Doing family under multi-local conditions

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„The Everyday Life of Multi-Local Families: Concepts, Methods and the Example of Post-Separation Families”
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Conceptual Challenges

• How can we define families which do not fit into the household-centred models of family, like the ‘nuclear family’?
• How can we understand the plurality, complexity, and fluidity of today’s family lives?
• How can we approach the diverse practices families develop to deal with multi-locality?
• How can we understand the geographies of familial relationships of multi-local families?
Outline

1. Definition of Family
2. The Concept of 'Doing Family'
3. Multi-local everyday life: challenges for 'doing family'
4. Conclusions
1. Our idea of ‘family’

Family is a fluid social network

- based on emotions and centred at personal care relations between generations and genders.
- including a high variety of relationships
- characterised by different spatialities
2. The Concept of ‘Doing Family’ (1/4)

‘Families are what they do’ (Silva/Smart 1999)

→ Families are created through sets of everyday practices

The Concept of ‘Doing Family’ or ‘Family Practices’

Takes up:

- ‘Doing gender’ (West/Zimmermann 1987)
- ‘Daily conduct of life’ (alltägliche Lebensführung; Voß 1991) or
- ‘Familial conduct of life’ (familiale Lebensführung; Rerrich 1994, Jürgens 2001)
- Concepts of action-oriented social geography
  (settings; Weichhart 2004, ‘locales’; Werlen 1997)
## Basic forms of ‘Doing Family’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating social ties while maintaining boundaries</td>
<td>Boundary work, boundary management (Nippert-Eng 1996)</td>
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<td>Coordinating individual patterns of daily life management into a joint daily life management</td>
<td>On temporal, spatial, social and emotional level</td>
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<td>Constructing intimacy, a sense of belonging together, we-ness</td>
<td>Everyday and biographical interaction processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Displaying family’</td>
<td>To convey the message ‘this is how we do family and it works’</td>
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### Family Practices

| ...take place in the course of everyday activities and routines; 'quality moments' | while sharing dinner, reading a bedtime story, while waiting or doing household chores |
| ...take place at specific places | at home, at the workplace, at school, in supermarkets, while driving,… |
| ...are embedded in broader contexts | individuals use concrete ‘settings’ or ‘locales’ for family practices (Weichhart 2003, Werlen 1997) |
| | social, spatial, temporal, economic, cultural conditions on different spatial levels |
2. The Concept of ‘Doing Family’ (4/4)

**How family is ‘done’?**

- Family is ‘done’ by all family members: adults and children
- Gender shapes family practices
- Individuals ‘do’ family by resorting to their individual resources, orientations, and abilities
- Family practices are shaped by individual concepts of ‘good family life’ as well as by ‘family habitus’
What are the challenges of families who are living a multi-local every-day life?
3. Multi-local everyday life: challenges for 'doing family' (1/4)

Multi-localisation – decision to live at two or more places

New spatio-temporal patterns of family life shaped by

- number of actively multi-locally living family members
- location of and distances between their residences
- duration, frequency, rhythms, and regularity of their shuttling

New contours of the communal life of family members

- alternating numbers of family members living together at one place
- alternating (shorter or longer) periods of co-presence and absence
- contact mobility – important element of daily family life

New everyday practices have to be developed in daily family life

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Different requirements for 'actively' and 'passively' multilocal family members.

Source: Michaela Schier, Schumpeter Research Group, DJI, Munich; Drawing following Bernstein (1988)

New requirements for ‘doing family’ arising from multi-locality

Coping with…
1. …being repeatedly on the move from here to there and backwards
2. …daily life and social-spatial embeddedness (social integration, territorial belonging) between and at multiple places
are requirements concerning first of all actively multi-local family members.

Coping with…
1. …managing the ‘choreography’ of joint everyday life
2. …long or short residential distances
3. …intermittent co-presence and absence
4. …maintaining intimacy at a distance
are requirements for actively as well as passively multi-local family members.

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Practices for ‘doing multi-local family’

1. Family life deviating from normative model
   • redefining family ties, rights, tasks, obligations
   • greater effort for ‘displaying family’
2. New organisational and coordinating tasks
3. Maintaining intimacy and feelings of we-ness at a distance as well as in short times of co-presence
   • creating ‘quality moments’ during short periods of co-presence
   • substituting practices for spatial co-presence: telecommunication, gifts, financial support
   • Visits – contact mobility

=> Development of mobile, translocal and local family practices
4. Conclusions

The added value of a combination of geographical and sociological approaches to study late modern family life:

- Defining family as a fluid social network => focus on boundary-crossing dynamics of family practices
- The concept of ‘doing family’ => opportunity to approach the plurality, complexity, and fluidity of today’s family lives
- Focus on everyday practices => opportunity to comprehend how families manage their multi-local life
- Action-oriented social geography approach => families use spatiality for practising family, spatial arrangements form family life, families ‘make geography’
- Problems, as well as new opportunities, for families get visible.

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Thank you for your attention!

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Cited literature


