

# *Fathers in Europe –*

*Mobile children, escaping fathers?.*

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***Doing Family.***

***Wissenschaftliche Fachtagung des DJI mit  
Parlamentarischem Abend.***

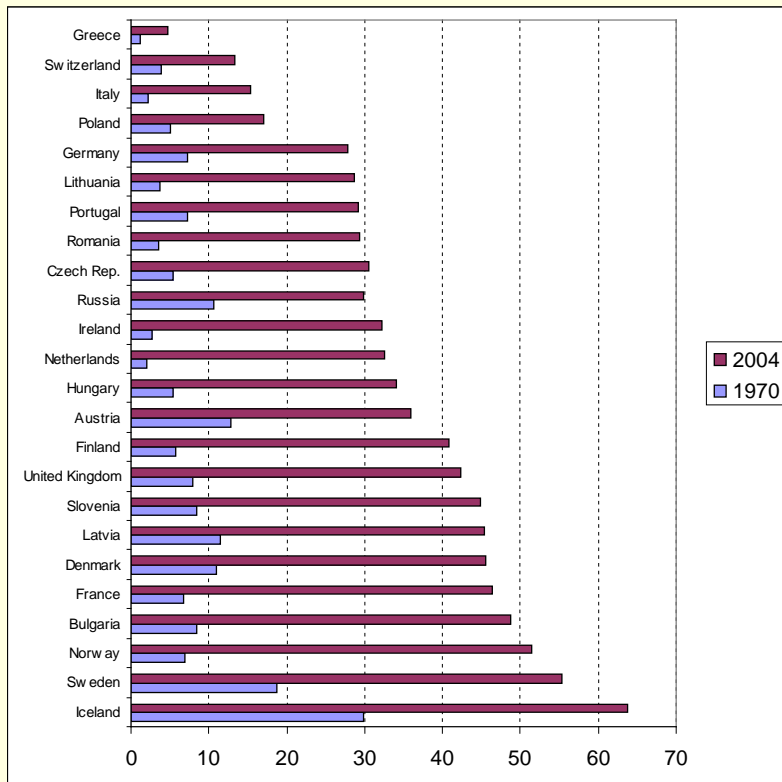
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# Father escape – mobile children

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- Forms of father escape:
  - Father 'escape' from child responsibilities
  - Fatherhood 'escape': childless men
  - Classic: Non-resident fathers without contact with children will be less emphasised here
- Growing ambivalence towards children among men?
  - Mobile children - a solution to parental separation.
  - Mobile children - contact with fathers across homes.
  - Mobile children: 'best interests' of who?

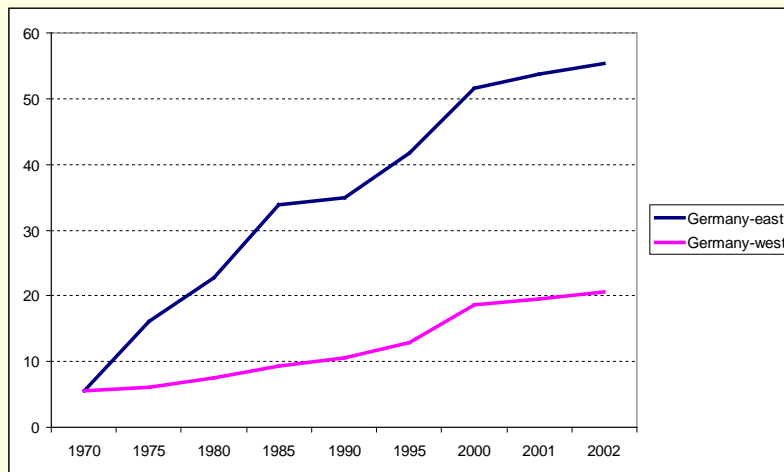
# Marriage escape?



- Since the 1970s more children are born outside marriage.
- In Germany almost 30%, in Scandinavia 50% (2004).
- Many of these children will not to live with their father on an every day basis.
- They are likely to travel between two parental homes.

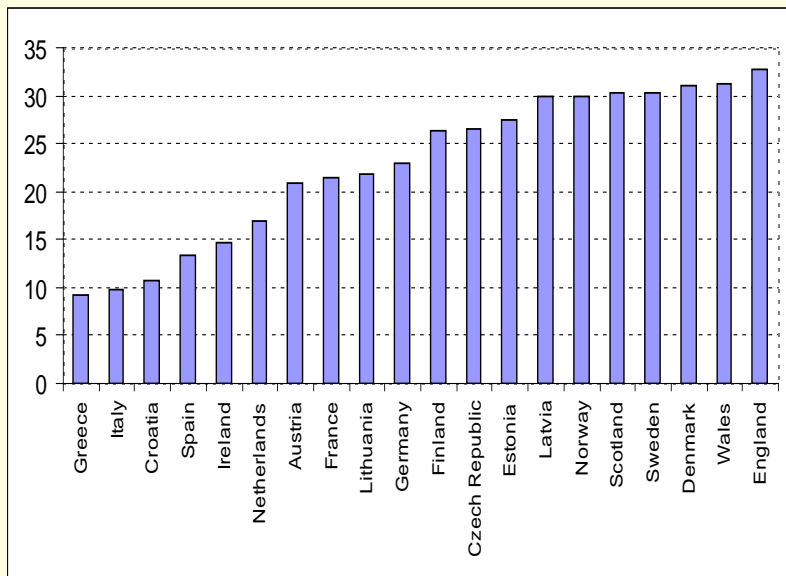
# The two Germanies: differing levels, same trend

Children born outside marriage since 1970.



- Outside marriage – higher fertility:
- *"It makes absolutely no demographic sense to cling to traditional family structures, on the contrary: The more equality given to both men and women in working life, the more children are born."* (Berlin Institute for Population and Development (2008: 9))
- Unobserved consequences:
  - Non-married births implies more children living with the mother and more mobile children.

# More mother-only families



Source: *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) 2001/2002* (Currie et al., 2004).

- Across Europe 20 – 30% of the children (11, 13 and 15 years) do not live with both parents – almost always without the father.
- In the UK and Scandinavia 30-35% do not.
- The degree to which these children commute between homes vary.

# Germany: part of the picture

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- In 1998 17 percent of children under 18 lived with two unmarried parents or in a lone parent family.
- One fifth of all children born in the 1990s has or will have experienced divorce by the time they reach adulthood – with considerable differences between West and East Germany.

- Source: Jurczyk, Olk and Zeiher, 2004 (COST A19 German country report)

# Father's hesitance?

Time with children/daddy quota and fertility

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- Norway: during the 1990s father's time with children did not expand.
- Sweden: father's taking 'extended' parental leave have less 'risk' of a second child, than father's taking 'moderate leave'.
- Getting father's into the home is uphill.

# Diverging trends of a new fatherhood

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- More fathers are separated from their children in everyday life.
- Time with children after break-up is a yardstick for good parenting
  - Wade and Smart, 2003.
- A new logic of parenthood: from everyday to shift-time.
  - Picture: Babies delivered at the door. Danish newspaper Politiken

# Children as family nomades

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- Diversification of family patterns produce mobile children.
- Main features are
  - More children born into consensual unions.
  - More children live apart from one parent – usually the father.
  - Ideologies of children's need for both parents.

# Time and space:

a parent – child conflict covered up by ”best interests of the child”?

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## ■ Parents:

- More 'childfree'
- More time for partners and leisure
- More time for work

## ■ Children

- Less 'parentfree'
- Less time for their own activities
- More 'virtual' space

■ (Skjørten et al.,: Shared homes (2007))

# Mobile children: a feature of modern childhood

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- Mobile children symbolises modern childhood where time rather than space defines family life.
- Mobility affects not only travelling children but also friends.
- Mobile children captures a condition of childhood about which little is known.

# Equal sharing of parenthood – a politically supported growth.

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- In Norway 10% of children have two homes - equal sharing in 2004. In 1996 only 4% did.
- In Sweden 18% of the children have two homes – equal sharing.
- Shared parenthood is seen as:
  - Promoting gender equality
  - Counteracting bad impacts of 'absent fathers'
  - Future benefit for children.

# Two homes - equal shares: when does it work?

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- Parents views – sharing works when:
  - Distance is short
  - Conflict is low
  - Routines (upbringing, food, bedtime, TV and PC-use etc.) are shared
- Children's views – difficult when a new step-parent enter:
  - Longer distance between parental homes
  - Fewer family celebrations with both parents
  - Fewer shared routines (step-parents can have own children with other routines).
- Children's possibility influencing visiting schedules:
  - Lowest when conflicts between parents are stronger.
    - Flexible schedules more difficult when parents do not talk together.
    - Influence is less when most needed.
  - (Skjørten et al.,: Shared homes (2007))

# Children are transported to school, but may travel alone between parental homes.

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- Risky travels:
  - Most obvious with long distance travelling
  - Many children travel alone by air, bus and train.
  - Media reports about children not being met at destination.
- Loss of rootedness:
  - Even with short distances children do not have friends across parental homes.
  - How to play a football game if the keeper is away?
  - Third culture kids: global nomades integrating parts of 'birth culture' and a new country into a culture different from both.

# Children's space: dilemmas of control and freedom.

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- **Domestication:** activities are located in houses or areas fenced in by walls and hedges which control children's agency by the structural power of spatial borderlines and the size of areas.
- **Insularisation:** children's spaces form an archipelago of islands with varying distances between them.
- **Dilemmaes:** Mobile children are located in parental homes, often without friends around. They move between 'home-islands' with varying locations as parents form new families.
- Mobility between two homes adds to domestication and insularisation while dilemmaes are silenced.

■ Source: Jurczyk, Olk and Zeiher, 2004 (COST A19 German country report) p 752-753

# Between a rock and a hard place: children's conceptions of fairness.

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- English children about their experiences with travelling between parental homes. Many say equal sharing is "fair". But feel over time their own needs are neglected. They ask if they are part of their parent's "equality equation" or an object to be shared along with other belongings.
  - Wade & Smart 2003
- Norwegian children tell they do not want to choose between parents. They find that both parents have an equal right to them. Few question this.
  - (Skjørten et al. 2007)

# Best interests of who: children, parents society?

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- Children navigating between family networks accords with a society in need of people 'lighter on their feet' (Bauman, 2001).
- Children's mobility between homes is sometimes described as competence building.
  - Travelling prepares children to cope with the needs of a society where differing routines and practices, habits and interactions are essential (Sennett, 1998).
  - Are children 'captives' of struggles serving a future society while detrimental to their own welfare?

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