

International Workshop

The Everyday Life of Multi-Local Families

Concepts, Methods and the Example of Post-Separation Families

20th-21st October 2011

German Youth Institute/ Deutsches Jugendinstitut, Munich, Germany

Workshop Concept

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The Schumpeter Research Group 'Multi-Local Families in Germany', funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and hosted by the German Youth Institute (DJI) in Munich, Germany, has completed its first qualitative case study on the 'multi-local life of post-separation families'. The workshop will use the study as a starting point for a discussion of the Schumpeter Group's research procedures and findings with invited scholars.

The first day of the workshop will deal with conceptual as well as methodological approaches to multi-local family life as one of numerous new settings for post-modern family life. The second day of the workshop will focus on the example of multi-local family life after separation and divorce. The management of multi-local everyday family life, translocal connections and relations, multiple belonging and the resulting mobility of adults and children in post-separation families will be discussed from various perspectives.

Until now, multi-local family life has been studied and debated in such diverse research contexts as migration research, mobility studies, housing studies, research on post-separation families and research on dual career, long-distance and commuter couples. So far, hardly any connections have been established between these different research contexts. The workshop aims to foster the exchange between international and interdisciplinary scholars with respect to the various conceptual and methodological approaches to multi-sited family life. Thanks to the international framework of the event, it will be possible to discuss research findings

from various national contexts (e.g., legal regulations and the welfare state). The setting will also allow participants to reflect on the limitations of their own approaches and provide opportunities for further research cooperation and exchange.

20th October 2011

**1st Day Multi-locality – A New Condition for Postmodern Family
Life: Conceptual and Methodological Approaches**

Families have changed significantly in the past forty years. Economic and social changes have meant that in an increasing number of cases 'family life no longer happens in one place but is scattered between several different locations' (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 91), sometimes even connecting locations spread across different nations. With new modes of travel and communication, families have become more flexible in both dispersing and localizing members in different localities or even in different parts of the world (Ong 1999: 127). One of these changes involves the increasing necessity of job mobility as a consequence of globalization, flexibilisation and deregulation, which among other things forces parents to commute between their homes near the workplace and the family's original place of residence (Schneider 2010, Reuschke 2010). In addition, social developments can be observed such as new lifestyles, the normalization of dual-earner families based on increased female labour orientation in Western countries as well as the high separation and divorce rate, elements which all cause family life to be scattered across several householdsⁱ (Schneider 2009, Green 1997, Schier 2010).

Various new forms of family life have thus emerged, forms which differ from the still-existing traditional monolocally residing core family. In the literature these forms have been called 'living apart together families', 'commuter or weekend families', 'split families', 'binuclear families', 'transnational or multi-local families', 'astronaut families', 'flying-in and out families', etc. (Waters 2001, Bryceson/Vuorela 2002, Kaczmarek/Sibbel 2008, Ahrons 1979, Bertram 2001) There are major differences between these various types of families, but all of them have the following fundamental aspects in common: Parents and their minor children live separate from each other at different places for various periods of time. Parents and/or their children commute in order to see each other according to different rhythms and with varying frequency. Nevertheless, despite the separation and multi-locality of the family, family members look out for each other. They provide emotional care and guidance for each other from afar, share resources and maintain close social relations. With the emergence of the bourgeois model of the family elements such as spatial nearness, co-residence and contacts in spatial co-presence are considered essential for the

development of a good parent-child relationship, of a good partnership as well as of family life in general (Lenz 2003). In all of the other aforementioned forms of family life, these aspects are absent or present on a temporary basis only.

These developments not only evoke new research questions but also have serious conceptual and methodological consequences for research in family issues. For a long time, family research was dominated by household-centred conceptions and the use of quantitative research methods. The traditional family model is based on the idea that married parents and their children live together in one household. Referring to data from household surveys, researchers still often assume that the main family contexts are limited to household boundaries. In doing so, essential aspects of real family relations and experiences are obscured. This has been criticized since the 1980s (Bien/Marbach 1991, Widmer et al. 2008). The family can no longer be conceived as a well-defined entity based on married partners and their children living together in one household. New conceptual and methodological approaches need to be found in order to look at family relationships beyond the domestic unit, to study existing interdependencies between family members who live in different places, to shed light on the day-to-day 'management' of pluri-local family lives and to study the consequences of multi-local family arrangements.

First Session: Conceptualizing Family Life beyond Household Boundaries and in a Mobile World

As has been shown above, there is a need for developing theoretical perspectives on the family which emphasize its specific temporal and spatial nature, its interconnectedness and the way in which it 'functions' across household boundaries. Furthermore, the embeddedness of the family in more than one locality, society, welfare state, etc., has to be taken into account.

In order to describe and understand family life today, it thus seems important to develop space-sensitive conceptions of the family. In the last decade diverse proposals for conceptualizing forms of family life, which are spread over several households, have been developed (Widmer 2010, Bien/Marbach 1991, Morgan 2011, Smart 2007, Mazzucato/Schans 2011). Combining approaches from different research contexts, this session aims to discuss some of these conceptualizations.

Second Session: Searching for an Appropriate Research Strategy on Multi-local Spaces and Family Relationships beyond Household Boundaries

With the criticism of ‘methodological localism’ⁱⁱ in mind, this session aims to discuss new ways of conducting empirical research on the plurality of contemporary everyday family life. The papers in the session deal with the following questions: What are appropriate methods for researching the multi-local everyday life of families, including multi-local activities, life-worlds and different forms of mobility? How can the appropriate research unit be defined? Are mobile and multi-sited research techniques (Marcus 1995, Büscher et al. 2011) needed in order to research multi-local phenomena? Which methods are useful for researching family members’ perceptions of geographic spaces and their multi-local way of living? Which methodological difficulties arise when researching family relationships across household boundaries? Which methods provide adequate research access to the different perspectives of family members – children and adults – as well as to the family’s point of view?

21th October 2011

2nd Day: Multi-local Everyday Life of Post-Separation Families: An Example

In contrast to what may be suggested by terms such as the ‘incomplete family’ or the ‘broken home’, families do not really break up as a result of divorce or separation. In fact, during the separation the family system is basically reorganized. Constance Ahrons (1979) proposed using the term ‘binuclear family system’. She stresses in particular the reorganization of relationships between the members of the nuclear family in the context of establishing a maternal or a paternal household. However, the separation not only means the reorganization of family relationships, but also – and this will be the guiding thought for the papers presented during this second day of the workshop – it means a spatiotemporal reorganization of family life (Hater 2003, Haugen 2010, Schier 2009). New requirements associated with ‘doing family’ emerge, and parents and their children have to develop new practices in order to (re-)organise the conduct of their daily life. They do so on the basis of national foundations such as the welfare state or the law.

Third Session: Living in/Commuting between Two Families – Children as Multi-local Agents

In post-separation families, children become multi-local agents as they often commute more or less frequently between the mother's and the father's home. Either they have one primary residence and visit the other parent more or less frequently (primary residence model) or they spend equal amounts of time at both parents' homes (shared residence model).

Regardless of the residence model, the children become frequent travellers between the homes, using different means of transport to overcome space and time. They sometimes travel alone and sometimes their mother or father accompanies them (Jensen 2007, 2009).

Furthermore, they become frequent border-crossers of different familial life-worlds, which also requires mental transitions in order to be able to act appropriately and successfully in the individual's current life-world. Overall, children are seen as active agents who deal with the challenges of commuting between different family life-worlds and continuously master the transitions between these worlds (Smart et al. 2001, Schier/Proske 2010).

But besides the challenge of travelling between family locations and the mental transitioning that goes with this, commuting between two homes also means that children are located in two places. In each place, for example, they have a particular social network and neighbourhood and particular daily routines, and they may also be involved in particular activities outside the home. The ways in which life is different for children in two places is greatly influenced by the distance between the two homes. Commuting between two family life-worlds affects children's identity, the way in which they 'construct' family as well as their notions of home and belonging, notions which go beyond the simplistic concept of singularity.

Fourth Session: Doing Post-Separation Family: New Challenges for Parents and their New Partners

In multi-local post-separation families parents have to adjust their daily routines to the children who commute in and out of the family. Sometimes they live with more children, sometimes with fewer children and sometimes entirely without children. Especially when they have new partners who have children of their own, this often results in continuous changes in the number of household members.

As a consequence, parents develop new practices and new daily routines in order to cope with the varying number of household members (Jurczyk et al. 2009). This includes the reconciliation of work and family: new working and childcare arrangements have to be developed. The commuting of children between two family homes requires organizational work from the parents. Depending on the children's ages,

the distance between the homes as well as the residence model, arrangements have to be made between the parents regarding an upcoming stay, children need to be picked up or taken home, common time needs to be scheduled and the stay has to be prepared.

Following the separation, the parents need to make decisions concerning the living and visiting arrangements. This process is highly gendered. Different models of residence lead to different requests by family members concerning the organization of everyday family life. This is an opportunity but also a challenge for separated parents (Smart/Neale 1999). Those parents, for example, who choose the shared residence model mainly face the challenge of staying in close contact with each other on a cooperative basis in order to coordinate their children's daily life. Parents who choose the primary residence model, on the other hand, have to 'live' their roles as mother or father from afar, which means creating and maintaining intimacy across the spatial divide.

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ⁱ The term is used here and in the following to apply to the notions of 'household-dwelling'.

ⁱⁱ Following the discussion about 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer/Glick-Schiller 2003; Pries 2008).