

Considerations on the Role of Family Policy in Societies Like the Nordic Countries

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1. Introduction

The pivot of this paper is that most individuals in late modern societies wish to exercise some kind of control over the timing and the number of childbirths they experience through their adult lives. More specifically, the paper discusses the role of family policy measures from the point of view of the Nordic countries in Europe: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Populations have probably always reacted to external changes by altering their reproductive behavior. Not just the availability of contraceptive means but also the religious, cultural and social acceptance of practicing birth control are important in this respect. If we look at Europe in a more historic perspective, the contraceptive means to practice birth control were less safe and effective than the ones available in most European countries nowadays. Further, state regulations regarding entrance into marriage, acts about the mutual rights and responsibilities of spouses in both marriage and in case of divorce have had more or less direct influences on fertility as almost all childbirths took place within wedlock.

In countries like the Nordic ones, in which there exists easily accessible contraceptives and access to induced abortion on demand, it is possible to live a sexually active life even without establishing a family with children (Giddens 1991; Knudsen et al. 2002, Lappegaard 2001a). Further, women are capable of providing for themselves and their children and not in need of a male provider (Borchorst 1993). Under these circumstances, the reproductive behavior such as family formation, the onset of childbearing, timing and spacing of the births and, further, the total number of children during lifetime, must be regarded as subject to deliberate decisions of the women and of the couples.

A number of studies focusing on the attitudes or the political and socio-economic living conditions have been conducted in order to explain the decreasing fertility observed in the Nordic countries during the 1960s and 1970s as well as the subsequent increase (Andersson 2001; Bernhardt 2002; Bertelsen 1980; Bertelsen 1981; Noack and Østby 2000; Hoem and Hoem 1996; Knudsen 1993; Kravdal 1989; Lindgren et al. 1993). In these studies fertility behavior was regarded as influenced by the individuals' – and the populations' – reactions towards some societal changes. The grounds for the declining fertility rates were analyzed with the aim of elucidating to which extent the increasing labor market participation of the women influenced their decisions on family size and, subsequently, which measures might help the women in combining family and work obligations. The political questions as well as the research problems took the women's obligations and priority of the family life for granted, and, consequently, discussions focused on whether women wanted to participate in the labor market and under which conditions: Surveys were conducted on whether women wanted

fulltime or part-time work. Recently, the focus of the political discussions have shifted to take the attachment to the labor market for granted for both genders and discuss how the work places should be organized in order to allow the women also to take care of their families. Even more recently also the fathers' obligations and wishes in relation to the family life have been brought into the picture.

The influence of policy measures on fertility is many faceted and may not be easily identified, though. Many studies concentrate on the simultaneousness of existing policy measures and fertility pattern or even better of the changing policies and fluctuations in fertility behavior, cf. the section on Research Interests below. The rapid changes in family formation and fertility that have recently been seen in a number of countries are much faster reactions to political changes than those that occurred in the 1970s. This is primarily related to the fact that the existing means to limit fertility are so effective that the population can exercise a very effective limiting birth control resulting in a very strong fall in the propensity to give birth. Examples of this were seen in Eastern Germany and the Baltic countries throughout the 1990s after the removal of the iron curtain although this was certainly not a result of political decisions on family matters. The fertility dropped tremendously during a very short period of time in the former socialist countries (e.g. Reicheckel et al 1998) and, subsequently, much research has concentrated on studying the efficacy of specific policy measures aiming at increasing the fertility (e.g. Balicki 2001; Rychtariková 1999; Stankuniene 2001).

It is a precondition for the discussion in this paper, that public policies may exercise some kind of influence on the reproductive behavior of the population. The sections of the paper present a general discussion of family formation and of the impact of policies on fertility and nuptiality with a special focus on the Nordic countries.

2. The Nordic Scenario

This section will discuss the actual scenario of fertility and family life in the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. For the discussion of family policies in this paper the point of reference is the situation in these countries, as it was in the mid- and late-1990s.

The relatively high fertility in the *Nordic* countries during the last decades has often been claimed to be a result of the welfare policies which enable the individuals to combine work and family life. In other words, the policies support a framework in which both men and women should have room for both family obligations and obligations in their jobs. The special structures of the welfare states in the Nordic countries were classified as one special group and labeled the Nordic 'social-democratic welfare regime' by Esping-Andersen (1990). These regimes are characterized by an orientation towards the individual, although the gender relations were not included in the model (Skrede 2001). The orientation towards the individual is contrasting the regimes in the countries in Southern Europe, which are more traditional and more family-oriented.

In general, the state support, especially towards gender equality and reconciliation between work and family is considered to be important and acting

in direction of a family friendly situation in the Nordic countries. The various studies conducted in the Nordic countries indicate so far, that the family policy has had some overall positive impact on the fertility, although the direct effects are relatively small.

Outside the welfare state theories some of the superior explanations applied to explain the changes in fertility behavior are valid for the Nordic countries. Lestaeghe and Moors (2000) mention the importance of the higher female economic autonomy, the increased need for limiting the number of children due to need for income and the ideational changes in direction of individual autonomy and a growing respect for individual choices. These factors were present quite early in the Nordic countries compared to a number of other countries (Borchorst 1993; Staalberg 2001). Further, during the last couple of decades the Nordic countries have been among the few countries in which a recuperation of fertility has been seen among women over 30 although fertility continues to decline among women younger than 30 years (Freika and Calot 2001).

The similarities between the Nordic countries, which make it reasonable to treat these countries as one group in international comparisons, are not only due to the same type of welfare state policies¹. The countries have a joint history, the linguistic origin is similar except for Finland, and the contemporary languages are quite similar in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Further, the cultures and the organization of the states, as well as of the public sectors are very similar.

The young people in the Nordic countries leave their parental home early, and the girls leave at younger ages than boys like in most other countries. At the age of 20-21 about 50 percent have left to live either independently or in a common-law marriage. Only very few marry directly as living in consensual unions has become very predominant (Carneiro, Knudsen and Osório 2002; Hoem and Hoem 1996; Texmon 1995).

When they leave their parents, both the young men and the young women have completed school education and the main part continue with some kind of vocational or further education. Occasionally they may come back to the parents' home for a limited period in-between studies, or between military service and study but this is not at all as common as in South Europe. They are expected to and expect to be occupationally active during their adult lives: Labourmarket participation is high among women in all the countries and about 70 to 80 percent of the women participate in the labor market also while having small children at home (Knudsen et al 2003). The life-time housewives have disappeared from the Nordic scenarios. However, the recent extensions of the leave schemes in connection with births and child raising has led to a situation in which some women spend longer periods outside the labor market than previously and especially more than men do (Haas and Hwang 1999; Knudsen 2002a).

Regarding fertility, the Period Total Fertility Rates (PTFRs) in the Nordic countries were among the highest in Europe in the late 1990s with 1.7 in Denmark

¹ Coleman (1996) place Denmark in the group of Western European countries, while the rest of the Nordic countries together with the Baltic countries are placed in the group of Northern European countries.

and Finland, 1.8 in Norway and 2.1 in Iceland. Sweden, though, reached a TFR as low as 1.5 in 1997 (Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2001; Recent demographic developments in Europe 1999). This low level mirrors a decline subsequent to a strong increase, which will be dealt with later in this paper. In all of the countries, the PTFRs are composed by low and still decreasing fertility rates among women younger than 25 while the fertility among women above this age increased in the 1980s. The mean age at the birth of the first child has been increasing during the last three decades and was approximately 28 years at the turn of the millennium.

Table 1. Period Total Fertility Rates in the Nordic Countries.

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
1900	4.14	4.83		4.39	3.91
1910	3.67	4.60		3.83	3.31
1920	3.29	3.76		3.61	2.58
1930	2.30	2.75		2.19	1.77
1940	2.22	2.15		1.95	2.35
1950	2.58	3.16		2.51	2.23
1960	2.54	2.72	4.27	2.91	2.20
1970	1.95	1.83	2.81	2.50	1.92
1980	1.55	1.63	2.48	1.72	1.68
1990	1.67	1.78	2.31	1.93	2.13
2000	1.77	1.74	1.99	1.85	1.53

Note: For Finland and Iceland the figures for 2000 are from 1999. For Denmark 1900 is from 1901.

Sources: See Note ².

The fall in PTFR, which began in the late 1960s, leveled out and reverted in the late 1970s – early 1980s in all the Nordic Countries. A similar reversion has not yet appeared in for instance the southern European countries. The fact that this reversion took place in countries with very high participation rates of the women have sharpened the attention towards the relation between policy measures and the women's situations, also among scholars from outside the Nordic countries.

The completed lifetime fertility for the female cohorts in the Nordic countries varies. The level is lowest in Denmark and Finland and, further, the level is considerable higher although still decreasing in Iceland while Sweden

² Recent demographic developments in Europe 1999, Vital Statistics 2001 (For Denmark, Figure in the table is from 1901), Befolkningutvecklingen under 250 år. Historisk statistik för Sverige. Stockholm: Statistics Sweden. Demografiska rapporter 1999:2. The figures for Sweden 1900-1950 are based on five-years periods: 1901-05, 1911-15 etc. The latest figure is from 1997.

For Norway for the period 1900 to and including 1950:

<http://www.gfeeney.com/pubs/aempaper/supplements/developed/norway/norway.tfr.xls>

For Finland for the period 1900 to and including 1950:

<http://www.gfeeney.com/pubs/aempaper/supplements/developed/finland/Finland.tfr.data.txt> and

Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2001 (for 1999)

experienced the lowest point earlier than the other countries.

For the female cohorts, that have recently completed their fertility, to have two children or just one child was the predominant pattern in the Nordic countries as in most of the EU-countries³. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the female cohorts born in 1945/1950 gave birth to approximately 2 children, while the number was somewhat lower in Finland. In Iceland, as well as in Eastern European countries and in South of Europe, the completed cohort fertility was higher (over 2) while the lowest numbers were seen in Austria and Switzerland (1,7) (Recent demographic developments in Europe 1999).

Inspecting the total fertility for cohorts reveals that the younger generations (those born 1960->) are overtaking the slightly older generations of women, cf. Table 2. As previously mentioned the fertility deficit for the female cohorts born in the late 1950s and 1960s caused by the continuing delaying of first birth and the decreasing fertility rates below age 25, have been compensated at higher ages (Frejka and Calot 2001).

Table 2. Cohort Total Fertility for generations of women in the Nordic Countries.

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
1930	2.36	2.46		2.48	2.12
1935	2.38	2.29		2.57	2.14
1940	2.24	2.04		2.45	2.05
1945	2.06	1.88	2.87	2.21	1.98
1950	1.91	1.85	2.71	2.09	2.00
1955	1.84	1.90	2.57	2.04	2.03
1960	1.90	1.95	2.49	2.07	2.03

Sourcers: Recent demographic developments in Europe 1999

Some women have less children than the number they consider to be the preferable number of children in a family and even end up with less children than they originally wished to have (Knudsen 1993; Noack and Østby 2000). These observed discrepancies between the preferred and the actual number of children might be resulting from the experience of constraining factors and subject to change by political incentives.

The largest proportions of women who never give birth are found in the groups that are also characterized by late entry into motherhood and low average number of children. Among the female cohorts who ended childbearing during the last part of the 1990s, approximately 10 percent remained childless and much concern has been directed towards whether the late onset of childbearing – the ageing of fertility - reduces the biological ability for the women to get the preferred number

³ Details about the family formation patterns and the family sizes in the Nordic countries can be found in the FFS-reports: See: http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/ffs/ffs_standtabframe.htm for the tables

of children.

For both sexes the age at first sexual intercourse is around 16 in all the Nordic countries and this age has been rather unchanged during the latest decades. Nevertheless, fertility rates among the youngest women are very low as the use of contraceptives is generally accepted and encouraged among young adolescents. In case of unintended pregnancies, the acts on induced abortion on demand give a possibility for the young people to choose pregnancy interruption. The Nordic countries have had liberal acts on induced abortion on demand since the early 1970s, although in Iceland and Finland, abortion has to be approved, following a list of (broad) indications (Knudsen et al. 2003). The induced abortion has been chosen among approximately two thirds of pregnant 15-19 year old women in Denmark since the mid-1980s, while this proportion has fluctuated between 50 and 60 percent in Finland. At present Denmark has the lowest rate of induced abortion among 15-19 year old women in the Nordic countries and, furthermore, Denmark is the only of these countries in which the rate is not increasing (Knudsen and Gissler 2003).

3. Family formation

Both in demographic and sociological literature, *family formation* as such is often defined indirectly, and one has to infer that the family formation is the event that implies the establishment of a family, and temporally preceding the situation in which the family actually exists. The *family*, however, is defined either from its structure and functions or quite empirically and pragmatically (based on the existing data in the national statistical offices). Previously, family formation used to be identifiable by the legal event of contracting a marriage, but today marriage is far from being the only type of family in contemporary Europe. The predominance of the legal marriage has been substituted by a diversity of family forms (Kuijsten 1996).

In this paper *family formation* is understood as the initial process in which two people of different sex decides to establish a joint household and have a child - in other words they decide to establish a family. This rather broad definition is in accordance with definitions within demography and sociology, although the mere phase of the formation of the family is not always specified as such. Instead, family formation may be defined as a phase or stage in the life cycle of the family, and interpreted more or less as the concept of *nuptiality*, which in demographic literature is notifying the process of beginning a new family. However, nuptiality has often been synonymously substituted by 'marriage' denoting 'living in a family' or 'establishing a family' (as a contrast to living as single), and not just the initial phase of the family⁴.

Temporally, the formation of the family is the first stage of a family's life although it varies whether the formation of a partnership (traditionally most often by marriage) or the birth of the first child is notifying this stage. In Bongaarts,

⁴ In the 'Subject Index' of a recently published book on Family Life and Family Policies in Europe (2002), nuptiality is included, but with the note: '*see also marriage'.

Burch and Wachter's book on 'Family Demography' from 1987, Höhn identified the family formation as the first phase of the life cycle of the family, beginning at the wedding and ending at the birth of the first child. Influenced by the more recent development in family formation patterns and especially by the fact that the mean age at first childbirth has changed place with the mean age at first marriage, there might be a need for changing this definition. Giddens (1987) has characterized the 'study of familyas one of the most provocative and involving' and further, as research involving controversies from various theoretical angles. Moreover, Giddens find that there are uncertainties and risks associated with the changing family forms.

In recent sociology, a family is defined as 'a group of individuals, related to one another by blood ties, marriage or adoption, who form an economic unit, the adult members of which are responsible for the upbringing of children' (Giddens 1997, p. 582). In accordance with this, a nuclear family is defined as 'a household in which a married couple (or single parent) live together with their own or adopted children' (ibid. p. 168). This definition refers to the established family, including lone parents.

The United Nations (in 1987) has defined a family unit in a way which takes into account the emerging new family patterns: A family unit is existing when a couple is being either married or living together as man and wife, or when one or both parents are living with their unmarried children (Hantrais and Letablier 1996). According to this definition, a family unit is thus formed either by marriage (or a consensual union) or by the arrival of children (Hantrais and Letablier 1996, s. 16). It should be noted that this definition includes a couple without children as a family unit as well, an inclusion, which is also found in the routine statistics in Denmark.

The tremendous changes in family patterns, which were witnessed during the last of decades in most of Europe, point at a need for new concepts to understand the changes and the new forms of equilibrium that have developed or rather are still developing. Anyway, the traditional pictures of family formation and life do not catch the new diverse forms of private life (Drew 1998; Kuijsten 2002).

In many countries it has become common to live together before marrying and perhaps even experience a couple of rather long-lasting co-residential unions before having the first child. Still, consensual unions have higher risks of dissolution even in countries like the Nordic (see for instance Vital Statistics 1996 (1998) for information on the situation in Denmark). Consensual unions are more prevalent than marriage among the young people and very few marry directly after leaving their parental home. The vast majority of those women marrying directly in Denmark belong to the immigrant population (Knudsen and Carneiro, forthcoming).

Even in those European countries, in which being married is still the predominant way of family life as adult, cohabitation increases in the younger cohorts, which is witnessed in the various Country reports from the joint Fertility and Family Surveys in Europe (UN 2002). Consequently, family formation today cannot be identified by the wedding per se, which again points at the birth of the first joint child as the event to mark the family formation.

In accordance with this, a couple living in a consensual union and not having any child will not be regarded as a family in the following. The term *partnership* can name the relation between two persons who choose to commit themselves to each other and regard themselves as being together as a couple. They may live together in the same apartment (in a consensual union or a common law marriage) or they may live separately (Living Apart Together, or LAT-couples). If the couple in a consensual union at a later time decide to have a child together, they 'form a family' according to the terminology approved here.

The term *family* is thus reserved for a couple that has had at least one joint child, as *family formation* is denoting the process in which a couple has their first child or decides to have a child, notwithstanding the two persons are married or cohabiting. Unlike the formation of a partnership, even with joint address, the term family as used in this paper implies that there are two adults and at least one child.

Consequently, lone parents will be disregarded here as most single mothers or fathers are lone parents subsequent to a split up of the family into which the child was born either by divorce or moving apart. Only rarely a child is deliberately born by a single woman without a steady partner. Even in the Nordic Countries where the shares of children born by unmarried women are 40-50 percent, the predominant part of these children are born into a family with two parents, although they may live in a consensual union (for the situation in Denmark, see for instance Nygaard Christoffersen 1993). Stepfamilies, or blended families, though, are becoming more common in our societies. A growing research interest is being directed towards these families and how the combination of his, her and their children influences the fertility in the family and in the society (Thomson et al. 2001). However, this will be considered to be a specific aspect and not dealt with in detail here in the discussions of family formation.

Much of the research on fertility, on which we base our knowledge on the reproductive patterns simply measure the number of births, by maternal age and parity, by socio-economic background of the mother, the father or both. In these studies the family type is only taken into consideration if the research questions are directly aimed at elucidating fertility in certain types of families or for instance how the fertility in a current relationship is influenced by whether the two partners already have children with a previous partner (Thomson et al. 2001; Vikat et al. 1999). In the aggregated statistics on fertility no distinction is made of various family forms.

Family formation by choice and not by need

One of the characteristics of the late modern society is the idea of the reflexive formation of life biographies (Giddens 1991). Reproduction and family formation have been included in the life biographies of the individuals as a consequence of the use of contraceptive means and the access to induced abortion that make it possible to reject childbearing and to postpone or reject family formation. Ideally speaking, no woman is forced into joint parenthood with a man she does not want as the father of her children, if any. Nor is she forced to complete an unwanted pregnancy and face a life as unmarried mother. This is an ideal situation - or a

practically and technically possible situation – as the cultural background, the values and attitudes or reactions from the family or close friends may lay a pressure on the woman and influence her decision about the pregnancy. For a man, the situation is somewhat different as the woman, in most cases, is the one who administer the use of contraceptives and, moreover, can have her pregnancy interrupted without any consent of the male partner (Knudsen 2000).

In the Nordic settings, almost all of the newborn children are born into a stable relationship that is, parents living together either in a consensual union or in legal marriage. The laws have gradually been adjusted to the fact that consensual union is a widespread alternative to legal marriage and to day, the two family forms are almost equal as regards mutual rights and obligations between the two partners. In the mid-1990s, around 45 per cent of the newborns in Denmark was born by unmarried mothers (Vital Statistics 1998). Nevertheless, it is known from previous analyses that approximately 90 per cent of these unmarried women are living with the father of the child. The fact that the two family forms are considered almost equal and legal fatherhood established in both forms, has let to a situation where marriage is more an option than a prerequisite for childbearing and living in consensual union is no hinder for childbearing.

To have a child either by planning a pregnancy or by accepting an unplanned pregnancy is considered to be a joint decision of the couple. One of the rather common reasons for pregnancy interruption expressed in studies on induced abortion is the disagreement between the couple about the decision to have the child. Another reason is that the severity of facing a joint parenthood can make the partners reconsider their partnership and whether they are right for each other in a family with children (Bankole et al. 1998; Knudsen and Gissler 2003; Rasch et al. 2001). There is no doubt that the conditions for the child is better if the birth follows a joint decision between the parents-to-be and if both partners are prepared to be parents than if there is disagreement about the decision between the partners.

In the couple's decision-making regarding having a (first) joint child one of the important factors is the picture of their anticipated future as a family with one or more children. This picture comprises both the current situation and expectations regarding possibilities to complete an ongoing education, income, aspired living conditions, the daily time structure and leisure possibilities and is influenced by the observed living conditions of contemporary families with children.

With the consciousness of the existing possibilities to postpone and to reject childbearing, childbearing and family formation (and form of family life) may be considered as optional choices. This is reflected in the continuous postponement of the family establishment, as the decision to have a child will be made, when the external situation (education, job, and economy) is settled and the partner is the right one. The family is not a necessity in societies like the Nordic countries where the woman does not need a (male) provider: The female participation rate is high and the laws and rights are directed towards individuals and not towards the family as an institution. In stead, the family has become a manifestation of a 'preference'. However, this choice is made difficult, among other things because great value is attached to the quality of the relations between the partners in the

post-transitional relationship. Further, the partnership or the family is expected to fulfill several recreational and social functions for the partners. However, childbearing cannot solely be regarded as a rational choice as individual norms, values and attitudes towards family and children, and towards interruption of pregnancy also play important roles.

4. Principles in family policies in the nordic countries

Which roles are played by the various policy measures in relation to influencing family formation and fertility? And which policies should be counted when discussing the framework for family formation?

This section focuses on policies in the Nordic countries that may have a direct or indirect influence on the family formation patterns. A very broad range of policy measures are relevant to discuss, as both activities within the social sector (e.g. support for lone parents, leave schemes) and in the labor market (e.g. working hours, flexibility) set the frames for family life. The policy means that may be considered to be more or less direct family support (child allowances, rights to leave, access to publicly supported day-care) are equal to all inhabitants in the Nordic welfare states.

The policies in the Nordic Welfare states are more aiming at general improvements and the reduction of social differences between the families than directly aiming at increasing fertility. The policies may support or hinder the couples' wishes of childbearing to come true and it is quite complicated and perhaps impossible to identify the direct influence on fertility patterns of specific family policies - or policies within other areas of the society (Hantrais and Letablier 1996; Strohmeier 2002).

Within this framework, three main underlying principles in the policies will be discussed: The concern for the population development, concern for the reconciliation between work and family, and the question of gender equality both in the family and in the labor market. Finally, the need for securing the time for the family and for private life is discussed.

Population development

In the 1930s, the contemporary political debates in the Nordic countries were influenced by the low fertility and expressed concerns for the population development. The political measures that were initiated at that time aimed at supporting family life and in that way in the long run, influence the propensity to give birth and therefore influence the population growth positively. The fertility development is the most influential demographic factor in the perspectives of the population's dynamics in countries with very low mortality and little or only moderate immigration. Further, the concern for the growth of the population might be said to be the most superior point of view as it deals with the changes at the population level and not at the individual level.

During the first three decades of the 20th century, the fertility in these countries had decreased strongly. The PTFR fell from more than 4 per woman in 1900 to 2.11 in 1933 in Denmark while the lowest PTFR was observed in Sweden – in

1935 as low as 1.7 , cf. Table 1. The large families became less common as especially the fertility among high parity women in the upper half of their fertile period decreased. The very low fertility levels in the 1930s were followed by increases in fertility rates which lasted more or less to the mid- and late 1960s, even though the pace and levels differed between the countries. Again in the 1960s, the PTFR was remarkable lower in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries, cf. Table 1. In the decrease that began at this point in time, the issue on the population's development was not very urgent.

In short, the political initiatives aimed at improving living conditions for families and – which is one of the most specific characteristics of the Nordic model - for individuals. Programs were introduced to improve the health and nutritional conditions of both the pregnant women and the newborn children. The superior aims were to diminish the stillbirth rate, the mortality of infants and small children, and, subsequently, to increase the population. Other initiatives aimed at improving the survival of the newborns by establishing antenatal care programs and provision of health nurses to check the health conditions of the infants. Leave schedules were introduced, giving for the first time women a right to a maternity leave, although the time period was short compared to the ones existing today. In Denmark maternal leave of two weeks were introduced as a right for all salaried female employees in 1933 (Rostgaard et al. 1999), although previous acts on working conditions had introduced some regulations regarding work in factories after delivery. Gradual extensions of the leave led to 14 weeks after the birth in 1960. The leave scheme was most extended in Sweden and already in 1955, Swedish women had the right to three months of paid maternity leave (Haas and Hwang 1999). In the late 1960s, Swedish mothers were guaranteed six months' leave after the delivery (Sundström 1996).

These initiatives by the Parliament were, at least in Denmark, accompanied by a discussion of the relation between the individual and the state: of the rights for the state to intrude into motherhood and into the private sphere of the citizens. This contradiction between whether the upbringing of the children was a state responsibility or a private responsibility is an underlying explanation of the liberalistic approach still witnessed in the UK and the USA (Gauthier 1996; Wennemo 1994). However, in the Nordic countries, the seeds had been sown to a kind of society being supportive for individuals and families without abilities to take care of themselves. Interestingly, today these frames may be interpreted as frames within which the individuals increase their opportunities to make their own decisions. There are still some ongoing discussions about the individuals' own rights which may be seen as a feature of the individualization. Nevertheless, the states' providing of the frames may be viewed as a necessity for the individualistic choices.

The initiatives in the 1930s were strongly influenced by the book on the 'Populations crisis' (Myrdal & Myrdal 1935), which argued for general improvements by discussing the association between poverty, poor living conditions and the low fertility. The authors pointed out the possible positive effects on the fertility if the conditions for the families with children and for the children already born were improved. Further, they hypothesized that such

initiatives would eliminate some of the reasons for the families to desist from having children and argued how to redistribute the financial resources in favor of families with children. Still, the authors also mentioned that children should not be born at any price, and accordingly the book considers the need for fertility regulation including interruption of pregnancy under certain circumstances.

After the onset of the fertility decline in the late-1960s, the Nordic reactions again aimed at increasing the childbearing propensity, although the means had changed. The underlying concern of the policy measures was a concern for social welfare and equality and the countries introduced or enforced policy measures that were generally supportive for the dual-earner family. The Swedish government reacted to the very low fertility in that country by strong initiatives, aiming at general improvements for families with children. It is remarkable that this took place without any attempts to hinder the ongoing discussions about making the access to induced abortion more liberal. In comparison, it should be mentioned, that in 1973 Hungary reacted in the opposite way in a similar situation. Even though the PTFR in Hungary was only slightly lower than was the case in Sweden, this country reacted by restricting the liberal act on induced abortion that had been in force since 1956 (Gauthier 1996; Knudsen 2002b).

In the light of this decline, new perspectives came into the discussion, as the fertility decline appeared together with changes in family forms, the rise in consensual unions and in a situation in which female labor participation grew as did the educational levels. Sweden and Denmark have been considered forerunners in relation to many of the changes characterizing the second demographic transition period, which began in the Nordic countries earlier than in most Western European countries (van de Kaa 1987).

To day, one may say that the fertility and nuptiality behavior is put into the population picture again bearing consequences not only for the couples and for family formation but also for the ageing of the societies. Consequently, the ageing of the Nordic societies has revived an interest in the future of the populations, often based on economic forecasts of the consequences of the growing proportion of old people in populations with very low fertility and only seldom linked to a discussion of the fertility behavior.

Reconciliation between family and work obligations

A pro-natalist policy was hardly ever present in the Nordic Countries. As Demeny (1987) has pointed out, the clear relation between the success of the nation and the size of the population has lost its relevance in the modern society. Instead, the main aims of policies directed towards the families turned to the question of *reconciliation between family and work obligations*. These policy measures were strongly influenced by the increasing female participation rate during this period and the fact that the option of living as a housewife was disappearing.

The shift towards the question of *reconciliation between family and work obligations* in the family policy is also mirrored in the EU (EEC) activities as described by Hantrais and Letablier (1996). In the 1960s and 1970s, the EU only expressed a social concern in so far as the activities affected the mobility of

workers or the competitiveness of enterprises. According to Hantrais and Letablier (1996), 'family matters' were not mentioned in a community document until 1974⁵. In the early 1980s a 'Resolution on family policy in the European Community' was adopted by the Parliament stating that 'family policy should ...become an integral part of all Community policies'. Hantrais and Letablier (1996) further conclude that by the mid-1990s the Union had still not developed a clearly defined family policy, although the family had been placed on the European social policy agenda. Concrete proposals for EU legislation on childcare, maternity, leave etc. had been brought forward as equality or health and safety measures, as a designated family policy program was absent (ibid. p. 142).

However, the European Commission established 'The European Observatory on National Family Policies' in 1989 with the purpose 'to monitor changes in family forms and family policies (and other policies which impact on the family) in all member states of the European Union' (Ditch et al. 1998, p. v).

Although not directly aiming at influencing the childbearing propensity, a sociological rationale for improving the possibilities for reconciliation could be to consider that the general living conditions of families – defined as couples or lone-parents with children - have impact on how childless adults consider the options of having a child. The early political acceptance of this policy in the Nordic countries may also be seen as a sign that the dual breadwinner family is accepted as inevitably.

The relation between family and working life is often considered an almost 'classical' approach to analyses of women's lives between family and work and the focus on reconciliation is closely related to the problems of gender equality. The policies aiming at solving the reconciliation problem included improved day care facilities and leave schemes. The policy of leave schemes - both maternal, paternal and parental leave schemes - are currently being debated in many countries.

Gender equality

The most recent rationales for family policy concern the question of *gender equality* including the individuals' obligations in the family as well as in the labor market.

While the reconciliation concern still may be seen as a reaction to changes and attempts to increase fertility, the equality concern may be regarded as a form of support for the emerging or already emerged patterns and a wish to improve the options for women (as for men as regarding their activities inside the families). In the Nordic countries the dual breadwinner model of families have been accepted and the acts and regulations in the welfare states may be said to act supportive to that fact. Only indirectly the aim can be seen as an attempt to increase childbearing – it is more a question of making childbearing possible.

In the early 20th century, all the Nordic countries initiated legal changes which

⁵ In fact the family appeared only indirectly in the context of reconciliation of family responsibilities and work aspirations and the need for an action programme for migrant workers and members of their families.

made women more equal to men and gave them certain rights to decide for themselves, to be educated, to have a job, earn a salary and to keep the money they earned. These changes improved the possibilities to live without a male provider. The reforms from these years are important also in order to understand the more recent patterns, as women in the Nordic countries gained some individual rights also regarding marriage, divorce and custody over children in the 1920s. These changes dissolved the patriarchal and hierarchical structures in the society (Staahlberg 2001).

Some of the important actions taken in the late 20th century in the direction of gender equality aimed at making the legal conditions between married spouses and common-law spouses more equal. This may be seen to be a prerequisite for making the choice between marrying and living in a consensual union an option for both women and men. For the women it was a question of financial security in case of family dissolution and for men one main issue has been to have regulations of contacts and division of custodial rights over children after the dissolution.

It seems to be an important angle in the discussion – that the political initiatives aiming at increasing the gender equality can be seen as reactions in a situation in which a diversity of family forms are accepted. At the same time, the family pattern may still seem to be developing in the direction of finding a new equilibrium and in this process some couples reject to have a child.

Time for family life – for private life

Some of the family obligations, which are still the main responsibilities of the women are locally anchored and context-dependent (especially care for children, for sick people and for the elderly). Women's lives have to be lived in relation to these responsibilities. But how women's traditional context-dependent bonds to the local community and family unfold in relation to the flexibility at the labor market, and whether and how that affects men's lives are major questions. Women have often solved their time and space problems in relation to work and family by not working full time and/or by finding a workplace within short distance from home. Commuting analyses have shown how the women's labor market in time and space was more limited than the one of men (Hanson and Pratt 1995).

Apparently combining family life with a working life on the present terms is still difficult in the Nordic countries, especially when seen from a woman's perspective. The apparent success of the more flexible leave systems and the current discussions (at least in some countries) of flexible working hours points in the direction of what might be the pivot of the future policies aiming at making family formation a realistic option for individuals: *Time*. The question is, however, whether we have reached the point at which a fight for room for a family life is necessary. It has been argued that the modern working life has won over the family meaning that the consequences of individualization have contributed to the tendency that we have become controlled by the wish for developing an identity through the job, but also through the consumption made possible by the wages. The way in which the time structure of the working life controls our time is

therefore a cornerstone in understanding the time pattern of the everyday life. The 'new' family life and the form of the family may change considerably from what we know today. If we agree that actions must be taken to secure space and time for the family - or for some kind of needed intimate community - it is an underlying assumption that individuals are in need of close relations and a community to undertake caring obligations for the children (Drewes Nielsen and Knudsen 2001).

5. Research interest in family policies

In studies on fertility patterns, it often seems to be easier to identify potential obstacles for childbearing and child raising and to answer the question of why people *do not* get children, than to find answers to why people *do* get children. Research on difficulties in childbearing focuses both on the obstacles for families and on which circumstances give the best conditions for family life with children. Research on the explanations to the latter question may look to socio-biology or evolutionary theories on the urge to procreate and to multiply – at least in countries in which the old people are not financially dependent on their own children. Some of the pronounced pro-natalist policies, though, have linked the individuals' procreation to the nations' survival through the growth of population - a view, which does not have general appeal today and which has not been evident in recent family policies in the Nordic countries (Demeny 1987; Knudsen 2002a).

Within Europe the various regions are characterized by different fertility regimes. The reasons behind the various patterns are nested in the history, the cultural background and the women's contemporary situations at home and at the labor market. The evidence of the effect of policy measures is rather limited and, moreover, the net effect on fertility is generally considered to be small. Further, difficult methodological problems are involved in the research on the effectiveness of the policy measures (Ermish 1996; Gauthier 1996; Gauthier and Hatzius 1997; Strohmeier 2002).

In spite of these difficulties or perhaps also partly because of the difficulties, the question of the effect of (family) policies on the fertility and nuptiality pattern is subject to increasing interest from researchers. Not only in Europe, but also researches from overseas have studied the profound changes in Europe's populations' fertility behavior over the last few decades. One great challenge has been the dramatic changes in the former socialist countries since the breakdown of the Soviet regime around 1990. The research has been directed towards analyses of whether and how the countries' various principles in the family policy and the concrete policy measures have influenced the development.

Studies on the effect of family policy have been grouped into four main groups according to data and methodology (Gauthier and Hatzius 1997). *One group* of studies is based on data provided by public opinion surveys, in which respondents are asked more or less directly about their opinion of or attitudes towards family policy measures. *A second group* consists of studies seeking to assess the effects of family policies on the basis of what is called a descriptive-intuitive approach.

By this is meant the studies, which have led to the conclusion of a positive correlation between fertility and policy, based on analysis of fertility trends on the one hand and family policies on the other. One may add here that interpretations based on these kinds of observations conclude from simultaneousness between the policy and the fertility trends.

A number of recent studies have been conducted either on a national or a comparative inter-national basis, by use of aggregate data on fertility and a discussion of policy measures. Can the observation of a fall in the PTFR after introduction of a more liberal right to abortion, be interpreted as an evidence of an effect? And if it is the case in some countries, like for instance in Czechoslovakia (see Balicki 2001), is a similar effect then automatically to be expected in other countries? In the Scandinavian countries, quite another process was seen, as the fertility decline in the late 1960s began *before* the acts on induced abortion on demand were approved in the early 1970s, and in the subsequent period, the fertility rates and the abortion rates have not been complementary (for Denmark, see Wielandt and Knudsen 1997).

A *third group* of studies is based on aggregate data and involves econometric modeling. These studies have, still according to Gauthier and Hatzius (1997), identified positive relationships between fertility and policies, which involves some economic improvement, e.g. in the form of family benefits (Blanchet and Ekert-Jaffé 1994) or tax relief (Whittington, Alm and Peter 1990). On the other hand, other studies suggest an influence on the timing, as higher family benefits would encourage early entrance into motherhood (Ermish 1988). To supplement it should be noted, that Vikat (2002), found indications that a home-care allowance that existed in Finland from 1990 onwards although only for a few years might have influenced the fertility rates for second and higher birth orders in a positive direction.

The *fourth group* of studies is based on individual data. These studies seem to conform the results from aggregate analyses, and often focus on various subgroups of the population. According to Gauthier and Hatzius, the findings from these studies are not at all concurrent, though. This kind of studies, those based on individual level data, is often performed in the Nordic countries in which national, population-based registers with individual level information exist (Andersson 2001; Murphy and Knudsen 2002; Vikat 2002), and sometimes on combinations of register data with surveys (Kravdal 1989). The individual level data in the registers facilitate studies of life courses of individuals, of family members, parents and children and analyses of for instance the fertility pattern in the families, or in specific groups of women (see for instance Knudsen and Murphy 1999).

6. Findings on the nordic countries

The observed changes in the patterns of both family formation and fertility since the late 1960s have often been studied in relation to the profound changes in especially the women's positions in the society (e.g. Women, Work and the Family in Europe 1998; Women's Position and Demographic Change 1993).

When the present situation regarding family formation and fertility in the Nordic countries is subject for analyses, the welfare state system is not only in general considered as providing proper frames for childbearing and child raising, for reconciliation of family life and working life but also as providing a framework in which women and men have the options to choose whether or not to have children.

Important features are the existence of and the good coverage of child care facilities, flexible leave schemes for both parents, support for lone parents, the legal equality between spouses and the fact that the laws are directed towards the individuals not the families, which together contribute to the picture of family policies aiming at securing working women the possibility to have family and children as well.

In this section I refer findings from demographic research on the Nordic countries on how fertility and family formation are influenced by some of the main characteristics of the women's' and the couples' situation during the last couple of decades of the 20th century focusing on labor market participation, education and the legal gender equality in the family and in the labor market. Some of the studies are based on published aggregate level data, while others have used individual level data from the public population registers⁶. Further, findings from both national studies and from international collaborative projects will be included, concentrating on the entering into motherhood and on the lifetime fertility.

It is an underlying assumption in the studies that women and men react to the societal frames, the laws, the economic development etc by altering their fertility behavior. The assumption that decreasing fertility may be explained as reactions to constraints in daily life – are closely linked to the assumption that it is possible to change the fertility and nuptiality patterns in direction of increasing fertility by introducing family friendly policies.

Education and labor market participation

In the decades after the 1960s, the educational level among the younger cohorts of both genders have increased as the compulsory school age has been raised and women in the Nordic countries have acquired education, basic as well as further and vocational education almost in line with their male contemporaries. In the cohorts of young individuals, who were completing school in 1990 as many as 28 to 46 percent of the cohorts continued in some kind of further education (Bonke 1995).

The improved education of women has had the consequence that women in year 2000 are much better equipped to work in a broad range of jobs in the society than was the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Increasing female employment was seen in all of these countries during the 1960s, beginning with increases among women in the upper end of childbearing ages but soon followed by increases

⁶ Inherent challenges in the studies are to examine to which extent it is possible to conclude from the fertility levels at aggregate levels to individual behavior. One interesting approach to study the consistency between register data on fertility trends and survey data on sexual behaviour are presented in Wielandt et al. (2002).

among the younger women. Another characteristic pattern is that both the level and the profile of the participation rates over the lifetime show similar slopes: Participation increases after ending school, is more or less stable during adulthood and then decreases at the time of retirement. The participation of men has decreased a little since the 1960s and this is contributing to the very equal levels of the participation of the two sexes, although the level is still somewhat higher for men than for women. The slightly lower level among women is due to the fact, that women have experienced and still experience a higher rate of unemployment and, further, that women more much more than men have some periods outside labor market due to prolonged leave schemes.

Legally, women and men have equal right to work and to be paid equally wage for the same job, but in practice the labor markets are segregated by sex both in the horizontal and the vertical direction. The proportion of women is lowest in upper shares of occupational positions and, further, women are still predominant in caring, nursing and teaching sectors of the society and in some industries as well (Women and Men 1999).

The less strong attachment to the labor market among women is also seen in the fact that part-time is still more common among women than among men, although the differences are getting smaller among the younger generations. Part-time jobs were previously seen as a solution to solve the question of reconciliation between work and family at the individual level and may, as long as it reflects a preference by the woman (and her partner), still be viewed as a way to solve the time and obligation problem between private life and work. The proportion of part-time female workers has varied considerably between the Nordic countries. Denmark experienced a decrease from 60 percent in 1970 to 20 percent about 1990 in the proportion of women, who was working part-time, while the proportion remained almost unchanged in both Norway (45 percent) and Sweden (40 percent). In the late 1980s about 60 percent of employed women in childbearing age in Sweden worked part-time compared to less than 10 percent in Denmark – a share that was even less among women with small children (Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1995; Helweg-Larsen et al. 1998). Further, part-time normally means more hours per week in Denmark than in the other countries. If a possibility for part-time job and a flexible leave scheme should be valuable for the women and their partners in the direction of providing proper frames for childbearing, these possibilities should be accompanied by a high degree of job security so that each individual has the right to go back to full-time or to the job after the leave.

In all countries increasing educational level of the women influences the timing and number of children by delaying the first birth and decreasing the number of children (Knudsen 1993; Kravdal 1989; Lappegaard 2001b; Gustavsson et al. 2001). The effect of education is first of all due to the fact that a larger proportion of both young women and men stay in the educational system to higher ages and have poorer conditions to establish a family with children while they are studying. Secondly, as Gustavsson et al. (2001) have pointed out, part of the postponement can be caused by career planning, which, by the terminology introduced previously in the present paper, is an integrated and important part of the planning

of life-biographies.

The postponement of first birth was very outspoken among highly educated women from the cohorts who were young at the time of the onset of the fertility decline in the 1970s. A similar decline began somewhat later among the women with shorter education (e.g. Knudsen 1993). Still, women with long educations have fewer children through their lifetime than women with shorter education although some studies and daily-life observations indicate that the average low number of children among these women hides a growing polarization between women with 3 or more children and women completely without children. Various data from the FFS-studies reveal that a stronger difference in the number of children for young women than among women in their late 30s, which supports the notion that the effect of education is primarily a postponement effect as some of the 'missing' fertility is caught up at higher ages (UN 2002).

There are some indications that the highly educated women who begin their childbearing late, have a shorter distance in time to the next child(ren) if they continue after the first child (Hoem 1990; Kravdal 1992). The late first birth means either that the woman has no more children or that she continues quite quickly to have more children.

If the male partner has a long education too, the share of couples with no children increases (Emerek 1986) a fact, which may support the idea of career planning and the idea of difficulties in combining family life and work. However, men with higher education normally have more children than women with similar education as the males' partners often have less education and consequently better possibilities to adapt the work obligations to the family obligations.

Some studies have found that fertility is higher among women working as nurses or teachers or in occupations with good opportunities for flexible work schemes (Hoem 1994; Knudsen 1993; Lappegaard 2001b). Further, there is a strong relationship between educational level and occupational participation and positions, as women with short education often have less permanent attachment to the labor market and in some cases even part-time jobs. The extent to which women are full employed is one of the features that differs between the countries. Overall the participation rate is about 80 percent among mothers with small children in the Nordic countries, although Norway was lagging behind for some years. Still, some differences persist as more than 40 percent of the female workforce in Norway were working part-time the late 1990s (Skrede 2001). In 1999, 9 % of the women and 4 % of the men in Denmark were working part-time. The shares in Finland were exactly of the same magnitude while 27 % of women in Sweden, and 32 % and 37 % in Norway and Iceland, respectively, were working part-time. In these three countries the share of part time employed men was about 6-7 % (Women and Men 1999).

What is evident here is the change from adapting the female participation in the work force to the family pattern (like it was seen in the 1960s and 1970s) to a situation in which the family and the fertility behavior are adapted to the demands from the labor market.

Summarizing on the relation between education, occupation and fertility one may conclude that even in the Nordic countries it is still the women's possibilities

for combining work and family that seem to matter more than that of the males. Further, that students have difficulties in combining studying with childbearing and that strong career orientation from both partners delay and decrease fertility.

Income and unemployment

Educational level and occupational position is closely related to income and financial opportunities and to secure stability and a certain standard of living. At this point it may be argued that one of the characteristics of the welfare state policies is that in case on unemployment or other economic instability state policies for support of the needing being either families or lone parents become active.

For Sweden, Hoem (2000) found a positive relation between the entering into motherhood and the employment levels in the municipalities in which the women lived, a finding also supported by the pro-cyclical pattern of fertility in Sweden described by Andersson (2000). Hank (2001) further showed that the income level of the women increases the 'risk' of giving birth for the first time and stronger for in their 30s than in their 20s (when standardized for calendar year and the age of the woman). A similar relation is not found for third births and for second births the relation is even weaker.

One may conclude from this, that income plays a role in the decision making on establishing a family. However, the same analysis demonstrated slightly increasing first birth intensities among women who had experienced unemployment in the years before. Two possible explanations are discussed in the paper : The women postpone deliberately the birth until they get a job, are more secure in their employment and can use the leave opportunities or – on the other hand – a spell of unemployment may reduce the cost by having a child and thus increase the intensity⁷ (Hank 2001).

Other studies have shown that policies aiming at economic incentives as for instance a home-care allowance will most probably have the strongest effect on higher parities than on entry into motherhood (e.g. Vikat 2002).

Leave

Specific analyses have tried to elucidate the effect of selected changes in rules and regulations, e.g. regarding the leave system (Hoem 1990). This can be done either in one country or in comparative analyses of two or more countries, in which the support is known to be different (e.g. Andersson 2001; Rønsen 1999).

The attention towards the effect of the extended leave systems has increased recently. The most well known effect is probably the so-called 'speed-premium' in Sweden, which resulted in a rather rapid increase in period fertility as the spacing between children were diminished (Hoem 1993). The core of this policy was that women who got pregnant while being on maternity leave could extend that leave until the birth of the next child. Sweden is the country among the Nordic in which the fertility rate has been fluctuating strongest, which has been

⁷ The analysis is solely based on information on the women's situation. To include information on the partner would increase the understanding of the influence of economic security.

related to the changing economic situation and the increasing unemployment (Andersson 2000; Hoem and Hoem 1996). At present, a new research proposal has been launched, aiming at studying 'The Nordic model of Family Welfare' in a comparative perspective⁸, focusing on to what extent this model of welfare and gender equality represents a sustainable road in a broader comparative perspective (Skrede 2001).

While there was some opposition in the beginning - also from trade unions, even trade unions for women solely, primarily based on the anxiety that the women should be marginalized in the workforce if they used the leaves possibilities too much, the leave is now considered as important - especially if it can be organized in a very flexible way (see for instance Rønsen 1999). Sweden is a good example of this because it is possible to divide the leave periods into short periods - depending on the current needs in the family - for instance a couple of weeks at the time when the child starts to go to school (Hoem and Hoem 1996). In his recent comparison of the fertility trends in Norway and Sweden, Andersson (2001) concluded that the changes in the leave schemes in Sweden did have an impact on the fertility trends.

The main principles in the acts and regulations on leave are that the mothers can have a rather long maternity leave after the delivery while the fathers have a short leave period (in Denmark for instance two weeks) immediately after the birth of the child together with the mother. More recently, fathers have been given the possibility to take longer leave at a later time and, further, parental leave has been introduced. In contradiction to the leave periods exclusively for mothers or fathers the parental leave was thought as a possibility for both parents during the first years of the child's life.

Even after the introducing of parental leave directed towards the fathers both statistics on use of leave possibilities and several studies have demonstrated that too few men use take leave. Some of the reasons have been stated as the workplaces being in opposition to the men taking leave and the greater loss of income as most men have higher income than their female partner (e.g. Nygaard Christoffersen 1990).

It remains to be settled whether and in which way the leave schemes influence the propensity to give birth. One might expect that those societies in which the most generous leave schemes have been approved will also have the most positive general attitudes towards childbearing, towards female employment and therefore provide the best environment for family life and gender equality.

Gender equality

It was mentioned above that the share of men who takes parental leave are still way below the share of mothers on leave. One way to change this might be to earmark part of the leave period for the father so that the total leave period will be

⁸ The project will be carried out in cooperation between researchers from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and in MPIDR, Rostock, working on Nordic register data on the populations. All researchers are part of a network established in 2000, aiming at conducting joint or parallel register studies on the situation in the Nordic Countries.

shortened if the father is not taking leave. Another possibility, from the economic point of view, could be to increase the maximum possible compensation during the leave period in order to make the economic loss less for the family. Interestingly, some studies have found that the attitudes of the fathers play a stronger role: A high proportion of men with longer education take leave but this is a result of the fact that a high share of the well educated men express a very strong family orientation (Olsen 2000; Rønsen 1999).

This points in the direction of an understanding of the influence of other factors than the economic. The attempts to increase the fathers' involvement in childcare at an early stage of the family life is partly rooted in the wishes of increasing the gender equality – not just in the labor market but also in the family. The equality in the family includes increasing male involvement in and responsibility for the domestic chores, including care for children. Shared responsibilities at home and that the fathers' take their share of the obligations in relation to the care of children must be seen as a prerequisite if full-time working women will have children. The women have adapted both the number of children and the time spent on domestic chores to be able to manage their occupational activities: During the decades with the great fertility changes in the Nordic countries the women's weekly amount of time spent on domestic chores decreased much more than the males' time increased.

7. Perspectives

The observed differences and the fact that the family forms are developing at different stages at present in the countries of Europe, raises the question whether it is at all possible to believe that we can have the same policy in all countries - and whether we can expect the same effect of specific policy measures.

Regarding the last decades, there is a greater uniformity in the fertility patterns in Europe than in the nuptiality patterns and in the forms of families, which that are developing or have developed (Kuijsten 2002). This makes it more relevant to discuss whether the evolving family forms should be seen as resulting from different preferences and different possibilities to establish a family nucleus.

In the discussions of family formation earlier in this paper, I quoted Giddens (1987) for the statement, that there are uncertainties and risks associated with the changing family forms. The highlighted changes are the decreasing marriage rates, increases in divorce risks, the evolving of new types of families and the decreasing fertility which together have been seen as signs of the loss of importance of the family per se (Beck 1992). Based on these observed changes in fertility pattern and family formation which have been observed in Europe throughout the last decades of the previous century it was debated whether the family as the institution we know is undergoing a process of dissolution. It has also been argued, though, that what is happening is in fact that the family as a frame for the joint lives for individuals is changing in forms, and it can be argued in addition that the new family forms are expressions for a search for a new equilibrium of joint personal life between two partners who are both breadwinners.

In line with this, one might state, that in this rather negative and pessimistic

view Beck had focused on the form, more than the functions of the family. Other scholars (e.g. Kuijsten 1996; Lestaeghe and Moors 2000) view the still ongoing changes and the increasing diversity of family forms as the development of new forms of family life and new forms of private life, as Kuijsten (2002) has expressed it. Individuals are still searching for closeness and for a joint community.

The large amount of dissolutions of families and the rise of new forms imply the emergence of a more diversified picture of the family. Likewise, the society of singles, which is an often used label on e.g. Denmark and Sweden, overlook the fact that many of the individuals who live as singles may be in this situation as a phase between either parental home and partnership or between two partnerships. The many singles are the other side of the coin, when serial monogamy is common (Drewes Nielsen and Knudsen 2001).

One important point is that it may be difficult to understand the development conceptually. At the same time as Beck seems pessimistic about the family, he criticizes the family sociologists of being too narrow-minded as they are not able to imagine other family forms than the forms of today ('today' is here the 1980s). With the changes in society regarding labor market, and the rising individualization, a diversity of family forms may exist side by side. Likewise, the economic and ideational conditions favor this development.

In their recent analysis of the delayed fertility in Europe (Pinelli and De Rose 2001), concludes that modernization, institutional support and a fair gender system encourage changes in family behavior in the direction of fertility delay – but also, although with a weaker effect – a higher fertility. They find a lower fertility in cases where the situation is less progressive. The 'modern' patterns of behavior are easier to combine with fertility in e.g. Sweden (representing Scandinavia in their analysis) than in South Europe, in which the family politics are not supportive for the two-bread-winner-pattern becoming more popular among the young generations. In the terminology used here we can say that the policy in South Europe do not support the attempts to develop a new equilibrium of family forms.

Provocatively, I have stated that the family is chosen by the individuals, who, in the late modern societies are not forced to establish a family even in case of childbirth. What does it mean that people form a family and that they have children by choice and not by need? And how do we assure frames within which individuals as well as couples are given the possibilities to act according to their preferred choices?

Being optimistic, one may view the Nordic welfare state model as giving the couples opportunities for deciding about their life courses and in line with the discussion of the development of new family forms above, the Nordic countries provide opportunities for finding a new equilibrium between family life and working life.

Still, couples in the Nordic countries - and women in particular – experience a number of obstacles in obtaining the number of children they wish for. The families with small children often complain about the lack of time in the daily life and the subsequent fewer possibilities to act in the most desirable ways. The

question on gender equality needs to be revived. There are still deficits in the male involvement, as it is still the women who take the most responsibilities and adapt their career to the time and space bindings in the close relations. Men as fathers must be more involved, especially in countries in which the women's roles are rapidly changing resulting in a very low fertility.

In one way or another it is not possible to believe that women - and men – do not wish to have children. Therefore, the goal should be that the general conditions for family life and for childbearing and child raising should be so satisfactory and flexible for individuals that they will have the children they want and that they can manage to combine family life with working life.

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