment Guidelines that underpin the European Employment Strategy. The Commissioner plans to continue this approach in the future.

Europe's employment targets for this coming decade were set at the Lisbon Summit in March 2000. They involve creating some 20 million extra jobs and raising employment rates among all people of working age – including young people. Success in creating jobs will contribute significantly to raising the average European living standard and generate a more inclusive European society. It will also go a long way towards filling the funding gap on pensions. However, we should remember that a majority of these new jobs will be taken by women. Nor should we forget that most of these women already have child or family responsibilities.

We must ensure that any successes concerning employment over the coming decade will also be social successes. In addition, we have to adjust our working life to accommodate new challenges and opportunities. We need to ensure that it is not children and youth who inadvertently end up bearing the strain.

That is why the Member States and the social partners must strengthen their efforts to design, implement and promote more family-friendly policies – including affordable, accessible and high-quality care services for children and other dependants, as well as parental and other leave schemes. Furthermore, in relation to young people, it will be crucial to improve the transition from education to integration into the world of work.

As this seminar has demonstrated, there are differences – and sometimes significant ones – within and among the Member States when it comes to issues of family, children and youth. This partly reflects different notions of the family's place in society; the rights, duties and functions entrusted to men and women within the family; and differences regarding what rights children and youth have. It can also reflect more general views on the role of the State in such matters. However, variance may also simply result from differences in how well policies are developed and applied in the different Member States. Of course, family policies have always been and will continue to be an area of national responsibility. Nevertheless, everybody recognises that there are some essential European values at stake here.

The Commissioner intends to ensure that the European Union provide the maximum amount of support to all those whose concerns revolve around family, children and young people. In addition, she intends to engage and involve all her colleagues in addressing such issues as the individualisation of children's rights, the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the development of a European Youth Policy.

Commissioner Diamantopoulou has furthermore indicated that she will work to ensure that all our relevant policies and principles be fully respected in the process of enlarging the Union.

In conclusion, I wish to thank you for your thoughtful contributions to this seminar and to assure you that your deliberations will provide important input for the Commission in both its thinking and actions taken on behalf of families and young people.

The Policy Implications of this Seminar

RUDOLF RICHTER

This paper analyses the results of the seminar *Family Forms and the Young Generation in Europe* with a view to policy implications.

The situation of young adults in Europe, i.e. those aged 18 to 30, is considered to be a new phase in the life cycle. Compared to the former situation faced by cohorts in this age bracket, young adults nowadays are in a different situation. This is mainly due to an expansion of the educational system, as seen in young people's occupational situation as well as in their everyday life. The papers presented at the Seminar reflect the diversity both within this generation and within Europe. After briefly outlining the results, this article will draw attention to certain political implications in various areas affecting the young generation, e.g. employment, education or housing. Because the discussions at the seminar and the political ramifications reported here are strongly related to the concept of 'social quality' as introduced in the European Social Agenda, the first step will be to introduce this concept and to highlight essential issues within that agenda.

The social-quality concept was only introduced into the discussion rather recently. It is almost exclusively found in EU papers and constitutes an essential criterion for social policy in Europe. Social quality is a rather general concept, more a guideline than a well-defined term. In a speech held at the European conference on social and labour-market policies in Brussels in February 2001, Katherine Duffy defines it as "the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential". Social quality is linked to quality of life but is not synonymous with it (Gössweiner et al. 2001)¹. It includes social cohesion, the economic situation, material well-being, employment and integration into society. As documented in the *Report on the Social Situation in the European Union 2001*, the social-quality concept relies heavily on objective measures of financial, social and cultural resources².

Social quality is a key issue in Europe's social policy, because full employment and quality of work are as central to employment policy as are competitiveness and dynamism to economic policy – the other pillars of the European social agenda.

The European social agenda follows certain criteria. The focus is on sustainable development. What European policy is now envisioning is to create a European model that is competitive in a global society. Sustainability should be reachable in this emerging knowledge-based society. "The next society will be a knowledge society", Peter Drucker says in a report for the *Economist* (3 November 2001, p. 4). A knowledge-based society has characteristics different from those of an industrial society. Knowledge itself is borderless; it travels easily throughout the world. It is not difficult to gain access to knowledge. The educational system is rather open, and people can acquire knowledge from a multitude of resources – not only at schools and universities, but also via the Internet. This encourages upward mobility but also carries with it the danger of downward mobility for marginal groups. A knowledge-based society is highly competitive, offering good chances for success but also a high risk of failure. In addition, it is ignorant of hierarchies: knowledge may or may not be useful in a certain situation and does not relate to an acquired position. The prestige of university professors comes less and less from their title and more and more from their performance.

¹ Gössweiner, V. et al. (2001): Quality of life and social quality. Vienna: Austrian Institute for Family Studies. Working Papers 12-2001. This paper examines both terms, in particular regarding their usage in Internet documents. Numerous studies deal with quality of life.

² European Commission (2001): The social situation in the European Union 2001. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. For a special focus on family, see: Richter, R. (2001): Die soziale Lage Europas unter der Familienperspektive. Daten aus dem Sozialbericht der EU. In: Zeitschrift für Familienforschung.

In this society, labour will still play an essential role, though its nature will have undergone change. Part-time work and interruptions for such purposes as relaxation, raising children, continuing education and frequent job changes will be essential points of working life in the future. Nevertheless, full employment for everyone – men and women alike – is a key goal on the European social agenda. One of its declared aims is to raise the average employment rate of women to a level above 60% within the next five years.

Sustainability, a knowledge-based society and full employment constitute the societal framework within which policy implications for the situation of the young generation in Europe must be seen.

Young Adults

Already by the 1980s, youth sociologists had detected a new phase in the family life cycle, one which they called 'post-adolescence'. This term refers to a phase between youth and adulthood that did not exist in previous decades. Former generations rather tended to have a 'normal life course' with clear passages in status: adulthood simply followed youth. In a traditional Western European life cycle, this was linked to such key events as getting married, leaving the parental home and having children. Meanwhile, this transition has become more blurred.

Data in Europe show that we face an interactive and/or overlapping life-course calendar. Important facts are well known:

- ▶ The primary issue is *fertility*. It has decreased rapidly and has remained generally low in Europe. However, there are differences: the European fertility rate is much higher in the North (highest in Finland: 1.89 in 1999) than in the South (at its lowest in Spain, with 1.19% in 1999). Yet even though fertility is higher in the North, it is lower than in the 1960s, when the average value was well above 2.5%. The fact that the birth of the first child is postponed adds to that scenario. It is not unusual for a woman in her thirties to have her first child. This holds particularly true for women in Southern Europe, for several reasons: the increase in cultural capital (especially in the form of higher education), the occupational situation and housing facilities are all components that make women choose to bear children at a later age.

Yet giving birth and raising a family are not the only facts that indicate a change in the life course of young adults. Other impressive characteristics are the time young people spend getting an education and the number of people enrolled in higher education. In the 1960s, there were fewer students. The dramatic expansion of the school and university systems started in Central and Northern Europe in the 1970s and then spread to the South. Women benefited most: the rate of women in universities rose tremendously. By now, they outnumber male students in almost all European countries – though not in higher education as such and only in specific subjects. However, within the next ten years, more young women than men will have a university degree.

- ▶ The second striking issue is the *increasing length of education*. Young people tend to be students for longer and longer periods. Again, there are differences: in Italy, for example, young adults stay in the educational system for a shorter period and also have a higher unemployment rate than their peers in other European Members States.
- ▶ A third aspect is the *occupational situation*. Young adults share the highest unemployment rates, at a par with those above 50. Moreover, if they are employed, they often do not work full-time. This leads to low income levels and an insecure job situation. Moreover, the educational and occupational systems are interlinked, especially for women. As already stated above, it is mostly women who are now enrolled in the higher-education system. People with a higher degree of education are looking for jobs equal to their level of know-how. It is only natural for well-trained people to want to put their knowledge to use at work. This is not only an individual but also a social issue. If society invests a lot into education, it would be unreasonable not to use this knowledge on the market – and this would be especially counter-productive in a knowledge-based society. Hence, well-trained women first want a job, and only afterwards a child. This interaction between the two systems particularly affects women, because family life hardly has any impact on the working career of men. As a consequence, one of the major political issues

is to reconcile family and work. Countries where people can easily combine work and family have higher fertility rates, and children are born earlier in the parents' life course.

Education and economy go hand in hand with changes in the social field. Here, too, many things have changed. However, the changes relate more to duration than to actual behaviour. What was formerly marked by the single event of 'marriage' now takes quite a long time. Measured by the age at first intercourse, young men and women have sexual experiences earlier than they did decades ago, and first conjugal union follows somewhat later. Notwithstanding, although young adults mainly live in partnerships, this does not mean that they always share a household. Again, there are differences within the European Union. In the North, young unmarried couples leave the parental home sooner and live together in their own household. In the Southern countries, young people remain in the parental household until they reach their thirties, as Sgritta points out. Compared to Northern Europe, in Italy twice as many women aged 20 to 29 live as singles without children. Though they have partners, living in a partnership and having children is done step by step and takes more than a decade.

The seminar also pointed out another important issue, namely, the size of cohorts. If a lot of people attain higher education, and access to knowledge is rather easy and open, competitiveness will rise as a result. In a knowledge-based society, upward mobility through higher education is within almost everybody's reach. Obtaining knowledge is not a problem, be it via the formal education system or by way of distance learning, the media or the Internet. As we know, knowledge changes rapidly and thus requires life-long education. Especially for the young, a knowledge-based society becomes highly competitive. In turn, this means that young people consider it important to gain knowledge coupled with a variety of different experiences, in order to remain flexible and mobile. This is time-consuming and reduces the time they have left for their social and private life.

When discussing Sgritta's paper, Dumon brings this to the point. It is common knowledge that we measure the phase of young adulthood using the indicators outlined above, i.e. education, entry into the labour market and raising a family. In former times, all of them converged into one situation, namely marriage: A person married when he or she had finished school, a man entered the labour market or a woman had a child, a person left the parental home and established an independent household. Now these events are taken separately. Unions are often formed while young people are still in the educational system and still live at home. Once they have completed their education, they do not always get a full-time job and often have to face periods of unemployment. Moreover, having a job does not preclude studying. And last but not least, many young adults have a child before they get married.

In the early 20th century, the anthropologist van Gennep showed the importance of *rites de passages* indicating entry into a new life phase. The rites of passage between youth and adulthood no longer exist. This leaves the young generation in a rather ambivalent situation. They do not know what they are and where they belong to: youth or adulthood. Neither do their parents.

Political Implications

Effective policies need to take into account the social situation of young adults as reported above. It is common knowledge among experts that political measures hardly ever have any direct influence on people's behaviour. However, they can set the framework for it. Introducing measures does not build the path but can open or close possibilities.

If policies are guided by humane and democratic values they will not intend to change people's behaviour in private life but raise social quality in general. Therefore such policies for young adults will focus on the different fields in which young people are participating and on their relation to the social system of the family.

Based on these assumptions and the scientific analysis of the social situation of young adults, we can identify certain political implications. We will do this by referring to such different policy areas as the market, employment, education, housing, the social network and the family. Because the family still is a key element

of society, it will constitute the frame of reference for measures introduced to raise the level of social quality. In modern social science, family is defined broadly. The term is not limited to the nuclear family formed by parents and their biological children but also includes stepfamilies, patchwork families (consisting of divorced and re-married partners with or without children), lone parents and the extended family network.

Education

The educational system is a key contributor in the development of this new phase of family life, commonly known as young adulthood or post-adolescence. Its most characteristic feature is that young people spend increasingly longer periods in the educational system. One might even argue that this is a prerequisite for being in this phase. At least in some Member States of the European Union, the increasing duration of schooling – and especially of university studies – is considered to be a problem, in particular from a financial point of view. To remedy it, politicians have introduced measures that try to limit the duration of tertiary education. It is a well-known fact that the more structured an educational system, the more people will graduate in the scheduled time. If the length of studies makes university education too expensive and socially dysfunctional, then structures must be changed. One policy could be to introduce a bachelor's degree throughout Europe. This has the additional advantage that bachelors can enter the labour market with deepened knowledge and return to the university later to do their master's degree. Such a policy would meet the need for flexibility that is essential in a knowledge-based society. Implementing non-academic training programmes would also help. Such courses could be tailored to the needs of the labour market; they could be a kind of higher vocational training. A European policy aimed at lowering the negative output resulting from a long, unstable phase of young adulthood has to structure and diversify the educational system – especially at the level of tertiary education. As a lot of financial transfers as well as social and material support come from the parents, this would also ease the burden on them and lower costs for families.

However, we should also bear in mind that young adults might actually want to stay in higher education for a longer time and that this can also be beneficial for society. If students are granted a higher degree of freedom in structuring their studies, they may unintentionally broaden their knowledge and develop a more stable personality. Structuring the system and shortening tertiary education, as well as concentrating on knowledge for so-called 'practical matters', might be functional for the market but might not always be an advantage for society. If the European Union wants to develop a specific European social welfare system, it will have to find a balance between economic needs, market requirements and social quality. In any case, a more regulated curriculum might not only reduce abuses of the educational system but also lower its tremendous cost.

Economy

In our society, life revolves around the economy. Society would not be the way it is if the economy were different. Economic structures strongly influence the way people live in a society. Besides providing them with a social identity, such structures supply them with the necessary means to survive: financial resources, i.e. money.

The skills needed to participate in the economy have changed tremendously over the last few decades. The focus on industrial production has shifted to knowledge as the essential criterion. Both the market and society are now knowledge-based. Because knowledge changes very quickly, even young employees have to be very flexible. Policy measures have little if any influence on the structure of the economy. It may be true that policies cannot reverse the way economies develop, but they can at least try to shape the social conditions in the world of work at the national level. Besides guaranteeing humane working conditions, especially for young adults, they should reflect a key feature of the modern market, i.e. flexibility, by enabling the workforce to broaden its knowledge and remain mobile. Policies must also address such negative social effects as anomy and dysfunctional competitiveness, both of which lead to bad health, social conflicts and, in the

long run, a disintegrated society. Such measures will definitely have a pervasive impact, but they are particularly important for young people entering the labour market.

Employment

Young adults have characteristic employment features. Many are engaged in part-time work or take so-called 'McJobs' providing almost no social security. The unemployment rate in this age group is high, generally twice the average rate. One of the aims of the European social agenda is to reach employment for all and to raise the rate of labour-market participation, especially for women. This entails new political challenges.

Knowledge and higher education are essential elements for employment. They can be obtained at universities and in colleges. A high educational level constitutes a favourable prerequisite for entering the labour market and must therefore be open to everybody. In Europe, females have high participation rates in the educational system and already outnumber males at universities in almost all the Member States of the European Union. This knowledge should not be wasted. Therefore, policies should offer women the chance to fully participate in the labour market.

In modern societies, employment policies are a central issue. We know that having a family has little if any impact on male careers but tremendously impinges on those of women. Measures permitting people to reconcile work and family should therefore be given top priority. Different countries might find different ways. As a rule, the opportunity to work part-time encourages employment, but the availability of child care is also essential³. As working biographies become more flexible, measures that enable people to take a short break from working life to care for their child might be another possibility to consider. However, studies have shown that re-entry into the labour market becomes more difficult after any lengthy interruption. Because the educational period is continuously prolonged, policy measures should also provide the means to combine studying with having a child. This might be particularly important for young lone mothers. All in all, raising the educational level in a society is the best contribution to ensuring employment.

In addition to these broad guidelines, we should also analyse employment from the point of view of young adults. It is a fact that many of them have jobs that do not offer any social security, and also that they take on jobs as a sideline while studying. We do not know whether this is a necessity or a mere preference. What we do need to do is to carefully analyse the support systems available to students in Europe. Only if we can prove that they are insufficient and that students have to work to satisfy their everyday needs, can we say that 'jobbing' is a necessity for students. If we find that transfers – be they from the state, the family or both, as is most often the case – do indeed cover their needs, then we can say that young adults must have other reasons for jobbing. They may want to increase their income because they are not satisfied with just having their basic needs met. They may also want more financial freedom. In a knowledge-based society, jobbing can be very functional. It can be a learning process, even if not related to the student's field of study at the university. It may be a form of vocational and/or social training that will help young adults develop a stable personality. It might also help them gradually become independent of their parents. Jobbing and precarious forms of employment need to be neither absolutely fought nor encouraged. There should be room for young adults to participate in the labour market in this way.

Generally speaking, the most adequate policy for young adults is to give them a good education. Especially women need strategies that allow them to reconcile work and family. To the best of our knowledge, this can be achieved by offering opportunities for part-time work.

³ Also see the fertility seminar held by the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family in September 2000 in Sevilla/Spain, and the synthesis report prepared by Bagavos, Christos & Martin, Claude (2001): *Low fertility, families and public policies*. Vienna: Materialiensammlung, Heft 10, Austrian Institute for Family Studies.

Housing

Housing conditions are a core element of social quality. In Europe, they tend to be good for young adults – as long as they live with their parents. Most of them have their own room and may invite friends. They seldom help with household chores, which are done by the parents – usually the mother. When they leave the parental household, they generally face lower living conditions. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that young adults tend to leave the parental home at an increasingly later age, though there are great differences within Europe: the Scandinavians leave earlier, and the Southern Europeans much later. Due to young people's financial situation, staying with their parents during the earlier phase of adulthood is often considered a necessity. Housing policies should bear this in mind and provide affordable housing for young people. However, it would be wrong to assume that small flats for single persons are an adequate solution. According to statistics, single households are much more frequent among the aged than among young adults. In Scandinavia, young adults leaving the parental home tend to cohabit with their partner. The difficulty is to find affordable, decent housing for two persons. Different forms of subsidies should be considered; most of them should facilitate access to the money needed for housing. Last but not least, we must not forget that some young adults have children. Housing for families should be a priority in social and family policy.

Social Networks

Young adults are embedded in a network of social contacts. Family members become less important, while the importance of friends and public places increases. Young adults frequent restaurants of all kinds, cinemas, shopping areas, etc. Because young adults frequently use public transportation and tend not to be well off in financial terms, their transportation could be subsidised. Especially for young women, public spaces also involve problems concerning safety. Policies could aim at more police on patrol in public areas, mainly in the underground system and encourage self-defence.

Voluntary associations play a primary role in social networks. *The Report on the Social Situation* shows that, on average, half of the EU population do volunteer work; but there are clear differences. In the Northern countries, the rate is 80% or more, while it is lower than 30% in the Southern Member States. Voluntary organisations play a rather important role in modern democratic societies; they are the foundation of civil society. For this reason, policies should encourage participation in voluntary organisations. This can be achieved by facilitating the creation of voluntary associations and by providing room for their activities, e.g. in communities.

Admittedly, these are very indirect policy implications when it comes to the social network of young adults. However, they should also be considered when talking about European policies to raise the level of social quality for the young generation.

Family

As stated above, the family remains a key institution in modern society. It has developed a variety of forms. One of the most important among them is the nuclear family, but there are also remarried families, lone parents and cohabiting couples. Some of these forms are more typically found with young adults.

When talking about policy implications in this area, we have to consider two perspectives: that of the young adults and their parents, and that of young adults who are parents themselves.

In general, young adults are either unmarried or live with a partner. Usually they are dependent on their parents. Various studies in the Member States have shown that financial transfers from parents to young adults are considerable. A look at the income cycle explains why parents can provide this support. People between 45 and 55 have the highest income. This is exactly the age when their children are in the phase of young adulthood. Yet this does not mean that there is no need for support. First of all, there are differences between the rich and the poor in society. Long-term education is quite costly. In this phase, family policies should find ways to provide support to parents. Another key task of family policy is to subsidise the educational system, making it accessible to all. In this area, family policies should supplement general educational policies.

The second perspective is that of the young adults themselves. Here, it is important to offer possibilities enabling them to fulfil their desires concerning having a family. Policies pursuant to this aim have to make it easier to start a family. As highlighted above, this can be achieved in different ways. Family foundation, e.g. starting a family, is very much linked to the chances society provides to combine work and family. Making this possible must be a political priority. Some Member States have also introduced other ways to provide support to young adults, e.g. cheaper housing and a financial subsidy when they get married.

Family policies have two tasks: to provide support to parents and their children, and to ease family formation. Both of them will contribute to social quality in general, as they have implications for the economic, educational and family systems.

Citizenship

What implications does this extended phase of young adulthood have for the political system? This key issue was highlighted in several papers presented at the Milan seminar. Young people staying on longer in the parental household might lead to lower visibility and activity in the public sphere. This sometimes gives the impression of apathy in the political field. As Lister points out in her paper focusing on the UK, adolescents tend to show little interest in politics and generally feel marginalised. However, young adults can be described as active sceptics. This implies that they are interested in politics, though not at the formal level. We see a distinct decline in voting participation on the national level, but a high commitment to local issues. Young adults are also prepared to contribute to informal politics and to groups within such new social movements as ecological or feminist groups.

From the policy point of view, there have been a lot of suggestions, but with none of them leading to any success because they seem to be too visionary and unpractical. The image of politics can hardly be changed within a short period of time. More concrete is the call for lowering the voting age to 16. Yet this probably would not result in higher voting participation. To prepare pupils for politics might also be a good recommendation, but the experiences are not encouraging. Teenagers find politics either boring or irrelevant.

Citizenship education would require a strategy for raising the level of personal responsibility. This would mean that political strategies have to find ways for self-reliance within systems that youth feel they can influence, above all the educational system. Policies increasing the participation of young adults in decision-making processes are pivotal for creating citizenship. The discussion of democratic politics introduced the term 'free spaces' meaning that politics should leave areas for activity and creativity unregulated and open to self-regulation. It is true – and Sgritta also states it in his paper – that young adults are unwilling to take responsibility for their own life. Staying at home when you are in your twenties is less a necessity than a convenience. In this respect, families themselves are probably more challenged than politics. If parents offer this convenience rather willingly, why should young adults then not accept it? Policies can hardly interfere. They probably need to concentrate on the educational system and what it provides in terms of a social contribution. From the point of view of citizenship, the long process involving the transition to adulthood can also be seen as an advantage. As Eva Bernardt argues in her comments, it might even lead to a more thorough acquisition of citizenship responsibilities.

Conclusion

In the past few decades, the phase of young adulthood has emerged as a very specific phase in the life cycle. This is mainly due to the extension of the educational system. It is accompanied by a change in values, the wish to remain single for a longer period of time and to take on the responsibility of a family at a later age. It is also linked to a labour market that offers young adults fewer opportunities for full-time employment and makes it difficult for them to reconcile work and family.

This poses new challenges for politics. As shown above, measures can be introduced along two lines. They can focus on family policy as such or on social policy in general. Both are necessary. All people, and especially young adults, are embedded in a family system. The families of origin provide a great many finan-

cial, material and cultural resources to their young adults, which increase the longer the phase lasts. The current social situation also tends to discourage young adults from setting up a household and having children. This holds true even for those who really want to start their own family. It should be the task of family policy to raise the public awareness of this problem and to safeguard families' interests by mainstreaming them in all measures.

Family policy is connected to social policy in general. The most common fields are the labour market and the educational system. Labour-market policies need to create opportunities for reconciling work and family. Moreover, they need to offer strategies that make the new economy more social. Educational policies should pursue two lines. The first is to structure the educational system so as to offer everybody the chance to get an adequate education without delay. This might include a chance to return to the educational system later on. The second line is to create mechanisms for fostering citizenship by granting young people a say in the educational system. Educational policies should also take this into account, perhaps at the price of extending the time young adults spend at universities.

It remains to be mentioned that all these policies have to pay special attention to marginalised citizens and special groups. The frameworks provided in the more general strategies of social and family policies must specifically take into account the needs of disadvantaged groups, young lone parents and people with a disability.

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