

**CONTEMPORARY FAMILY –  
COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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# CONTEMPORARY FAMILY – COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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## Introduction

Across Europe the traditional nuclear family model, defined as two adults with dependent children and a sole, male bread-winner, has dramatically lost in importance. Dual income and one-parent, predominantly female, families are increasingly common. Two explanations have been proposed to account for the “downfall” of the traditional family: women’s participation in the workforce and the process of individualization. In all contemporary societies women have started taking up jobs outside of the household. Although for many women the motives are chiefly economical, such work, nevertheless, grants means to gaining independence and facilitates emancipation. Accordingly, the growing number of women working outside their homes has affected not only the outlook on women’s role in society, but on their gender role in general. The decline of the traditional family has also been interpreted as a result of an on-going individualization and modernization. In today’s society, the individual has become free and independent from the traditional, social and religious institutions. People can choose their lifestyle and can make their decisions based on personal interests and values. This development has resulted in a more individualistic formula of family life. The classical family may be outdated, but the European Values Study clearly shows that family is still considered the most important domain in life. Indeed, family is regarded as being of far greater importance than work, friends, religion or free time. In this respect family remains the corner-stone of society. This is even true in Scandinavian countries where the demographic trends seem to indicate the disappearance of the traditional family. Family has become a concept wider than the traditional household or marriage. Today the term includes couples living together, single parents, gay couples with or without children and “reconstituted” families – households including children from former relationships of one or more of its adult members (Halman, Luijkx, Zundert 2005: 27).

Interest in the family is currently extremely alive and widespread. We live in a time of intensive transformations of the family as the basic social particle

and witness it undergoing various changes related to a shift in the preferred and implemented models of family life as well as relations within the family.

For centuries the family was based on marriage. What this meant was that the traditional family served to satisfy both the need for care, emotional fulfilment, economic support, and fostering socialization, as well as the procreative and sexual functions. Today, these two can be sought and realized outside of the traditional family, for example in a cohabitation union or in a partnership without living together. As K. Slany (2006: 15) writes: *“The separation of sex life not only from procreation (reserved mostly to the family) but also from marriage has changed both the status of the family and of the people who are nowadays guided by values and standards incomprehensible and alien to those of the previous eras. The instability and breakdown of the family, mainly for social reasons triggers the process of reconstructing relationships in formal or informal ways, generating a “serial monogamy or successive polygamy.” The birth and upbringing of children can be separated from marriage and division of work performed by gender. Monoparental families and even voluntary childlessness are becoming a permanent element of reality.”*

Nowadays, the concept of the family covers a multitude of alternative meanings. In many countries of the Western Europe, Scandinavia and the United States, it is possible for homosexual couples to marry. Moreover, in some countries also adoption of children by homosexual couples is possible (including Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, France, Ireland etc.).

In the contemporary South Korea the alternative family life form such as cohabitation has just begun to be acceptable – especially by young women who do not want to live in marriage within the patriarchal system (see Kim Seungkwon et al. 2013). More and more people decide to arrange their life by way of a cohabitation union instead of getting married. Obviously, the number of people living in cohabitation is still smaller than in Europe and the United States.

Apart from cohabiting heterosexuals, lesbians and gays who are not able to marry legally, are also marginalised in Korea. This is reflected by the fact that there are no official statistics on cohabitation in Korea (see Seo 2012). Nevertheless, the numbers of Korean cohabiting couples, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, are “estimated” to increase, based on the international survey on the youth values in 2010 and in 2012 conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. This shows the growing acceptance of premarital cohabitation and homosexuality, although the degree of acceptance is still low compared to neighbouring countries such as China and Japan (see: Choi et al. 2011).

The intensity of changes the pattern of family life undergoes is dependent on the number of socio-economic determinants (mainly on the level of the economic development), as well as those of a religious and cultural nature (Slany 2006: 13).

The pace of the changes taking place in the sphere of the family life varies depending on the country – in some the changes followed quickly practically unhindered by social barriers and family policies (e.g., Sweden, Denmark, France), in stark contrast to those countries, where issue is still debated (Juszczak-Frelkiewicz 2014: 16).

In developed countries changes take place quickly which can be seen in the liberal demographic behaviours, such as: a high number of divorces, high number of people living in informal relationships, decline in terms of the durability of the first marriage, increasing rate of second marriages, decline in the birth rate of children with a simultaneous increase in births outside of marriage.

Changes pertaining to family life are also codependent on individual value systems which greatly contribute to shaping the decisions made at the level of building or reorganizing the family, regardless of regional differences of living conditions. Modern Family is shrinking both in size and in social importance (Świątkiewicz 1998: 10). Modern Family takes various forms. In the contemporary world there is an increasing number of patchwork and monoparental families as well as couples living in cohabitation unions.

Changes in the family life also refer to the bonds and relations between partners or spouses which are oriented on high personal quality. This is the result of the ongoing individualization process – people are oriented on satisfying their individualistic needs, with emphasis on autonomy, sexual as well as self-fulfilment, emotional satisfaction but also satisfying their material needs (Juszczak-Frelkiewicz 2014: 9).

Transformation of family is facilitated by the increase in the number of divorces and separations, as well as the number of single parents and general tendency of delaying binding decision making on matrimony/parenting, or choosing not to have children at all, and growing popularity of informal unions. Other factors at work in the transformation of the family include: industrialization, urbanization, globalization, secularization.

This book consists of two parts – the first part concerns the family in Europe, while the second refers to the family in South Korea.

The part one of the book opens with an article written by Zsuzsanna Benkő and Klára Tarkó who treat the importance of historical development as an ordering principle, espousing the view that the function, structure, value system, actions and of course the complex lifestyles of families are strongly affected by their position in the actual society and social structure. Sociology of the family, as one of the most established branches of sociology, analyses the family from many perspectives, from which the authors chose to introduce families from the perspective of their historical development. This family history reviews families throughout changes in their function as well as shifting paradigms of the roles of their members, highlighting the geographical and social specificities. The specific socio-historical analysis of families has been underpinned with Max

Weber's (1987) action theory, and the authors use his typology in understanding social acts, also integrating Habermas' (1985) theory of a communicative action into Weber's track of thought. Their socio-historical analysis clearly proves and states that the organisation of family unit is a rather independent variable. According to the authors' reasoning, the large scope of industrial development and the differentiation and modernisation of the society generated the change in traditional life conditions, households and the family functions we are accustomed to. In their historical development families have been categorised into three larger groups: traditional, civic and modern families. Their introduction constitutes the backbone of the paper. The socio-historical approach to families is further refined by the three social characters proposed by David Riesman (1996): the "tradition-directed," the "inner-directed," and the "other-directed." These categories have also helped in understanding the sequential and at the same time parallel nature of the social processes. Being informed about the socio-historical processes has enabled the authors to realise that the families of Central and Eastern Europe for decades have been characterised by tradition-orientedness.

The second paper, written by Agata Zygmunt, discusses the main changes in the family formation processes in Poland after 1989 and points to their major determinants. The theoretical framework for this text is established by the concept of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) which is one of the most popular theoretical models explaining family-related behaviors that occurred in most European countries in the second half of 20th century. Declining propensity to marriage and childbearing postponement, limiting the number of children and the growing childlessness are the most significant factors influencing the shape of contemporary families in Poland. During the last three decades the frequency of divorce and separation has increased as well as the popularity of cohabitation and LAT relationships (*living-apart-together*), which indicates that marriage has lost its instrumental significance in forming a family. These phenomena can be explained by the SDT concept, introduced by Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa in 1986, which has profoundly influenced research on family and fertility behaviors.

The third paper authored by Andrzej Górny has been devoted to the changes and transformations taking place within Polish families. Contemporary demographic analyses indicate *aging* as one of the most important social phenomena, which should be recognized as a significant increase in the percentage of older people in modern societies, especially those at the highest level of economic and social development. That is why aging is often treated as a huge micro and macrosocial challenge while the government, public institutions, civic associations as well as local communities should be involved in solving problems this phenomenon causes. The patterns of the elders' social life have also changed. It concerns not only communities, but also the basic social structure, that is,

family. As a result Andrzej Górny's article concentrates on the place and role of elderly people in modern Polish family structures. Its main aim is to find an answer to the question whether grandparents are recognized as *important others* by the younger generations, or are they rather perceived as a burden.

The fourth paper was written by Montserrat Simó-Solsona who rightly states that the economic recession seriously affects families in the Southern European countries as well. The Southern European family system is almost inextricably linked to the two fundamental pillars of European societies: the welfare state and the labour market. Accordingly, the main objective of the author was to show the influence of the economic crisis on families, as these are not only affected by a weak welfare state and a problematic labour market, but also by the absence of family policies, particularly necessary during such a period. The article was divided in two parts. Firstly, following the main characteristics described by Flaquer (2004), it revises the main similarities and differences between the family models in the analysed Southern European countries: Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Greece, from 2005 until 2014. The second part starts with a short description of how the economic recession is affecting these countries; consequently, the longitudinal database of European Living Conditions (2010–2013) is explored in order to show how households fight against social exclusion and poverty. The article concludes with closing remarks about the future of these families in the analysed Mediterranean countries.

The next paper, written by Rose Marie Azzopardi, presents the changes in the Maltese society, economy and legislative framework as reflected by the family. The changes have been occurring for long decades, since the decline in the birth rates after the WWII, through their first analysis in the 1970s, to the legislation which occurred in the last five years, introducing divorce and civil unions in the 21st century. Although the Roman Catholic Church remains a force to be reckoned with in the Maltese society, the power of its teachings appears to have waned. The number of religious marriages has not declined, but the number of civil marriages, and separations/divorces, has been steadily increasing. This paper presents statistical evidence proving that there are significant changes occurring in the structure of the Maltese family, with single parents and households with no children being the most common. The literature on the Maltese family also confirms such a shift, which is further evidenced by data from empirical research. The policies and legislation adopted in the recent years have merely reflected the societal changes.

The next paper, by Gilles Raoul-Cormeil, tackles the issue of the family solidarity in France. Family solidarity means the legal mechanism of solidarity of a household in debt that is beneficial to the creditors of spouses and couples united by a civil solidarity pact. In the broadest sense, the family solidarity is evident in a small family (household), by virtue of marriage and parentage, by the contribution to the expenses of the marriage, and by the contribution to the

education and support of a minor child. In the large family (lineage), kinship and alliance lead to the allocation or financial support obligations that extend and renew family solidarity. Linked to morality, this phenomenon is polymorphic, however can't overpower individualism. The debt of the French state would justify amending the Civil Code and simplifying the implementation of the family solidarity so that the state's solidarity with the socially isolated individuals or those in need can finally prevail.

The next paper also focuses on the situation in France. Its author – Sébastien Bauvet – suggests that the recent evolutions of customs and the persistence of the socio-economic crisis both facilitate the acceptance of new forms of families. In the last two decades, important legislative transformations have led to the official recognition of same-sex couples that until then were considered less legitimate than the other types of “new families” (mainly blended families or single parents). At the same time, sociological analysis swings between the concepts of mutation and crisis to understand a new place of the family in the global social process. The definition of the family remains socially heterogeneous and depends on other social links as well as on the level of social integration. The most recent and sometimes violent debates about the recognition of civil marriage for same-sex couples (“Mariage pour tous”), apart from the traditional, religiously motivated opposition, also underline the difficulty in accepting the widening of access to rights by those for whom the “traditional family” is considered one's only wealth.

The aim of the first paper written by Grzegorz Libor was to present the changes taking place in family life in a quite different part of Europe – in Wales. The decision to choose Wales as “*matière à penser*” was not accidental. Since the creation of the National Assembly of Wales and the Welsh Government, thus since the devolution actually started and acquired an institutional dimension, more and more attention has been paid to the importance of inclusivity in the Welsh society and policy, including their aspects relating to family life, for example the legalisation of same-sex marriages. The author depicted both the legal solutions as well as selected statistical data in order to paint the fullest possible picture of the analysed issue. When it comes to the data presented, one should bear in mind that the research was carried out for England and Wales jointly without distinction between both of them which runs the risk of a failure to distinguish the uniqueness or specificity of Wales against its much better known neighbor – England. Moreover, the legalisation of same-sex relationships, in particular same-sex marriages is worthy of a detailed, geographically diverse analysis as it is a new and rare phenomenon.

The second paper authored by Grzegorz Libor is the analysis of the election programs of Welsh political parties. It can be assumed that the issues that are tackled in election programs are treated by members of a given society as the most important and essential for its functioning. In this way, it is possible to

explore the changes taking place within different societies over the years, which contributes to the understanding of the development of social change, and in this particular case in the development of the family policy.

The second part of the book is written solely by Katarzyna Juszczak-Frelkiewicz and focuses on families in South Korea. The first paper presents a longitudinal perspective of the issue of fertility in South Korea – from past to present. The paper discusses the rapid fertility rate decline in South Korea as well as presents and analyzes vital statistical data available online from the Korean Statistical Information Service. The author describes two stages of fertility transition in South Korea and characterizes the causal mechanism of the First and Second Fertility Transition and their related factors. The paper also presents the demographic trends in terms of the age of women giving birth to their first child. The paper closes with placing South Korea on the cultural map of the world created by political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel which was based on the World Values Survey.

The second paper is based on the empirical research conducted among the students of the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea and presents the analysis of research results related to the importance of children in the family plans of young Koreans. The analysis of the research results shows that more men than women plan to have children in the future and, what is important, almost every third woman was undecided in this matter. The analysis of the empirical evidence shows that gender is the independent variable which has a statistically significant influence on the opinions of the respondents concerning future plans related to starting a family.

The last paper of the book presents a sociological aspect of empirical research pivoting around the impact of religious beliefs, such as Christianity, Protestantism, Buddhism, or of lack of faith in God – Atheism, on family planning in South Korea. The study was conducted in 2014 among the students of the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul. The respondents have declared their preferences for the type of relationship in which they intend to live upon establishing a family. They have also expressed their future plans related to marriage and children. The test results have shown that marriage is definitely the preferred form of family life. Slightly more than 70% of respondents also plan to have children in the future.

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