Multilocality and the Pluralisation of Living Arrangements

How and Why has Family Life Changed over the Course of the Last 50 Years?

DJI Workshop: The Everyday Life of Multi-Local Families. Concepts, Methods and the Example of Post-Separation Families
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Introductory Remarks

• Main *questions*:
  – In what ways has family life in Europe and the “western world” become more “multilocal” over the course of the last 50 years?
  – Why?

• What does *multilocality* mean (in this context)?
  – A family or living arrangement is living in *more than one household* (maybe even with a large distance between these households).

• Main *theses*:
  – Reasons are complex and interrelated.
  – Reasons are routed in a broad process of (post) modernisation of societies.
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Main Trends in Family Life

The multiple trends in European family life can be summarised as a *pluralisation* or *de-standardisation of living arrangements*:

The strong statistical and normative dominance of one *family model* (the Talcott Parsons-type nuclear family) and one *family biography* has left more space for a plurality of forms and pathways.
Main Trends in Family Life

Main trends regarding the *forms* of living arrangements are:

- more people living as single (also among young adults)
- more couples living in separate households
- more couples living together without being married / fewer (first) marriages
- more divorces / more post-divorce families
- declining fertility / more childlessness (with recent counter trends in some countries)
- legalisation of homosexual couples
Main Trends in Family Life

Main trends regarding the organisation of living arrangements are:

- a higher labour market participation of women / mothers (often in part time)
- a somewhat stronger engagement of men in housework and childcare
- a higher externalisation of childcare
- a change in attitudes towards equal gender roles
- a less authoritarian relationship between parents and children
- rising demands regarding parenthood
Main Trends in Family Life

Main trends regarding the *family biography* are:

- higher ages at leaving parents home
- higher ages at first marriage
- higher ages at first birth
- less synchronism in events marking adulthood:
  - leaving parents home, being financially independent,
    having a partner, cohabiting, marriage, family foundation
- longer life spans / longer “empty nest” phase
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Household Sizes in Germany

Data: Destatis (German Statistical Office)
“Deviant” Family Forms in Germany

Data: Destatis (German Statistical Office)
Total Fertility Rates in Europe

Data: eurostat
Mean Age of Mothers at Birth in Europe

Data: eurostat
Non-Marital Births in Europe

Data: eurostat
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A Core Aspect: From Cohabitation to Multilocality

- “Couples” and “families” used to be defined and operationalised as *household units* (with a parent-child relationship).

- Today it is emphasised that *family relations* go *beyond household boundaries*:
  - partners in a relationship may live in separate households.
  - Adult children may move out (during the week) and still maintain close relationships with their parents.
  - Also (fully) adults and their elderly parents often maintain close relationships that can be regarded as family ties.
  - Hans Bertram (2000) has established the term *multi-local multi-generation families* (“multilokale Mehrgenerationenfamilie”).
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Life Course-Related Multilocality

- Couple formation *50 years ago* ...
  - Social norms define *marriage* a pre-condition for legitimate intimacy and sexuality. Married couples are expected to *move in together* and have family of their own soon.
  - Dating partners typically live with their parents and less degrees of freedom.
  - Phases of dating are short and do not establish an own living arrangement yet.

- Couple formation *today* ...
  - Social norms expect couples to try each other out by having a phase of unmarried cohabitation before marriage and a phase of intimate dating before moving in together.
  - Educational mobility (distant universities, internships,...) may hinder a couple from moving in together.
Life Course-Related Multilocality

- New norms regarding *couple formation* imply:
  - Instead of a clear cut between youth and adulthood there is a new phase of *post-adolescence*.
  - Living arrangements start with phases before marriage and family foundation, including a *pre-cohabitation relationship*.
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Job-Related Multilocality

- As recent research indicates, job-related *mobility* has increased over the course of at least 20 years:
  - Young age cohorts have collected more experience with being mobile for the job than elder ones (*JobMob* project / Schneider/Collet 2010)
  - Commutes and moves across administrative regions (in Germany) are increasing (Haas 2000).
Experience of Job-Related Mobility by Age / Cohort

What we would expect from a life course effect
(collecting more experience by aging)

What actually happens – additionally:
an increase in experience over cohorts

Data: JobMob 2007, people working for pay
Job-Related Multilocality

Theoretical arguments make it plausible that mobility requirements should have increased:

- Globalised economic relationships require mobility.
- Knowledge-based jobs require and allow more mobility than industrial work.
- Short-term contracts imply more frequent changes of jobs and of work places.
- Dual earner couples are rather affected by mobility requirements than single earner couples.
Job-Related Multilocality

- Depending on the employees choice how to deal with these requirements this may lead to job-related recurring mobility and/or multilocality:
  - Employees may relocate with the partner (residential mobility without multilocality).
  - Employees may relocate without the partner (residential mobility followed by multilocality).
  - Employees may commute daily (recurring mobility without multilocality).
  - Employees may commute weekly or with overnights away from home (recurring mobility with “part-time multilocality”).
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Family-Related Multilocality

An increasing number of family arrangements includes *children and their separated or divorced parents* maintaining social ties:

- Divorce (and probably also separation) has been rising.
- Shared custody has become more common.
- Railway companies and airlines have started offering special assistance for children travelling alone (e.g. between the households of their parents).
Divorce Rates of Marriage Cohorts by Marriage Duration in Germany

Data: Destatis (German Statistical Office), Computation: BiB
Family-Related Multilocality

Increases in separation and divorce are rooted in changes of gender roles and of values:

- Women working for pay are not economically dependent on their husbands.
- Economically independent women come with more self-esteem into the relationship, claiming equal rights and benefits.
- Expectations towards a (good) relationship have increased.
- Social norms rather encourage leaving an unsatisfying relationship instead of staying together under all circumstances.
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Lifestyle-Related Multilocality

Value change and individualisation reshape individual priorities and norms, provoking and allowing freely chosen multilocality:

- Desires for individual freedom, independence, autonomy, and self-fulfilment have become more important.
- These desires can be realised more easily in an own apartment – despite being in a relationship – as a “living apart together” couple (with individual styles of decorating, individual standards of cleanliness, individual routines, ...).
- Social norms expect partners in a relationship to be more autonomous than spouses used to be.
- The economic situation of young adults (supported by their parents) often allows affording a separate household.
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Concluding Remarks

• There are several forms of multilocal living arrangements and different reasons for them becoming more important.
• Most of these reasons are rooted in broad societal changes in late modernity, especially:
  – change from industrial to post-industrial production,
  – globalisation of economies with rising uncertainties,
  – female emancipation,
  – value change and individualisation.
• Some of these influences represent increasing degrees of freedom, some new constraints.
• Multilocal family life must be regarded as a highly diverse – and yet characteristic for late modernity.
Thank you very much for your attention!

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