

**Gender relations and fertility behaviour:
a qualitative comparative study in France and in Germany**

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When fertility started to decline in Western countries after the baby-boom, specialists first thought this decline was due to a delay in the age at which individuals enter parenthood, and that this delay would lead to a temporary drop in fertility levels. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, it became clear that below replacement fertility was there to last in many European countries. Researchers have singled out four factors, which, together, explain the diversity of fertility levels observed in Europe.

1. A rise in economic uncertainty

In the 1980 and 1990s, the advent of new capitalism led to a deregulation of the economic market and a continued increase in average living standards, but also to less job security and increased income inequality. In this context, young people have become more risk-averse, and invest more in human capital (educational level) and early career achievements ; as a consequence, they delay family formation. Today, economic uncertainty seems to be important to explain the delayed transition to the first child in Southern European countries (Gonzalez and Jurado-Guerrero 2006), and the sharp drop in fertility in Eastern Europe following the political transition in the early 1990s (Philipov 2002).

2. Rising individualisme

The value changes taking place since the late 1960s reflect a contestation of traditional power relations (gender, class) : individuals increasingly contest existing institutions, want to be in charge of creating their own lives, and value non-materialistic life goals. The Second Demographic Transition theory related these cultural changes to the great shifts observed in marriage patterns, and also predicted that they would lead to lower fertility. Micro-level work shows indeed that individuals with progressive values have a lower probability of becoming a parent in all European countries (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004).

3. Public and private solutions to combine work and family

The driving factor behind contemporary fertility differentials in Europe, however, seems to be the availability of public childcare infrastructures. Many studies have classified the European countries according to their family policies, distinguishing the amount of funds allocated, the diversity of measures included in family policies, the amount and shape of public child care, and relating these specificities to each countries socio-political history (Hantrais 2004). Differences in public childcare policies seems to explain why fertility levels are relatively high in Nordic and francophone countries, and relatively low in Southern and German-speaking European countries (McDonald 2006).

4. Gendered parental roles and women's entry into the labour-market

Since the 1970s economic and cultural changes led women to enter massively the labour force, while parental and domestic tasks continue to fall predominantly on their shoulders. New Home Economics theories related women's higher income opportunities to increased costs of childrearing, and lower fertility. This relationship between women's work and lower fertility is found in every European country at the individual level ; however, the relationship is reversed when comparing not individuals but countries since countries with higher proportion of working women are also those where public or private childcare facilities are most developed (Engelhardt and Prskawetz. 2004). It still remains unclear how concrete gender relations within couples shape fertility intentions and behaviour. A hypothesis in this domain is that a more equal distribution of the family responsibilities could decrease the cost of childbearing for women and then have a positive impact on fertility (Diprete et al. 2003).

Economic and policy explanations have been favoured so far in this research domain, while cultural and gender explanations are less developed, although their crucial importance is recognized by most experts. The aim of this paper is to revisit the link between gender relations and fertility in France and Germany. In these two countries gender relations can be considered as rather equal as regards the division of house work between men and women in comparison to the South European countries, but less equal than the Nordic countries (Eurostat on 2006). Women's employment rates are similar in both countries: about 72 %. On the other hand, among women who have one or two children under twelve years this rate decreases to 62 % for the German women whereas 69 % of the French women are working. Furthermore, the part-time work concerns 66 % of the German women with two children against only 32 % in France (Eurostat on 2005). The employment of the French mothers (often full-time) is then facilitated by childcare policies from the early childhood : In 2005, the childcare services offered places to 43 % of the children under three years (DREES on 2007). Conversely, the German family policies until quite recently did not finance collective structures of childcare, obliging most of the mothers to stop working or to reduce their working time (Salles 2006). In West Germany, only 9,6 % of the children under three had a place in a childcare service in 2005 (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend on 2006). The German fertility is among the lowest in European countries, with 1,3 children per woman, whereas France, with 1,94 children per woman, has one of the highest fertility levels (Eurostat on 2005).

Since couples in France and Germany have a similar way to share housework, but sharply contrasted professional and fertility behaviour, the comparison between these two countries is particularly interesting for the study of the relation between gender relations and fertility.

The purpose of this paper is to try to understand the relationship between resources, gender practices and perceptions among young adults in childbearing ages on the one hand and the fertility behaviour and intentions on the other one.

The specific aims in this study is to understand and describe :

- How individuals fertility behaviour (intentions and realization) are connected to their representations of gender roles, to those who prevailed in their childhood, and in the specificities of the gender structure in France and in Germany ?
- In which way the share of parental and domestic tasks within the couples is connected to the fertility behaviour for men and for women ?

Method

We use an innovative methodology, which consists in the analysis of comparable individual-level qualitative data collected in France and in Germany, completed by in-depth contextual knowledge of each country. To realize the semi-structured biographical interviews we used the same interview guide in France as in Germany. The qualitative data offers the possibility to analyze complex phenomena verified up to here only with the quantitative data. The comparison between these two countries, France and Germany, characterized by different family policies, also allows to integrate a micro-macro approach : the practices and the representations of the respondents are studied in each institutional and cultural context, to understand the interactions between the micro and the macro level specificities.

The interview guide treat the following themes: professional, residential, marital and reproductive history, quality and projects of the conjugal relation (if any), family background and current social network, representations of gender roles and division of tasks within the couple, representations of the sense of children and of the conditions to have children, evolution of fertility intentions over the life cycle, knowledge about different childcare options and effective childcare arrangements.

The first step was to collect discourses on parenting from a set of individuals concerned by this topic and selected according to similar criteria in France and in Germany. The in-depth interviews were thus conducted with men and women in the average childbearing ages, in West Germany and in France. The French data collection procedure was meant to replicate closely that of the West German study. A

city was first selected (Poitiers, 209 000 inhabitants), of approximately the same size than the city in the German study (Lübeck). To try to control for primary socialization, we selected the respondents who went to school in the same small city at the same time.

The total sample consists of 27 semi-structured biographical interviews conducted in France from October 2006 to June 2007 and 35 conducted in Germany in 2005. These data are first analyzed using a thematic approach, where we cut each interview according to a set list of themes. This first analysis sets the grounds for a case study (Becker 2002), where a portrait is drawn for each respondent : the portrait shows how the different parameters of interest are combined to produce the outcomes of interest. Three types of parameters will be listed : 1. Objective socio-economic characteristics, such as age, income, educational level. 2. The share of concrete parental practices and domestic tasks. 3. Attitudes and representations about gender relations. Based on these portraits, we will construct a typology focusing on fertility decisions and gender roles.

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