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Living arrangements in Germany - Pluralisation or Polarisation? The change of the social institution ,FAMILY‘

by

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1. Background

In the literature of the social and demographic sciences, „increasing individualisation“ has become a well-accepted thesis for explaining changes in birth and marriage frequency and changes in living arrangements. Often, society's trend toward individualisation is also seen in connection with an increasing diversity of living arrangements. The present paper considers whether such a trend is actually occurring in Germany and, if so, what its specific features are. In addition, it asks whether Germany differs from other countries in this regard and considers whether any explanations for the actual situation are available.

But first of all: what is meant by „individualisation“? Individualisation can be seen from both a macro-perspective and a micro-perspective. On the large scale, the individualised society is characterised by a changed framework for individual actions. In these terms, individualisation is understood as a multiplication of the options available to the modern individual (Jagodzinski and Klein 1998: 16). The diversity of options results from a reduction of behavioural norming by social institutions, large social groups, traditions and standards. On the individual level, the diversity of society's proffered options appears as freedom of choice. In the micro-perspective, individualisation is understood as a process in which individuals increasingly select behavioural patterns on the basis of autonomous decisions. They no longer orient their behaviour to traditional, institutionalised norms, biographical patterns or living arrangements; instead, they use their own individual orientation as the basis for their daily thoughts and actions. In the sociological literature, this process is referred to as „subjectification of socialisation“. It enlarges the diversity of living arrangements and patterns of conduct on society's aggregate level.

This is the general focus that, in the following, is applied to the issue of individualisation and pluralisation of living arrangements. Two questions in particular become especially important. Firstly: How do changes in the social institutions of marriage and family influence choices of living arrangements?

Secondly: What role have Germany's predominating family policies been playing in the genesis of the current structure of living arrangements? These questions shall guide the data analysis below. The answers shall then lead to a review of the individualisation thesis, from a demographic perspective, and then to a specification of the thesis.

In preparation for this analysis, however, the ways in which social institutions arise, and the ways in which they standardise behaviour, must be described. Social institutions provide a structure for human activity, and they regulate activity in individual situations. Social institutions such as „marriage and family“ no longer have an unlimited claim to validity in modern societies, however; they have to be deliberately recognised by the individuals concerned. People therefore influence the structure of such institutions through their conduct.

The social institution „marriage and family“ comes about in two ways. On the one hand, it is prescribed by society, and it is an element of the cultural system as expressed by legal provisions, norms and traditions. On the other hand, it is effected by individuals' ability to establish institutions by marrying or remaining single or by having children or remaining childless. Selection of patterns of conduct strengthens or weakens the institution, much as legal amendments strengthen or weaken it.

While there is no dispute that the institution is undergoing such change, there is controversy regarding the direction of the change, and this is a focus of the present paper.

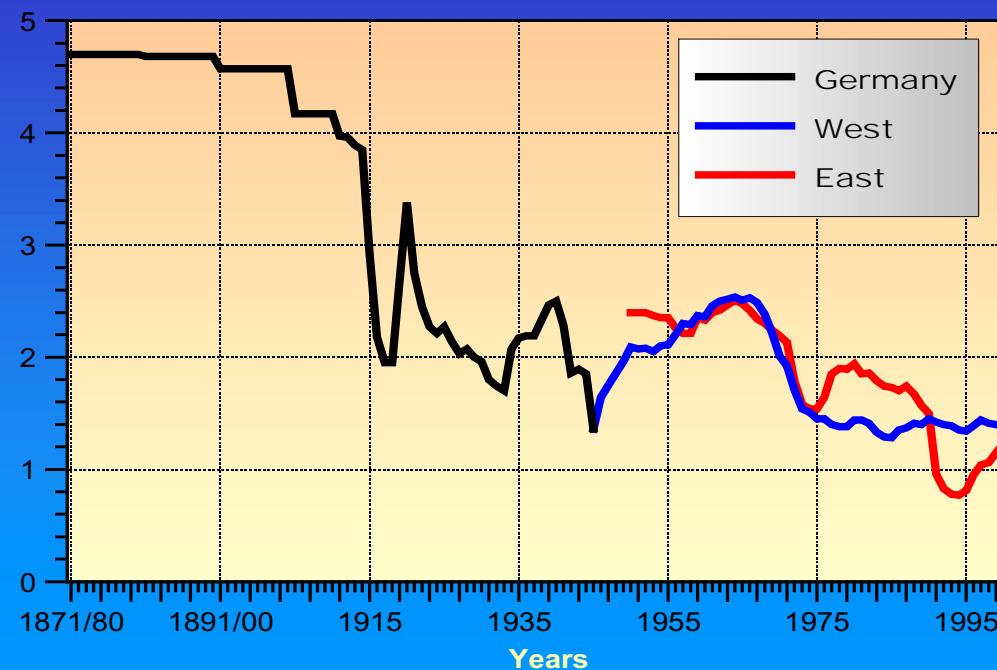
2. The demographic trends

The present paper describes trends in family formation on the basis of four classic demographic indicators - the total fertility rate; the percentages of people who remain single throughout their entire lives, as calculated with the help of first-marriage tables; the generation-specific parity distributions; and the rates of extra-marital births. The analysis focuses on western Germany. Since eastern Germany has been in a phase of demo-

Figure 1

Total Fertility Rates in Germany, 1871 - 2000

Children per women



Source: Federal Statistical Office, Wiesbaden, Germany

graphic change since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has not yet been possible to interpret eastern German data in terms of „individualisation and changes in living arrangements“.

With a total fertility rate of 1.36 in 1999, Germany is one of Europe's low-fertility countries. Western and eastern Germany differ in this regard, however. While western Germany had a TFR of 1.41, and a stable situation, eastern Germany had a TFR of 1.15 (Figure 1). This difference should be seen in light of the demographic shocks that took place in eastern Germany in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Germany's low fertility rate is the result of two periods of demographic transition that have occurred since the end of the 19th century. In 1871, when the German Reich was established, women had almost five children on average (Figure 1). The secular fertility decline began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Distorted through the influence of wars and crises, the total fertility rate quickly reached levels below population replacement. Occasional catch-up effects

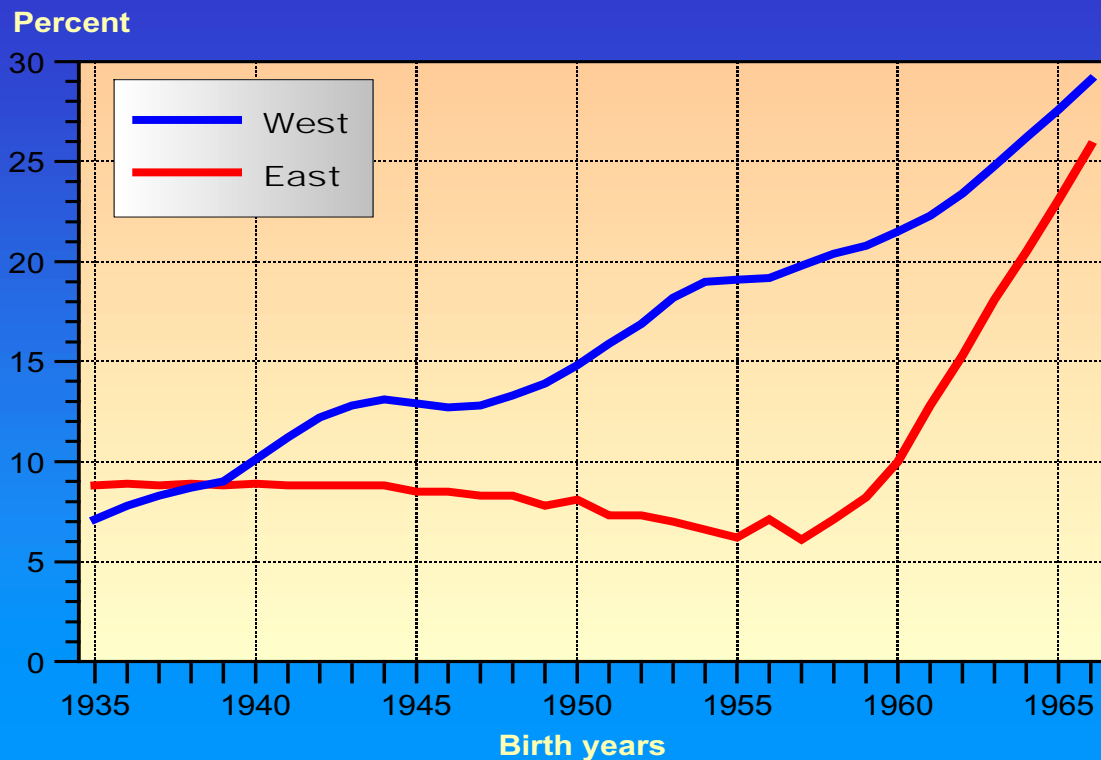
after World War I and during the Third Reich, as well as during the post-war baby boom of the 1960s - the „golden age of marriage“ - only temporarily budged the fertility rate from a below-replacement level, where it had been since 1925.

The first decline in fertility began around the turn of the century and was essentially completed in 1925. Fertility has tended to remain low since then. A second decline in fertility, one that has been the subject of much discussion, took place between 1965 and 1975. In part, this decline can be explained in connection with the post-war baby boom. Post-war euphoria, based on West Germany's economic miracle and East Germany's heady atmosphere of new socialism, had increased fertility. It was further enhanced by the almost complete entrance of generations into marriage - so complete, in fact, that the 1960s were dubbed the „golden age of marriage“.

In West Germany, the low fertility rate established itself by the mid-1970s, following the completion of „Europe's Second Demographic Transition“. It has remained unchanged since

Figure 2

Childlessness by birth cohorts in Germany, 1935 - 1966 (%)



Source: Federal Statistical Office, Wiesbaden, Germany

then. On the other hand, considerable change has occurred under the cover of this rate. This change can be recognised by considering the distribution of women, on a birth-cohort basis, in accordance with the numbers of children they have (Table 1, Figure 2). Especially in the birth cohorts of the 1960s, percentage shifts are apparent in which a clear rise in childlessness plays the decisive role. Only about 10 % of the women's cohorts of the 1930s remained childless. This percentage increased to nearly 30 % in the cohorts born after 1965.

These high levels of childlessness are termed „new childlessness“, to highlight the fact that they consist primarily of voluntary childlessness (Höpflinger 1991: 81). The new childlessness contrasts with earlier high childlessness at the beginning of the 20th century, which was due to two world wars in rapid succession and to economic crisis between the wars. At least in western Germany, the present new childlessness has resulted from Europe's Second Demographic Transition, with its individualisation and pluralisation of living arrangements.

A look at the changing parity structure in toto beyond childlessness reveals two main trends (Table 1):

- 1 The decline in completed family size of female cohorts born between 1900 and 1950 was due to a decline in the percentages of women who had three or more children. At the same time, childlessness was low, and the two-children family became predominant.
- 2 In the younger cohorts (after 1950), the percentage of women who had two, three and more children remained unchanged. The two-children family continued to predominate. The percentages of women who had only one child decreased and childlessness increased, however.

The second fertility decline after 1965 also involves a reduction in large families (3+ children). Yet we can already discern the influence of childlessness, which has started increasing again. In the younger cohorts that were born after 1950, the decreasing share of larger families is no longer important. The change in the parity structure among the

Table 1

Women by cohorts and number of children in West Germany, 1901 - 1966

Cohorts	Number of children			
	0	1	2	3+
1901/05	26	26	23	25
1906/10	22	26	26	26
1911/15	19	28	28	25
1916/20	18	29	29	24
1921/25	17	29	29	25
1926/30	14	28	31	27
1931/35	10	24	33	33
1940	10,1	23,8	24,6	41,5
1945	12,9	26,9	29,6	30,5
1950	14,8	27,4	31,6	26,3
1955	19,2	24,5	31,7	24,6
1960	21,5	21,9	32,3	24,3
1965	27,6	19,8	30,1	22,6
1966	29,1	19,3	29,3	22,3

Source: Federal Institute for Population Research, Statistical Office of the former GDR, Schwarz, K., 1997, 26; Dorbritz, J. and Schwarz, K., 1996: 234

cohorts born after 1960 shows a clear tendency towards polarisation into a group of childless women (and men) and a group living in their own families. A stable share of women with two or three and more children, a decreasing share of women with one child, and a growing share of childless women are the indicators for this change.

In light of these demographic developments, it must be asked who are the childless persons and what are the reasons for the childlessness? The Fertility and Family Survey (FFS) in Germany provides some answers.

Childlessness has been correlated with income (a higher level of childlessness among those of lower income), with occupational-training levels (increased childlessness among those with higher qualifications) and with living arrangements (higher childlessness in more or less individualised living arrangements). In combination, these factors produced two separate groups of childless women. The one comprised unmarried, better-qualified and fully employed women, while the other was made up of unmarried, fully employed women with low incomes.

The marriage frequency decreased in paral-

lel with the second decline in the birth rate (Table 2). The table of first marriages for 1999 shows high percentages of never-married persons: 26.7 % for women and 34.6 % for men. At the beginning of the 1970s, only about 6 % of women and 13 % of men remained single. These percentages have grown continuously since then.

Table 2

Proportion of persons married at least once in West Germany, 1971 - 1999

Years	Women	Men
1971	93,4	86,8
1980	84,1	76,5
1985	79,7	72,6
1990	82,3	75,5
1995	72,9	63,9
1999	73,3	65,4

Source: Federal Statistical Office, Wiesbaden, Germany, own calculations of first marriage tables

In contrast especially to the situation in northern Europe, which has very high extra-marital-birth rates (Sweden 55.3 %, Norway 49.1 %, Denmark 44.9 %), the extra-marital-birth rate has remained low in western Germany - at 15.9 % (Figure 3) - and has grown only slowly. For arguments in the context of changes in private living arrangements, it is important to note that the patterns of conduct „having children“ and „being married“ have remained firmly linked in western Germany.

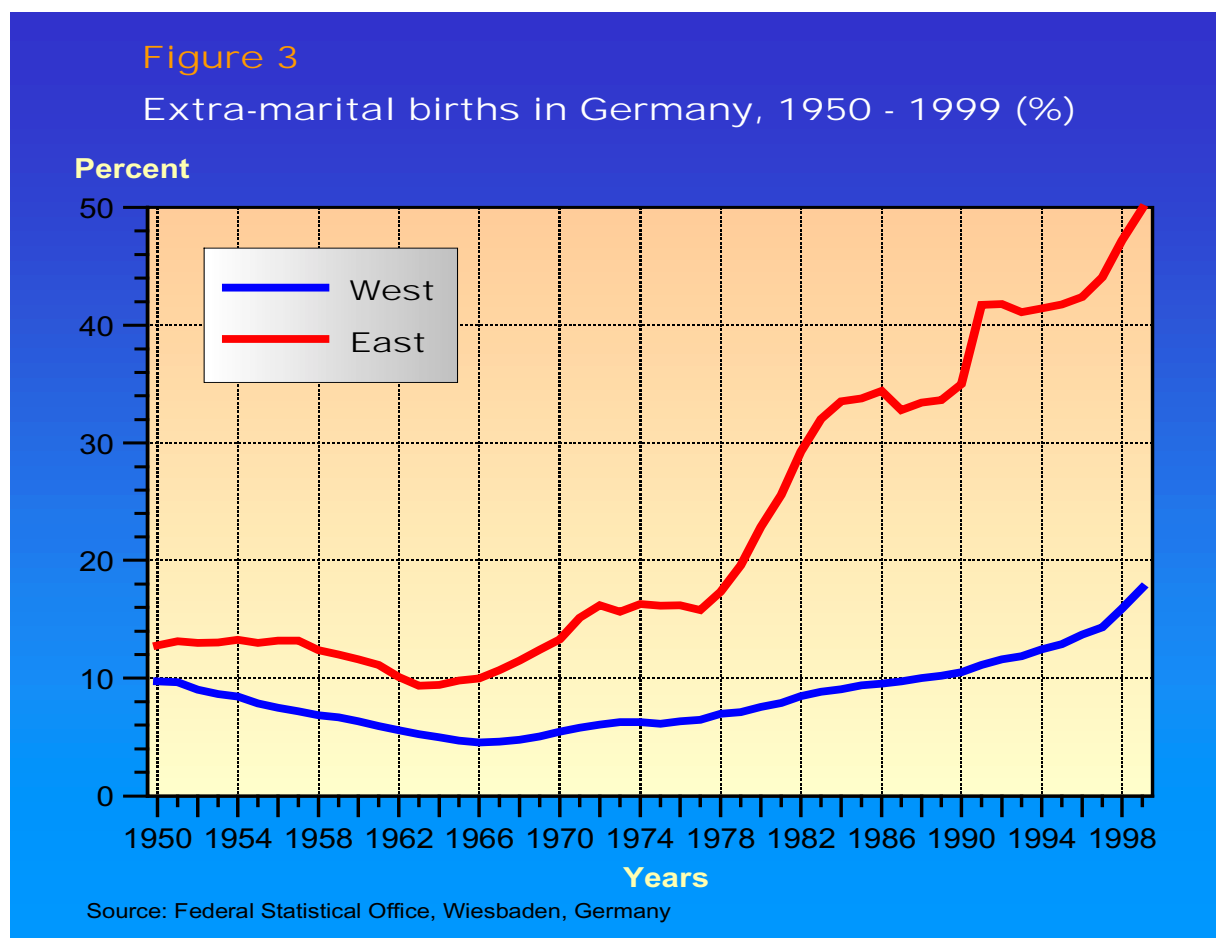
Interestingly enough, the situation in eastern Germany is completely different. In eastern Germany, the ratio of extra-marital births rose rapidly as early as the second half of the 1970s - without really dissolving the interconnected reference system of marriage and having children, however. The former GDR's pronatalist population policies strongly supported single parents and gave them special social protection. Their children enjoyed preferential access to state child-care centres, for

example. Single mothers received paid leave from work when their children were ill. Such benefits were considered attractive enough to eliminate the immediate need for marriage, and marriage tended to be entered into at a time such measures were no longer needed. As a result, a high extra-marital birth rate coexisted with a high first-marriage percentage.

The high ratio of extra-marital births continued to increase in the 1990s. By that time, it was combined with low nuptiality, however, meaning that a real disjunction of marriage

- ④ A decline in the percentage of families with only one child.
- ⑤ A strong link between marriage and birth of children.

Conclusion: high, still-increasing percentages of people who never marry and of people who remain childless, along with the continuing close link between having children and being married, supports the assumption that the population of people of family-forming age can be divided into two main groups. The first group is unmarried and childless, and the second group is married and lives with chil-



and having children had taken place.

As this analysis shows, family formation in western Germany exhibits the following characteristics:

- ① A stable, low fertility level, with children tending to be born late in parents' lives.
- ② A high, still increasing rate of childlessness.
- ③ A large percentage of persons who never marry.

dren. And once people decide to have children, they normally have families with more than one child. On the other hand, large families with more than 3 children are rare. This demographic situation supports the thesis that the population has polarised into a family sector (living together with children) and a non-family sector (living without children). These basic demographic indicators do not yet show whether individualisation and pluralisation of living arrangements are occurring,

however. The data only permits formulation of the polarisation thesis, a thesis that has to be reviewed on the basis of the living arrangements actually being lived.

3. Living Arrangements

The term „living arrangements“ is used to describe patterns of private relationships within the population. Marital status, household type and generation orientation are the key classification criteria.

have children. The second largest group consists of persons who have moved out of their parental household but have remained single (14.7 %).

The 25 - 29 age range contains the mean ages at first marriage and first birth. Married couples with children, at 25.8 %, constitute the biggest (although not overwhelmingly predominant) group within this range. Nearly as many - 23.1 % - are living on their own but are single (and a majority of this group have not yet married). The high percentage - 19.9% - of persons still living with their par-

Table 3

Population aged 18 years and over by age groups and living arrangements in West Germany (in %)

Age-groups	Total (1000)	Singles		One-Parent-Families	Couples				Never married, living in the parental household	Others
		never married	previously married		married		consensual unions			
					without children	with children	without children	with children		
18 - 24	5100	14,3	0,4	1,1	4,9	6,3	7,2	0,6	63,1	2,1
25 - 29	5132	21,6	1,5	2,4	12,5	25,8	12,3	1,8	19,9	2,1
30 - 34	5583	15,2	2,7	3,6	12,2	48,5	6,8	2,2	7,3	1,5
35 - 44	9615	8,4	4,3	4,9	11,0	61,8	3,4	2,0	2,9	1,2
45 - 54	8470	4,8	7,2	4,1	29,9	48,1	2,6	1,0	1,0	1,2

Source: Federal Statistical Office, Micro Census

The data in Table 3, which was calculated on the basis of the Micro Census in western Germany, represents the situation in the second half of the 1990s. Because it is broken down by age groups, it permits description of relevant structures and progressions.

In the youngest age group, persons aged 18 - 24, the largest group consists of unmarried persons living with their parents. In keeping with the population's older average ages at first marriage and at the birth of a first child, very few in this age group are married and

ents is evidence that people are tending to leave the parental home late. In addition, the percentages of married couples without children and of consensual unions without children are rather high, at 12.5 % and 12.3 %, respectively.

The 30 - 34 age group indicates that the „normal“ family, a married couple with children, is still the predominant living arrangement in Germany. A total of 48.5 % of the population within this age group have chosen this living arrangement. Significantly, once

again singles are the second largest group within this category, at 17.9 %, followed by childless marriages. 7.3 % of persons in the 30 - 34 age group are still living with their parents. The share of childless consensual unions has fallen to 6.8 %. This indicates that consensual unions tend to be seen as premarital unions and not as permanent arrangements. Only a small fraction of consensual unions live with children. Once children are desired or expected, marriage becomes the preferred living arrangement. On the other hand, the high divorce rate is reflected in an increasing percentage of lone parents. In Germany, lone parenthood func-

which reflects the Micro Census' counting of cohabiting household members only, indicates that children begin leaving the parental home when their parents have entered this age group. Never-married single persons are still rare in this age group. The reason for this is that persons now between the ages of 45 and 54 lived their family-formation phase in a period when marrying was part of a normal biography. The majority of today's single persons in this age group are divorced persons.

The polarisation concept (Strohmeier 1993: 11) helps highlight the sizes of the two population groups, the family sector and the non-

Table 4:

Proportion of the family and non-family sector in West Germany by age-groups, in %

Age-groups	Family sector	Non-family sector	Never married, living in the parental household
18 - 24	8,0	26,8	63,1
25 - 29	30,0	47,9	19,9
30 - 34	54,3	36,9	7,3
35 - 44	68,7	27,1	2,9

Source: Federal Statistical Office, Germany, Microcensus

tions not as an intended living arrangement but as a phase of passage, after divorce, towards a new partnership.

In the group of people aged 35 - 44, married couples with children clearly predominate, at 61.8 %. Once again, the second largest group consists of single persons (12.7 %). A total of 11.0 % of the age group are married and childless, and the percentage of lone parents is relatively high, at 4.9 %.

Among persons aged 45 - 54, married couples with children again form the largest group. In comparison with the previous age group, the balance has now shifted toward childless marriages, however. This result,

family sector (Table 4). Useful conclusions about any polarisation within the population can be made only for age groups beyond the average ages for first marriage and first birth. In 1999, the average first-marriage age for women was 28.4; for men, it was 31.1. In that same year, the average age at which women in western Germany had their first child was 28.9.

Thanks to the patterns of conduct of „late marriage“ and „late birth“, the family sector is smaller in the age groups 18 - 24 and 25 - 29. Among persons 18 - 24, the living arrangement „living in the parental household“ predominates. For the 25 - 29 age

group, the family sector has the largest percentage. Most persons in this age group have left their parents' home but still have no children - and thus are members of the non-family sector. Once they turn 30, most of the population live with children. In the 30 - 34 age group, a total of 54.3 %, or just slightly over half, are in this category. Very late births of first children can shift the balance slightly to the detriment of the non-family sector. In the following age group, 35 - 44 year-olds, the family sector has grown to about 2/3 of the entire group. The percentage of people in the non-family sector is 27.1 %. Percentage distortions are possible here, however, for two reasons. Firstly, people older than age 40 may already have children who have moved away from the parental home - making the percentage for the non-family sector too low. Secondly, the older members of this age group lived through their family-formation phase at a time when childlessness was not nearly as common as it is now, meaning that the percentages for the two sectors may no longer exactly represent the real situation at present. In spite of these uncertainties in the data, it may be assumed that the population in western Germany is polarised, by about 2/3 to 1/3, into a family sector and a non-family sector.

4. A special situation in western Germany?

Before these results can be interpreted, it is necessary to stress the special aspects of the situation in western Germany. Analysis of the relationship between childlessness and completed fertility for the 1960 birth cohort,

in selected European countries, reveals various European fertility patterns (Figure 4). In Europe, only Switzerland has a polarisation situation similar to that of Germany. In both countries, high childlessness has led to a relatively low fertility level. The example of Switzerland, illustrated with parity-progression ratios, once again highlights the specific features of this family-formation pattern (Table 5). Firstly, a very low rate of transition from childlessness to the birth of the first child indicates that Switzerland also has a relatively large non-family sector. Secondly, it has a high rate of transition from the birth of the first child to the birth of the second. A total of 80 % of all women who have a first child also have a second one.

This can be termed advanced, systematic population polarisation. The population is following two basic patterns: a) remaining childless, and thus not entering the family-formation process, or b) choosing to have a family, with more than one child. This pattern should be referred to as an „individualistic“ pattern of family formation, since the high childlessness rate has made it possible for individualised living arrangements to arise and for individualised lifestyles to be seen as permanent.

A second European fertility pattern, shown in Figure 4 as represented by Portugal, consists of a low childlessness rate and a relatively low fertility level. This pattern may be considered conditionally familial, since it features a high percentage of one-child families. The childlessness rate is low, and a large percentage of the population starts families, but family sizes tend to remain small.

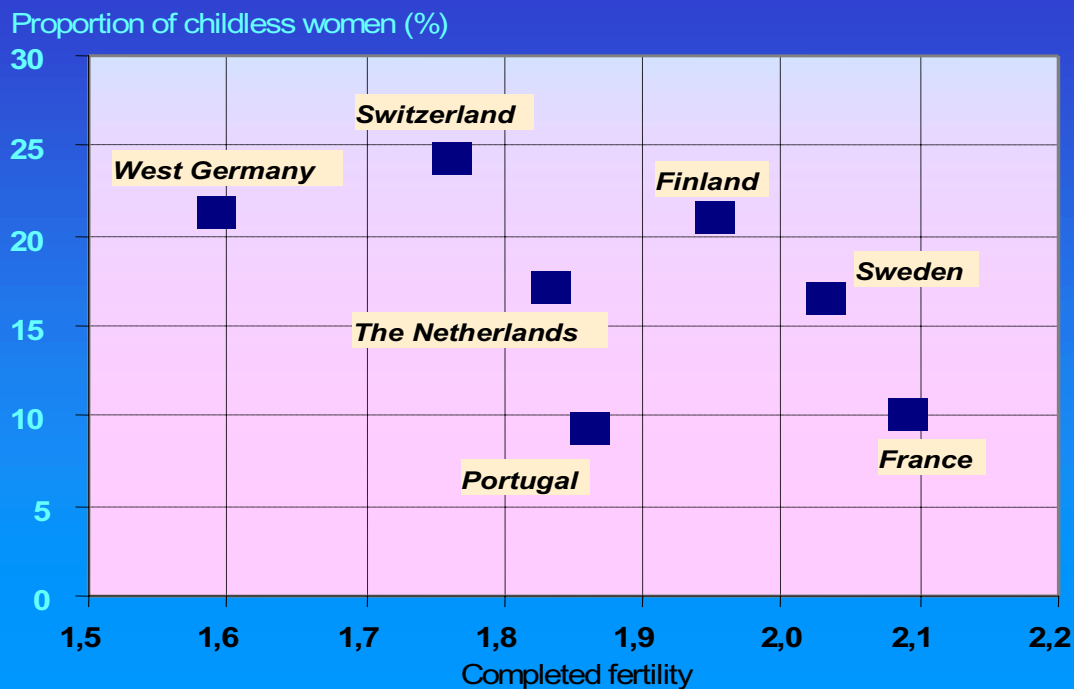
Table 5
Period parity-progression ratios for Switzerland

Transitions from			
0=>1	1=>2	2=>3	3=>4
0,766	.0,800	.0,324	.0,260

Source: Fertility and Family Survey

Figure 4

Proportion of childless women and completed fertility in selected European countries, cohort 1960



France is an example of a country with a clearly familial pattern. It has a low childlessness rate and a high fertility level. There is also a fourth pattern, one that is particularly pronounced in Sweden: relatively high childlessness in combination with a high fertility level. It should also be noted that a number of countries do not fall clearly into any of these groups.

5. Individualisation, pluralisation or polarisation?

Statistical analyses of demographic trends and living arrangements in western Germany show that about 1/3 of the younger population no longer enters the family-formation process. This conclusion is indisputable fact. On the other hand, there is still uncertainty regarding the causes of the polarisation and, especially, regarding the best way to interpret this change in the context of the theoretical discussion about individualisation and deinstitutionalisation of marriage and family.

Regarding the causes: polarisation of living arrangements in Germany is caused by a general „error in the design“ of society - in

part, it is caused by family policy. The sociological literature terms this situation society's „structural thoughtlessness“ toward families, meaning that society treats people as individuals regardless of whether they live in families or not. In other words, society is not concerned about whether people provide familial services or not. Social structures are behind the disadvantages encountered by families, disadvantages concentrated in the areas of income, costs of children, employment and careers. In comparison with childless persons, families must bear enormous economic burdens. These burdens include:

- ➊ Reduced amounts of disposable income, as a result of the high costs of children,
- ➋ Loss of independent social protection when employment is interrupted,
- ➌ Reduction of the value of vocational experience and qualifications, through interruption of employment, and
- ➍ Impairment of the career opportunities of mothers and fathers, who are less mobile - in terms of both scheduling and location - and, thus, less available than employed persons without any children.

These burdens, which are only slightly countered by transfer benefits under family policy, exist in an increasingly individualistically oriented social context. This context includes the striving of growing numbers of women for emancipation, fulfilment and recognition outside of the family, primarily through employment and careers.

Germany's social structures and family policies make it difficult to combine family with career. The main hindrances to such combination are found in companies' working hours, i.e. in a lack of flexibility, a shortage of part-time positions and inadequate availability of child care. While these problems are not exclusively the result of family policies, the role of family policies in causing them needs to be examined.

Various different concepts of family policy are pursued throughout Europe. There is a French model, which is „pronatal“, i.e. which financially supports parenthood and employment of mothers, an English model, which views family as a private affair and thus basically only amounts to anti-poverty policy, and a Nordic model, which seeks to uphold gender equality and promote good education for children - primarily through an extensive, high-quality child-care infrastructure. Yet another model, the southern European model, provides a low level of family services, within a system of poor transparency for those affected. Then there is the model oriented to the traditional family; this is the model pursued by Germany's family policy. This model hampers combination of employment and family in everyday life, while giving preference to life-phase-oriented solutions and relatively generous financing of bonuses for the traditional family.

Germany's social structures and family-policy concept, therefore, are strongly oriented to employment of women and tend to require women to decide between having children and pursuing careers. Imposition of this decision is polarising in nature. Women are increasingly deciding against marriage and children and choosing employment - and thereby enlarging the non-family sector. When they decide to have families, they usually temporarily drop out of working life. Logically, therefore, when they opt for families, they usually also choose to have more than

one child. The concept behind the prevailing family policies also encourages people to orient their living arrangements to the traditional family model - married cohabitation with children, in a two-generation family.

In this context, we shall present some empirical findings from the Fertility and Family Survey for Germany. Before doing so, however, we present structural data on living arrangements that includes the criterion of employment (Table 6), as a complement to the data presented in Section 3, which outlined a structure of living arrangements in terms of the criteria „married“, „having children“ and „type of household“.

The data shows how children influence the employment situation of women aged 30 - 39, in various living arrangements, along with the polarising effects of this influence. In living arrangements that include children, the great majority of women are not employed. The largest sub-group of women in this age group, or 30.8 %, have a „housewife marriage“ living arrangement. By contrast, only 3.1 % are married, have children and are employed in full-time positions. The great majority of married women who have no children are employed in full-time positions. Similar differentiation is found in all other partnership living arrangements.

These findings make it possible to describe the polarisation situation more precisely. Both sectors - the family sector and the non-family sector - contain core groups. The predominant group in the family sector is the traditional family, with married partners, children, a working husband and a housewife. In the non-family sector, the largest group consists of individualised living arrangements with single persons in full-time employment. The large percentage of unemployed single persons in this group reflects the group's high percentage of students. As a result of polarisation of living arrangements, the population contains two major groups: people in living arrangements typical of the „golden age of marriage“, i.e. the 1960s, and single, childless persons in full-time employment. Significantly, a majority of western Germany's population of family-forming age still opts for traditional living arrangements. This group is shrinking, however.

Table 6

Living arrangements and employment status of women aged 30 - 39 in West Germany

Living arrangements	Employment status	%
married with child(ren)	full-time	3,1
	part-time	5,7
	not employd	30,8
married without children	full-time	6,8
	part-time	1,3
	not employd	1,6
non-marital cohabitation with (child)ren	full-time	0,3
	part-time	0,7
	not employd	1,3
non-marital cohabitation without children	full-time	7,6
	part-time	0,4
	not employd	3,1
lone parents	full-time	1,7
	part-time	2,0
	not employd	4,6
without partner in the household (including 'lat')	full-time	15,5
	part-time	1,4
	not employd	10,5

Source: Fertility and Family Survey (FFS)

Overall, polarisation of the population has been occurring, guided by unfavourable conditions for combining family and work. Society's structures, thanks to orientation (not exclusive, however) of family policy to the traditional family, are organised in such a way as to exact a decision between employment and family.

In the following, we seek to answer the question, in light of the existing structure of living arrangements, of whether individualisation, pluralisation or polarisation is taking place - and of which of these terms best describes the prevailing situation. As clearly shown by the above analyses, the population is segmented into a family sector and a non-family sector. This is the basic trend, and it is adequately covered by the term „population polarisation“. On the other hand, family-formation trends in Germany cannot be characterised without the terms „individualisation“ and „pluralisation“, even if these terms are not absolutely precise in this context. Neither advanced individualisation nor pluralisation of living arrangements has yet occurred in Germany. In the case of pluralisation, the argumentation is relatively simple - pluralisation cannot be detected! The number of living arrangements actually being lived is limited. The majority of the population lives in just a few living arrangements. A total of 75 % of the population in the 30 - 34 age group is distributed among only 3 living arrangements. Furthermore, no new living arrangements have emerged. What has changed, however, is the population's distribution among the living arrangements. This development is more aptly described with the term „individualisation“. Persons who undergo this process develop a range of behaviours in their biographies that differ from the normal biography. Such persons tend to be found only in the non-family sector.

The high childlessness rate in Germany opens up opportunities for development of individualistic living arrangements. On the other hand, not all living arrangements in the non-family sector, i.e. childless married couples and non-marital life partnerships, can be termed individualistic. Individualisation often plays only a peripheral role. The central findings include a number of patterns of conduct that do not lead to the „normal family“ (i.e.

that imply remaining in the non-family sector), and the fact that the high divorce rate contributes to a departure from the normal family. On the other hand, again it is important to note that the majority of the population still choose the behaviour pattern „normal family“ and that a majority remain married with the same person throughout their entire lives. Overall, limited individualisation has occurred, not in keeping with a growing diversity of living arrangements, but with a redistribution of the population away from the traditional family and toward living arrangements that complement the traditional family - arrangements that offer increased opportunities for individualistic lifestyles.

How should the polarisation situation be evaluated in light of the changes in the importance of marriage and family, and what role does family policy play in it? Opinions diverge regarding the directions in which the institutions of marriage and family could evolve.

Consider the following possible ways of describing the development to date and relevant implications:

- ❶ An institutional change has taken place. Social change in Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s did not weaken the institution „marriage and family“. What it did accomplish, however, was further specialisation (distinction in the family functions) of the institution, highlighting its „real“ task: serving as a secure social environment for having children (Nave-Herz 1989: 215).
- ❷ A time-limited movement towards individualisation has partially disinstitutionalised marriage and family, with the effect that they no longer provide the general orientation they used to provide. As a result, alternative living arrangements have become permissible - and, indeed, relatively common (Tyrell 1988: 150).
- ❸ Living arrangements are changing, and a wave of comprehensive deinstitutionalisation will broadly individualise and pluralise them. Marriage and family may survive this in formal terms, retaining their legal and normative status, but they will no longer really be lived out in practice (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1996: 120).

The patterns of conduct of family formation in Germany currently exhibit features of evolution paths one and two. In western Germany, the patterns of conduct „being married“ and „having children“ have remained firmly linked. When children are desired or are born, the traditional family is chosen as a socially secure living arrangement. The relatively high value attached to the institutions of marriage and family in Germany is primarily based on the close ties between marriage and life with children.

Nonetheless, a certain deinstitutionalisation cannot be overlooked. Marriage and family have lost their exclusive status. The social climate has changed, with the result that „being married“ and „having children“ have lost much of their effectiveness as norms. Relevant controlling authorities and mechanisms have disappeared. The age-old ties between love and marriage have been dissolved. Limited individualisation on society's micro-level goes hand-in-hand with a limited deinstitutionalisation on the macro-level. Significantly, this deinstitutionalisation is not emanating from „marriage“ as a pattern of conduct offered by society. Marriage continues to be supported, as an institution,

- ❶ via legal enshrinement in Germany's Basic Law (Grundgesetz),
- ❷ through legal provisions governing marriage, divorce and children's rights,
- ❸ via family policy, and
- ❹ through religious value systems.

In Germany, the institution of marriage is being weakened through the polarisation situation: society's proffered opportunity to marry and have children is simply not being accepted by part of the population. This amounts to conduct-guided deinstitutionalisation. And this conclusion is exactly in line with the position advanced by „dissolution theorists“, who assume that the institution is disappearing because no one is accepting society's proffered option.

In its final consequence, this development would lead to comprehensive deinstitutionalisation, however. And such deinstitutionalisation is not currently taking place in Germany, since being married and having children are still closely linked.

As to the role of family policy in the process of institutional change, it is clear that family policy is being affected by the tension between institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation. On the one hand, family policy is a factor that stabilises the institution on society's macro-level, by supporting formation of traditional families. On the other hand, since the need to combine family and work is not adequately enshrined in family policy's support concepts - i.e. since it tends to make family and work successive, not concurrent - family policy contributes to the formation of the non-family sector and, thus, to conduct-guided deinstitutionalisation. In the final analysis, both institutionalisation, guided by family policy, and deinstitutionalisation are taking place. Family policy is thus caught in a dilemma from which it can escape only by expanding its concepts - by accepting alternative patterns of combining careers and family biographies.

The polarisation situation's consequences for the fertility trend are obvious. High childlessness makes it unlikely that total fertility rates will increase; for such an increase to occur, effects of childlessness would have to be countered by higher rates of births of third and fourth children. Future fertility trends will thus range between low and middle levels. And expansion of the non-family sector will play a decisive role in this context. If the current situation remains stable, a middle fertility level would be possible. Expansion of childlessness would lead to a decline in the fertility level, however.

6. Notes

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