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Family living arrangements in young adulthood

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6 CONCLUSIONS

This book contains four complementing and interrelated empirical chapters, in which data from international population censuses (IPUMSi), the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), and the Harmonized Histories are analyzed to tackle three broad and general research objectives. It aimed to describe and examine young adults' family living arrangements:

- (1) *In multiple social contexts* (e.g., policy regimes, socio-economic circumstances, and normative climate);
- (2) *from the perspective of different social groups* (e.g., women vs. men; young birth cohorts vs. older birth cohorts; low level of education vs. high level of education); and
- (3) *by comparing and explaining differences in living arrangements across several European countries* – including Eastern Europe.

It investigated to what extent family living arrangements are a function of structural opportunities of the context, people's individual characteristics, and the modifying influence of the context people are living in which hamper or promote the prevalence of specific living arrangements. Under this broad umbrella, each chapter had its own focal point and addressed specific research questions.

Chapter 2 "*Living Arrangements of Young Adults in Europe*": How much diversity in living arrangements is observable across European

countries? How have the living arrangements of young adults changed between 1980 and 2000?

Chapter 3 *“Intergenerational Co-residence of Young Adults with their Parents across European Regions”*: To what extent do the individual characteristics (individual resources and preferences) and the regional context (i.e., housing market and sociocultural climate) explain regional differences in intergenerational co-residence across Europe? How does the regional context modify the relationship between resources and preferences and intergenerational co-residence?

Chapter 4 *“The Transition to Adulthood and Pathways Out of the Parental Home: A Cross-national Analysis”*: How do life course trajectories differ between educational groups and men and women? How do life course trajectories differ across countries? And how do the educational gradients for life course trajectories differ across Europe and over time?

Chapter 5 *“Differences in Leaving Home by Individual and Parental Education among Women in Europe”*: To what extent does the timing of young women’s leaving home – and the different pathways out of the parental home – vary by education and parental education in Europe? How do education and parental education interact with national context across Europe?

6.1 Summary of Research Findings

6.1.1 Diversity of Family Living Arrangements across Countries

The first research question of Chapter 2 addressed how much diversity in living arrangements is observable across European countries. We argued that in order to provide a detailed picture of how young adults live across European countries, family living arrangements must be carefully conceptualized and include a variety of extended family and non-family living arrangements. This is important, because as our findings indicate, there are considerable country differences in young

adults' family living arrangements and these differences mainly play out between extended and non-family living arrangements. We found that, net of demographic controls, (1) non-family arrangements (i.e., living alone or sharing with others) are significantly more common in Western European countries, whereas (2) extended family arrangements (i.e., living with parents, living as a couple with parents and/or extended family, and living as a couple with children and parents and/or extended family) are significantly more common in Southern and Eastern Europe. This pattern is generally compatible with longstanding, systemic variation in family forms and cultures that follows a North – South gradient (Hajnal 1965; Reher 1998) – we may even speak of a *North/ West – South/ East gradient*. Nonetheless, our results also show that Ireland and Austria are much more similar to Southern and Eastern Europe with respect to some extended family living arrangements and do not seem to fit easily into the theoretical classification.

A recurring result of this work is that countries are not that easily distinguishable from each other – at least along the line of classifications derived from theoretical perspectives. We do not claim that the exceptions we have found justify overturning these classifications – more observations like this would be needed – but that an understanding of the variations in family living arrangements across Europe also warrants to be cautious about country-specific circumstances (including the cultural, religious, socio-economic and policy context).

The second research question in Chapter 2 addressed how the living arrangements have changed between 1980 and 2000. We found that, while there was an overall decline in extended family living arrangements, living with parents increased especially in Southern and Eastern Europe during that period. Extended living arrangements are quite robust in (parts) of Eastern Europe. In Austria, Switzerland, and France, but neither in Ireland nor in Southern and Eastern Europe, there was an increase in non-family living arrangements. This is generally in

line with prior research (Billari and Liefbroer 2010; Fokkema and Liefbroer 2008; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008) and suggests that longer time spent in education, later labor-market entry, and postponement of relationship and family formation translates into *a different prevalence and divergence of family living arrangements across Europe*. In Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as in Ireland young adults have been staying longer with their parents, whereas their counterparts in Western and Northern Europe leave earlier and live alone at least for some time or share a flat with others before entering a married or unmarried cohabitation.

With respect to the *perspective of different social groups* Chapter 2 underscores differences in family living arrangements between men and women. Young women, in general, make transitions such as forming relationships and having a first child earlier than men. We confirmed previous analyses on the different age-structuring of life course events for young men and women (Billari and Liefbroer 2010; Fokkema and Liefbroer 2008; Iacovou and Skew 2011; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008) and highlighted that single young mothers in Eastern Europe particularly tend to live with parents and/or extended family and not alone. This raises the question of whether intergenerational co-residence is a strategy adopted to organize support, economic and otherwise, or if it is an expression of preferred living arrangements.

6.1.2 Differences in Intergenerational Co-residence across Regions

In Chapter 3, the first research question addressed to what extent young adults' individual characteristics (individual resources and preferences) and the regional context (i.e., housing market and sociocultural climate) explain regional differences in intergenerational co-residence across Europe. We hypothesized that variations in family living arrangements – and more specifically in intergenerational co-residence of young adults and their parents – within countries comes from a complex interplay of variables at different levels. We found that

the distribution of individual resources (i.e., income) and preferences of young adults across regions partly account for differences in intergenerational co-residence patterns and that composition effects are more important than regional context effects. These results indicate that individual preferences shape intergenerational co-residence across regions in Europe, even if educational and income-related composition of countries also play a role (Billari 2004). Differences in the regional sociocultural climate (i.e., familialistic norms) and socioeconomic context (i.e., housing-market conditions) matter in determining whether young adults across European regions live with their parents or not. This highlights that the regional context is relevant for understanding differences in intergenerational co-residence across Europe, even if country-level differences remain prominent (Billari 2004; Mulder et al. 2002).

The second research question in Chapter 3 addressed how the regional context modifies the relationship between resources and preferences and intergenerational co-residence. This kind of question lies at the heart of a methodological multilevel approach, where individual characteristics have different weights in different contexts. We found that both young adults' preferences and income have less relevance for determining intergenerational co-residence in more familialistic regions, where family arrangements are more standardized. A fair share of macro-micro studies has asked whether the impact of individual level characteristics (e.g., education, social class, gender) on transition events to adulthood varies by type of welfare regime (e.g., Aassve et al. 2002; Breen and Buchmann 2002). Our findings add to this literature and furthermore highlight that explanations solely focusing on individual level characteristics ignore the power of regional contextual backgrounds in influencing intergenerational co-residence. It seems indeed imperative to consider how regional and country contexts channel the impact of individual characteristics.

6.1.3 Diversity in Life Course Trajectories across Europe

The first research question in Chapter 4 addressed how life course trajectories differ between educational groups and between men and women. I identified seven different types of the transition to adulthood among young adults in eight Western and Eastern European countries. Each of these types is characterized by a combination of the four residential, partnership, parental and employment trajectories of interest. Even though the types are based on limited information that does not take into account reversibility, work–family pathways showed a great deal of variety captured by a 7-group typology.

The level of education is an important predictor of life course trajectories for both men and women – generally young adults with a higher education are more likely belong to life course trajectories with late labor market entry and independence and where cohabitation is included and marriage and childbearing are postponed. Specifically, for women a higher educational level not only delays life course transitions but also facilitates the experience of less traditional and standardized patterns, while more standardized patterns like leaving the parental home to marry and have children are less frequent. The higher the educational level, the less standardized the transition to adulthood. Specifically, for women a higher educational level not only delays life course transitions but also facilitates the experience of a variety of different life course trajectories (i.e., living as a single or cohabiting before marrying, childbearing outside of marriage). Young adults with low education, experience a faster entry into the labor market, an early exit from the parental home, and early family formation. Young women are more likely to follow family oriented trajectories and trajectories linked to inactivity. Compared to men, their transitions to adulthood are, overall, more diverse.

The second and third research questions in Chapter 4 addressed how life course trajectories differ across countries and how the educational gradient for life course trajectories differs across Europe and over time.

The residential, partnership, parental and employment trajectories among European young adults born between 1951 and 1978 (in eight countries) were analyzed, based on the order and timing of events. The more modern life course trajectories with a typical early exit from the parental home, longer time staying single and cohabitation being more common are generally more likely to occur in Western European countries (like France and the Netherlands, for example) than in Eastern European countries (like Bulgaria and Georgia, for example). The country, however, does not only directly shape the transition to adulthood but also differently affects the association between education and young adults' life course trajectories. The positive educational gradient of belonging to one of the more modern and clusters is stronger in Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

Thus, the transition to adulthood remains, on the one hand, marked by historical family systems: Tradition of early parental home departure in Northern Europe, of late parental home departure in Southern Europe, and of joint households in Eastern Europe. In addition to the influence of the institutional and normative setting, we confirmed the buffer effect of generous welfare regimes, which prevent the transition to adulthood from being too delayed during periods of economic stagnation or depression. The fact that the trajectories of the European countries globally come together along the lines of the classical welfare regime typology suggests that *institutions and policies still leave a clear mark on the different stages of the path towards adulthood* (Blossfeld et al. 2006).

The convergence observed for cohorts born after the end of the Second World War, especially for those who grew up in a favorable economic context, slowed largely afterwards. This convergence could be linked to the participation of women in the labor force, hence to the growing equality between women and men. The accelerated transitions to adulthood experienced by the cohorts born after the Second World War in all Europe (except in Southern European countries) can be seen

as a historical exception rather than the norm when compared with the slower and incomplete pathways of the oldest and youngest cohorts.

6.1.4 Diversity in Leaving the Parental Home across Europe

Chapter 5 highlights the salience of education and parental education for determining which pathways young women take from the parental home: To live without a partner vs. to live with a partner. We focussed on women only in this paper because of the increased take-up of higher education among women in recent decades across Europe, which makes a study of how structural conditions shape women's leaving home behavior (via different pathways) very interesting. The first research question in Chapter 5 addressed to what extent the timing of young women's leaving home –and the different pathways out of the parental home – varies by education and parental education in Europe. Overall, our results lend support to (1) a positive relation between both women's individual level of education and parental education on leaving home to live without a partner; as well as to (2) a negative relation between both women's and their parents' level of education and leaving home to live with a partner. Another finding – not unexpected – is that enrollment in education is positively related to leaving home to live without a partner but negatively related with leaving home to live with a partner across all 17 European countries. This is interesting insofar as that role incomparability seems to hold across various contexts.

The second research question of Chapter 5 addressed how education and parental education interact with national context across Europe. Again, there is evidence that both the educational gradient and the parental educational gradient vary among European countries. Because we used a rather broad indicator of macro level effects and cross-level interaction effects – with country dummies and interactions with education and parental education, respectively – we cannot strictly disentangle the influence of welfare regimes, national policies, housing markets and family systems on leaving home. The overall country

context, however, also proves to be important in determining which pathways (to live without a partner vs. to live with a partner) young women take from the parental home. In most of the Western European countries (but not in Belgium and Austria) as well as the Czech Republic and Hungary the highly educated have a higher risk of leaving to live without a partner than the less educated. In Sweden and Norway, but also in many Eastern European countries, the differences between women with high and low levels of education are not very strong. It seems that in countries where leaving home is easy – given a high level of social security, strong welfare state transfers, easy access to rented or owned housing, and social acceptability of leaving home via various pathways other than partnership formation – young women’s education may be less of a decisive determinant of leaving home to live without a partner. Irrespective of their education, young women have good chances to establish an independent household. Similarly, in countries where leaving home is very difficult – given a low level of social security, weak welfare state transfers, difficult access to rented or owned housing, and social unacceptability of leaving home via pathways other than partnership formation – young women’s education may be equally less of a decisive determinant of leaving home to live without a partner. Irrespective of their education, young women in these countries have poorer chances to establish an independent household. Less educated women are more likely to leave the parental home to live with a partner in many of the Northern, Western and Eastern European countries than in Southern Europe. In France, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Italy the link between education and leaving home to live with a partner is stronger.

With respect to parental education, in countries where leaving home is rather difficult and may also be risky in terms of social mobility and poverty – notably in many Eastern European countries – parental education is less of a push factor and young women with highly educated parents have a lowered risk of leaving home to live without a

partner. Quite unexpectedly this also seems to hold in Sweden and Norway, where the context is such that normative expectations favor priority of the individual over the family and place a high importance of young people's autonomy.

6.2 Main Conclusions

The studies presented here demonstrated the pivotal importance of a multilevel framework for explaining and understanding differences in young adults' family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood in Europe. Explanations that focus on either macro or micro factors and do not consider their possible interplay cannot fully account for observed variation in family living arrangements across European regions or countries. Chapter 3 made the most important case for cross-level interactions: the case where a regional characteristic (the socio-cultural climate) channels the impact of young adults' individual characteristics – in addition to a more direct influence. Chapters 4 and 5 underscored this finding, although the context measure was with a country dummy variable comparatively crude.

Individual characteristics also play a role. A key objective in this book was to describe and examine young adults' family living arrangements *from the perspective of different social groups*. There were, not unexpectedly, clear differences between men and women in the prevalence of family living arrangements (Chapter 2) but also in the sequencing of life course trajectories (Chapter 4). Cohort differences (Chapters 2 and 4) in the transition to adulthood and differences between educational groups in their leaving home behavior need to be mentioned here, too. Individual level characteristics include the family background and characteristics of young adults' parents (Chapter 5). Finally, values and preferences are also a driving force behind young adults' behavior (Chapter 2).

Another conclusion relates to the first research objective, which is that we need to pay attention to *multiple social contexts* (e.g., policy

regimes, socio-economic circumstances, and normative climate). Although it is plausible to think that all these factors play a role, the theoretical and empirical challenge lies in determining the *relative weight* of these determinants (Billari 2004). First, policy regimes, socio-economic circumstances, and normative climate are not necessarily independent from each other. As a matter of fact, policy arrangements are themselves a reflection of cultural values shaped by socio-economic and political contexts (Hantrais 1999). Second, disentangling the effects of different levels of context also means to strongly consider variability at an infra-national level. In Chapter 3 we could show that on a regional level both familialistic norms and housing-market conditions are directly related to intergenerational co-residence between young adults and their parents. However, we did not evidence that regional youth unemployment – which has been shown to be an important predictor of intergenerational co-residence (Chiuri and Del Boca 2007, 2010; Vitali 2010) – adds an explanation for cross-regional differences. This could be due to the level of regional aggregation, which may be too large to capture such effects.

The third research objective stressed the importance of including Eastern Europe in comparative research because it would complement our picture about family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood. European family constellations are often described in terms of a North – South gradient. The analyses in this book revealed that it could be more appropriate to think of differences in family patterns along a *North/West – South/East gradient*. Yet I hasten to add that this description, too, paints the variation in family living arrangements in Europe with a very broad brush. There are indeed many “outliers” like Ireland, Belgium, and Austria, but also Hungary, Lithuania, and Estonia (Chapters 2, 3, and 5) – countries that do not follow the specific family patterns as predicted by theories of welfare and policy regimes, or family and kinship systems. These kinds of overarching, big macro-theories necessarily make simplifying assumptions and generalizations

about broad regions within Europe, neglecting country specificities or the way in which different factors come together in a given country.

An important task of any comparative research is to *delimit the context* (Hantrais 1999). Intuitively, *country* seems to be an appropriate unit of analysis in a European research setting, because countries possess clearly defined geographical boundaries, institutional, socio-economic, and policy structures. They also relate closely both to available statistical data and to existing theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 explored the argument that *region* is an appropriate unit of analysis or context, as well – specifically if the demographic research tries to assess the role of culture in shaping family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood. The results lend some support to this idea and underscore previous findings (Aassve et al. 2013; Holdsworth 2000; Santarelli and Cottone 2009; Vitali 2010). However, the empirical results also highlight that *different explanatory variables operate at different levels* and that researchers are well-advised to determine the context level for each variable. A case in point, again, is the association between youth unemployment and intergenerational co-residence, for which we did not find evidence on the regional level. Prior studies on the transition to adulthood in Spain, however, suggest that this factor operates in a *local context* (e.g., municipalities) (Holdsworth 2000; Vitali 2010). While the selection of the most appropriate contexts ideally should be theory-driven, demographic theories do not always spell out at which level factors operate or exclude specific country contexts (e.g., Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime typology).

6.3 Reflection on Data

Two data sources are used in this book: Censuses and surveys – both of which have their strengths and limitations. Census data provide information about individual persons and households and offer superior data on family living arrangements, given their sample size and geographic coverage, but they also tend to measure fewer variables than cross-national surveys. Cross-national surveys are rich in individual

level data and often offer greater subject coverage and detail than census data, but until recently they also covered relatively few countries and in the case of Europe even fewer Eastern European countries. Furthermore, cross-national survey analyses that focus on macro-micro linkages are often constrained because macro level indicators are not comparable and not available for all countries. It is important to remember, however, that the sort of quantitative analyses represented in this book depend on high-quality data from multi-country collaborations, which only recently have become available to family demographers. The rapid development of new, high-quality cross-national data or “big micro data” – offering greater variation in contexts and additional time points – bodes well for future demographic analysis (Ruggles 2013).

6.3.1 IPUMSi

The population census data that were used in Chapter 2 come from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, international (IPUMSi) (Minnesota Population Center 2011). These census data are highly comparable, harmonized and easily accessible. Particularly when, as in this book, very different country contexts are involved the census data have to fulfill statistical quality criteria, namely measurement equivalence and accuracy. While the IPUMS data are without a doubt of a high quality, known limitations concern under-coverage of European countries, lack of information of multi-residence of young adults and its related measurement difficulties, and the use of relatively broad categories of family living arrangements. First, there are only census data for 13 European countries available from the IPUMSi data base and, additionally, in some cases censuses are only available for single years (e.g., Slovenia 2002 or Italy 2001) or persons are not organized into households (e.g., United Kingdom 1991 – 2001 or Netherlands 1960 – 2001). For the purposes of Chapter 2 this specifically meant that the pool of available countries was minimized. It also more generally suggests that IPUMSi data mainly support a *small-country-sample*

approach to European cross-national research, where the focus lies more strongly on comparisons of individual level results between countries rather than explicitly testing cross-national differences in socio-cultural norms, welfare regimes, and institutional and policy arrangements (Yu 2015).

Second, family living arrangements tend to be poorly reported or measured in censuses if family situations are ambiguous. For instance, young adults may spend a large part of the year in their own apartment or student housing, but they also may ‘visit’ their parents for long periods. In the US research context, this somewhat ambiguous family situation has theoretically been termed *semi-autonomy* (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1989), practically it corresponds to having multiple residences. Although in most countries, rules are applied in censuses to avoid the double-counting of individuals (e.g., by restricting the observation of individuals to their main dwelling), this does not automatically allow for an accurate description and measurement of family households. Third, IPUMSi data – but also more generally census data – still measure family households in a somewhat broad way. Because *the* family is being replaced by complex cross-household families that can include married or cohabiting opposite-sex or same-sex couples; single parents; biological, step-, half-, and unrelated siblings; and other related and unrelated individuals, the Minnesota Population Center has announced a re-calibration of the family interrelationship variables in order to increase comparability across different data projects and over time, and to include same-sex couples and other less common family types. This would allow future analysis to study even more diverse living arrangements of young adults.

6.3.2 GGS

The survey data that were used in Chapters 3 and 4 come from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) (Vikat et al. 2007). A major advantage of the GGS as compared to other international social surveys – for example, the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) and the

European Social Survey (ESS) – is the large size of its sample (with an average of 9,000 respondents per country at Wave 1), covering many European and particularly Eastern European countries, its detailed life event calendar relating to key life course transitions such as completing education, leaving the parental home, entering the labor market, and starting family formation among others, as well as detailed information not only on socio-demographic variables but also on health, social networks, values and attitudes (Vikat et al. 2007). Due to the huge sample and the fact that information is being collected for all household members, the GGS is a rich data source for researching and monitoring the lives of young Europeans both as a specific subgroup within the population, and in comparison, with other age groups.

From its inception, the GGS was designed as a panel study – collecting information on the same persons at three-year intervals – because many questions relating to people’s incomes, well-being and life-course trajectories can be answered better with longitudinal data (i.e., modeling change over time and addressing causality). The GGS Wave 1 was carried out in the period 2002-2012 and twelve countries have thus far conducted Wave 2 of the survey. While I could thus not use information from the different waves from the GGS for a dynamic analysis of young adults’ family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood, the detailed life course history calendar recorded in the questionnaire allowed reconstructing detailed life histories and establishing links between the timing of events in various domains of the life course. Using information on life histories gained from retrospective questions can be associated with problems like recall bias or incomplete information, which in turn may bias studies on the timing and sequencing of life course events. This type of bias was particularly relevant to Chapter 4 where I excluded the data from the German GGS from the analysis because of the poor re-interview rate and the unreliability of the partnership and fertility histories, and consequent underreporting of first births (Kreyenfeld et al. 2013; Ruckdeschel et al. 2016).

The GGS is in many ways a quasi-successor of the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS), albeit with fewer countries participating (19 countries in the GGS compared to 24 in the FFS) and an improved and extended multidisciplinary questionnaire, which is both retrospective (i.e., life course history calendar) and prospective (i.e., questions about respondents' intentions). The coordination of the GGS was performed through the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), but the responsibility for the implementation of the respective national GGS lies with the participating countries (and the respective statistical offices or national research institutes) themselves. This means that although data comparability was an imperative goal of the GGS (Vikat et al. 2007), the *publicly available harmonized* data files do exhibit some variation, for example, in whether or not some variables were collected at all and how variables were actually measured, due to the different survey implementation by the various national statistical institutions.

For the purposes of the analyses in this book – and depending of the scope of the chapters' research questions – the following GGS country specificities were notable: The Dutch GGS questionnaire – which follows more closely the initial FFS questionnaire (see <https://www.unece.org/pau/ffs/ffs.html>) – excludes most of the questions in section 11 on *Value Orientations and Attitudes*. The Italian GGS does not collect any information on the respondent's income (i.e., types of income received, number of payments, and net amount of payment) in section 8 on *Respondent's Activity and Income*. The Swedish GGS neither uses the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) classification nor a national statistical area classification to measure the *Region or Administrative Unit of Residence*, but collects information on population size of urban or rural areas. The public release files of the Hungarian GGS data do not include any information on the *Region or Administrative Unit of Residence* – only through direct communication with the Hungarian statistical office information on NUTS regions for the Hungarian GGS could be acquired. These GGS

country specificities generally limited the pool of relevant cross-sectional data.

Another limitation of the GGS lies in the data quality and it is important to note that these issues are not necessarily evident from the GGS supporting material (e.g., data documentation and technical papers) and online portal. This seems to be due to at least two reasons: First, the different national statistic institutions appear to be reluctant in publishing detailed information on response rates and the like – notable exceptions are Belgium and France where in-depth quality reports are available online; second, the GGS is a comparatively young population survey and researchers and GGS data users have only started to do more exhaustive explorations regarding data quality (Beaujouan 2013; Buber-Ennsner 2014; Kreyenfeld et al. 2013). At this stage, interested researchers need to be prepared to make explorations of their own and are also well-advised to seek information from other GGS users. The analyses in this book benefitted from insider knowledge (on uncommonly low response rates in some urban regions in the Russian GGS in Chapter 3) and expertise from more experienced GGS users (on panel attrition and low representativeness of the German GGS in Chapter 4), for example. A greater consistency and clarity in documentation about the available GGS data would immensely benefit data users and possibly boost the GGS' attractiveness as a data source for scientific research. Fokkema et al. (2016) published a methodological overview of the Wave 1 data as late as 2016, however, more transparent documentation is needed.

6.3.3 Harmonized Histories

The survey data that were used in Chapter 5 come from the Harmonized Histories (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010). The Harmonized Histories data file was created by an international panel of researchers in an effort to facilitate comparative research on life course histories. It builds heavily on European GGS data, but also includes, harmonizes, and standardizes childbearing, partnership and leaving home histories

with data from Spain (source: The Spanish Fertility Survey), the United Kingdom (source: The British Household Panel Survey) and the United States (source: The National Survey of Family Growth).

Because the focus clearly lies on the life course histories in this data set, the socio-demographic background variables are relatively few. However, the advantages of this data source generally are the information on additional European countries – although this information could ultimately not be used in this book apart from more descriptive analysis in Chapter 5 – and the standardization of the various life course histories. The latter considerably eased the necessary work – in terms of data cleaning – for Chapter 5. Producing a similar, harmonized file from the GGS data would have gone beyond the time frame of the research project. The technical manual of the Harmonized Histories incidentally also revealed that the (already cleaned and harmonized) public release files of the GGS may still contain some errors (see also for a general discussion of the validity of life course histories in the German GGS: Kreyenfeld et al. 2013; Perelli-Harris et al. 2010). Again, these shortcomings are probably put into perspective by the fact that the GGS is still in its early days and this may improve over time. It only reinforces that researcher should not blindly use any kind of data and that careful checks of variables are always necessary.

6.3.4 Alternative Data Sources

Despite the inclusion of several Eastern European countries – a major strength – the GGS was nonetheless limited in the total numbers of countries available for selection, preventing a more detailed examination of contextual effects using multilevel regression models. Socio-cultural effects that are theoretically independent could thus not be disentangled in the empirical analysis. This led me to consider the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey (EU-SILC) as an additional data source that could have been used for this book. The EU-SILC combines comprehensive cross-sectional and

longitudinal micro-level data on income, poverty, social exclusion, housing, labor, education, and health for currently 32 countries in Europe (i.e., all 27 member states of the enlarged EU as well as Croatia, Iceland, Turkey, Norway, and Switzerland). The targeted sample size is 135,000 and 101,500 households for the cross-sectional and longitudinal components, respectively (Eurostat n.d.).

Although there are good reasons for using the EU-SILC to monitor the lives of young people, it was ultimately not used as a data source for the analyses in this book. First, this is because the EU-SILC is output-harmonized. The different national statistical institutes collecting the EU-SILC data are not required to use harmonized questionnaires but may decide how specified indicators and variables are collected. Furthermore, national statistical institutes are free to determine sampling strategies for data collection purposes and may use a variety of different sources. Second, the EU-SILC is a general population survey and thus does not place particular emphasis on the life situation of the younger generation. In particular, it does not focus on life domains of special relevance for this population category, such as education and training, life course events, friends and family relationships and the like. Third, another downside of the EU-SILC is related to serious problems with non-response and panel attrition, which may have an impact on general data quality and representativeness of samples in select countries and thus limit its analytic potential – particularly with regard to analyzing young adults' transitions from the parental home in Eastern European countries (for an in-depth discussion see: Iacovou and Lynn 2013).

6.4 Reflection on Methodology

This book is a testimony to the value of different methodological approaches to cross-national research. As I have argued earlier, in order to fully capture the variation in young adults' family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood, both a static and dynamic perspective are necessary. The advantage of a *static* approach is to provide a

unique snapshot and an important insight into similarities and differences in transition experiences of young adults living in different historical, socio-economic and cultural contexts (Chapters 2 and 3). While it is true that a static approach cannot address causality, gained insights complement our knowledge about family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood, particularly if countries are studied that do not feature heavily in other comparative studies. The advantage of a *dynamic* approach is to capture the time-dependency of family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, it allows addressing the transition to adulthood in an event-based way (Chapter 5) or in a holistic way (Chapter 4).

Aside from static and dynamic, methodological and analytical approaches in this book can also be delineated by the number of countries used for cross-national comparison: *A small country approach vs. a large country approach* (Yu 2015). The small country approach was applied in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, which both analyzed eight different European countries. Typical of this approach are so-called *parallel analyses*, where the same regression models are run for a relatively small number of countries. A specific statistical test can then be used to test whether or not the regression coefficients for the different countries are statistically different. Because this method tells us nothing about why the countries are different (if the coefficients are found to be statistically different across countries), it was not applied in this book. I opted instead for a slight variation of it: *Pooled regressions with country dummies*. The assumption here is that the regression coefficients for the various individual level variables are the same in all countries. A series of country dummies is then added to test whether countries are statistically different – after controlling for country-specific differences in the composition of the population (as captured by the individual level variables). Strictly speaking, this method still does not tell us why the countries are different (if the dummies are found to be statistically significant). In fact, the onus is on the researcher to build and present a convincing case, why, for example,

the cultural, socio-economic or welfare context of a country could explain patterns of family living arrangements. Arguably, the macro-micro linkages are ultimately unmeasured and only inferred with this method, making it generally slightly inferior to *pooled regressions with macro level variables*. The latter strategy, on the first glance, seems to be applicable easily enough – after all it only requires the replacement of the country dummies by relevant macro level variables in order to see what characteristics of countries explain unique patterns of family living arrangements. However, such measures were not always available for all countries (and particularly some of the Eastern European countries) or all cohorts, and neither were measure always comparable across the countries – a prerequisite for any cross-national analysis irrespective of the number of studied countries. Given these encountered practical restrictions, pooled regressions with country dummies seem an acceptable solution, especially if research question are explanatory and descriptive in nature. In a similar vein, a small country approach reveals associations and details that a multilevel analysis of two dozen countries cannot.

The large country approach, conversely, was applied in Chapter 3 (although we notably used a large number of regions rather than countries) and Chapter 5. Typical of this approach are *multilevel analyses*, where a large number of regions or countries are pooled into one dataset and macro level variables are directly tested. A key objective in this book, indeed, was to conceptualize and analyze family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood in a multi-level framework. The advantage is that large-scale, multilevel analyses allow us pursuing cross-country differences systematically, detecting patterns at the individual and country levels, and exploring the macro-micro linkages (typically by identifying moderating effects). The practical application of a multilevel model critically depends on the number of higher level units (more than 20), so that correct statistical inferences can be drawn (Snijders and Bosker 2011). The GGS data and Harmonized Histories data only provide information on 17 European

countries, which poses a severe limitation for the actual empirical application of a multilevel framework. In Chapter 5 we applied a method that – similar to a multilevel model – attempts to identify the impact of certain policies’ or the social context’s moderating effects on the leaving home behavior of young women: *Country fixed effects models with cross-level interactions*. This method is also applicable with a small number of countries – similar to pooled regressions with country dummies, but with additional moderating effects of the country dummies – and avoids omitted variable bias through controlling for country level heterogeneity with country dummies. In many cases, this is a good alternative, because it enables the researcher to produce equally valid results as those from cross-level interactions in multilevel models and to control for *all* country level characteristics that may shape individuals’ outcomes (Möhring 2012).

6.5 Contribution to the Research Literature

An important merit of this book is that it investigates family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood from a comparative perspective. As such it reveals some new puzzle parts of the big picture of young adults’ family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood in Europe. The first part concerns the cross-national and cross-regional comparison between *Eastern and Western Europe*. By including many Eastern European countries in the different analyses in this book our understanding about how young adults live in this part of the continent has deepened. Comparative research on family living arrangements in much of Eastern Europe has been scarce so far. The second part concerns *macro-micro linkages*. The analyses in this book have highlighted that young adults make choices regarding their living arrangements and life course transitions and that their individual characteristics are important in capturing agency. But young adults’ life courses also unfold within regional and national opportunities and constraints. This was most clearly illustrated in the moderating influence of the regional socio-cultural climate on intergenerational co-

residence. The third part concerns the usefulness of a *multilevel framework within both a static and dynamic perspective* for comparative research on the transition to adulthood. The explicit illustration of the different types of cross-sectional and longitudinal data on different analytical levels, as well as the different methods used throughout this book offer a unique in-depth insight into this type of research.

This book has highlighted cross-national differences in family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood. In light of the wealth of available comparative data – irrespective of possible limitations – and the extensiveness of the topic, this book necessarily presents selected sub-topics and research questions. During my 4-year work on it, I also came across other interesting and unanswered questions. Some of them fall into the realm of achievable research projects – because the data and statistical tools to analyze them already exist – whereas other fall into the realm of imaginable research projects. The latter seem very interesting and scientifically rewarding, if only the right kind of data would exist to study them. This section briefly outlines three different avenues for future achievable and imaginable research projects on young adults' family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood from a demographic and comparative perspective in Europe.

6.5.1 Avenues for Future Research: Achievable Projects

First, our understanding of young adults' family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood can be significantly improved by focusing on young adults' *residential decision-making*. So far, this aspect remains something of a black box: While the demographic literature has emphasized the impact of various contextual and individual level variables on leaving home behavior, it has rarely addressed how much intentions (e.g., to leave the parental home) guide actual behavior (Ferrari et al. 2014). As a result, we do not know much about how young adults make the decision to leave the parental home and what

possibly makes them fail or succeed in realizing their intentions across Europe. Knowledge about residential decision-making can tell us something about young adults' agency in shaping their own life course trajectories and identify more clearly the structural obstacles young adults face. A unique feature of the GGS data is that they include a number of questions on young adults' intentions to leave the parental home in section 5 on *Parents and parental home*. Given the GGS' panel structure it is then possible to link the information on leaving home intentions with their realization in a subsequent wave. In line with the cross-national comparative perspective this book takes, future studies should try to examine cross-national differences in young adults' decision-making process to leave the parental home paying particular attention to the influence of policy regimes, socio-economic circumstances, and normative climate. Alternatively, future studies could try to capitalize on the fact that differences in leaving home intentions and behaviors may not only exist at the national level, but also at regional levels within a country (e.g., Aassve et al. 2013); or that differences in leaving home intentions and behaviors may exist across subsequent cohorts. By either including the regional level or addressing within-country changes across subsequent cohorts, the variation at supra-individual levels of analysis would be increased – an important consideration, given that at this time only twelve countries have conducted two waves of the GGS.

Second, our understanding of young adults' family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood can be significantly improved by focusing on *migrants and the life course dynamics in migrant families*. This suggestion for future research ties in with a key objective of this book: To examine family living arrangements between different social groups. As growing shares of young adults in European countries have migrant origins, researchers have paid increasing attention to their transition to adulthood (e.g., Bernhardt et al. 2007; Kleinepiper et al. 2015). But studying migrants' family living arrangements is not only warranted because we know relatively little about how the transition to

adulthood unfolds for this population subgroup across European countries – at least two additional aspects are noteworthy: First, gauging the relative importance of cultural factors at the individual or family level. It has often been suggested that the strength of family ties and general patterns of the transition to adulthood vary across cultures and that cultural values shape young adults' family living arrangements decisions (e.g., Hajnal 1965; Reher 1998; Zorlu and Mulder 2011). Future research should further focus on a cultural interpretation of differences in young migrants' transition to adulthood relative to that of native young adults; second, comparing and contrasting the relative importance of cultural factors at the individual or family level across European countries. An interesting theme to pursue is, to study whether or not similar migrant groups replicate a specific pattern in the transition to adulthood across different European policy and welfare contexts. Again, the GGS data are readily available to study the family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood of young adults of migrant origin in Europe: Their particular advantage are the large national sample sizes and comparable measures, which are necessary to study smaller population subgroups such as migrants. They also are able to capture a sufficiently large number of life-events (like leaving the parental home) for statistical analyses.

Third, our understanding of young adults' family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood can be significantly improved by focusing on *the role of family and personal networks* as factors shaping young adults' behavior. The concept of "linked lives" (Elder 1994) from the life course literature is useful here. It emphasizes that the opportunities and constraints faced by individuals are shaped by the needs and resources of family members whose lives run close to their own. Young adults are affected by what happens to others, and when making decisions (e.g., to leave the parental home) they consider the consequences there might be for others. It is also important to recognize that a specific country context vis-à-vis welfare and social policies may reinforce interdependencies among family members. In

future projects interdependencies in the life courses of household and multiple family members (partners, parents and children, and also grandparents and grandchildren) should be examined. A major innovation of the GGS lies in its focus on the impact of intergenerational relations on demographic behavior. It is the only available survey with information on normative expectations of social network members. Thus, another unique feature of the GGS is that it allows assessing the influence of parents, children, friends, and relatives on decisions such as leaving home, entering the labor market, starting to live with a partner, and having children.

6.5.2 Avenues for Future Research: Imaginable Projects

The life-course perspective acknowledges *transition reversals*, such as the phenomenon of young adults returning to live with their parents – after having previously moved out and established an independent household (Shanahan 2000). This research topic has garnered some scholarly interest among North American and Western European researchers (Biggart and Walther 2006; Choi 2003; Da Vanzo and Goldscheider 1990; Lei and South 2016; Mitchell et al. 2004; Mulder and Clark 2002; Sandberg-Thoma et al. 2015; Smits et al. 2010; Stone et al. 2014) and is derived from theoretical underpinnings emphasizing the transition to adulthood as a process of gradually gaining autonomy (e.g., Arnett 2000). In this process, young adults, with the participation of their parents, develop new forms of living arrangements, such as living at home with occasional residence elsewhere, or living elsewhere with regular visits to parents. Young adults may also return home – “boomeranging” – after the end, or interruption, of the first autonomous living arrangements (Mitchell et al. 2004). While several conceptual approaches have been used to study returning to the parental home in a North American and West European context – among them socio-structural and socio-psychological approaches – systemic comparative approaches are rare. Consequently, cross-national research on young adults’ returning to the parental home in

Europe has been proposed as an avenue for future demographic research (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011).

Its implementation, however, crucially hinges on either longitudinal data recording the exact dates of several moves from and back to the parental home or a compilation of register data for a large number of European countries. The first kind of data is presently not available in any of the large-scale European longitudinal surveys (i.e., GGS or ESS). The second kind of data would have to be compiled in one data set from available register data for (a small number of) different European countries (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands). The gains of a comparative study of young adults' returning home lie, for instance, in disentangling the different life course trajectories leading to intergenerational co-residence. The latter may be due to young adults having not yet (or indeed having never) left the parental home; young adults having returned to the parental home; or the parent(s) having moved back in with their adult children. Each of these trajectories, in turn, may be due to specific and even contradictory determinants across European countries (e.g., Choi 2003). Furthermore, exploring interdependencies of returning home with other demographic behavior (e.g., family formation) provides insight into the unique demographic, economic and sociological implications of intergenerational co-residence across European countries.

More stringent tests of the effect of welfare and policy regimes, socio-economic circumstances, and normative climate, possibly disentangling the relative contribution of cultural vs. structural macro level variables, would also considerably enhance our understanding of the transition to adulthood in Europe. A non-negligible challenge for such future studies lies in finding, compiling or producing comparable and harmonized contextual data for a large number of – if not all – European countries. Although contextual data bases exist (e.g., the Contextual Database of the Generations and Gender Programme), some macro level measures may be incomplete (i.e., with regard to countries or years covered) or

not comparable for all countries of interest. Future studies may not only be challenged by data availability but also by theory availability. A case in point for the relative absence of macro-theorizing is the welfare state typology proposed by Esping-Andersen (1990). It has been widely used as an analytical framework to derive hypotheses from, but is limited to Western and Southern Europe. If we want to examine whether cross-national differences in young adults' family living arrangements across Europe are because of culture or structure, family demographers need more comprehensive data and theories. The ideal next step is to have a community of researchers who work on contextual data, with comparisons across time and societies, and theory advancement. However, I add a note of caution: The *small-N-problem* (Mills et al. 2006) is apt to remain a methodological problem despite concerted efforts by the demographic research community to develop and enlarge contextual databases. Even with available data for more than 20 or 30 European countries, the number of degrees of freedom at the country level would be still very small and the problems associated with comparative research (e.g., insufficient country-level controls, influential cases, and measurement incomparability) will not be fully resolved (Yu 2015). Nonetheless, a collaborative, coordinated approach to enlarge comparative contextual European data and to advance macro-theorizing (particular with respect to including Eastern Europe) can provide a broader foundation for comparative research on the transition to adulthood across Europe.

The *long-term impact of "period shocks" like the economic crisis* in 2008 looms large as a topic of family demographic studies. Media, politicians and researchers alike have paid much attention to how young adults were affected by unemployment as a consequence of the crisis in the short-run. The interest of media and politicians is understandable given the scope of the economic crisis, for researchers there is the additional possibility of conducting a natural experiment to capture the impact of profound economic changes on the transition to adulthood. More recent demographic studies suggest that the economic crisis has –

already in the short-term – left an imprint on fertility patterns and on patterns of intergenerational co-residence, for example (e.g., Davis et al. 2016; Goldstein et al. 2013; Lennartz et al. 2016; Sobotka et al. 2011; South and Lei 2015). In the long-run – and with subsequent future waves of longitudinal survey data (e.g., the GGS) – family demographers will be able to assess how the economic crisis has altered the lives of young adults and their families. They will be able to address questions like “Has the economic crisis led to a delay in leaving home across Europe” and “What does this delay mean for young adults’ family life courses?”.

6.6 Relevance of this Book for Policy Makers

Why are young adults’ family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood of interest for policy makers? This is the question I had to answer separately for each chapter and it is also a question most demographers have to think of when communicating their research results. This is because demographic research today focuses not only on knowledge gain but to a large degree on the production of research evidence with societal relevance. Unlike other demographic topics – think of childlessness or population ageing, for instance – the nexus between research on the transition to adulthood and social policy is not self-evident.

There are three arguments to be made about how comparative research on young adults’ family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood in this book bears policy implications. First, while the consequences of the transition to adulthood were not specifically analyzed, it is clear that the different transitions (i.e., residential, school, employment, partnership, and parental) of young adults are interconnected. For example, obstacles to leaving home are likely to lead to postponement of co-residential union formation and subsequent childbearing. Gaining new insights into when young adults leave the parental home and how and with whom they live afterwards thus helps us to – at least indirectly – gauge impact in other life

domains which then in turn relate to social policy. Second, cross-national comparisons have demonstrated that variation in family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood cannot be understood without looking beyond the individual. By identifying the critical conditions that promote or hinder the realization of specific family living arrangements, cross-national comparisons can inform policies to advance young adults' abilities to freely choose when they leave the parental household and with whom they live. Third, knowledge about young adults' family living arrangements has potential benefits for housing policy. For example, with whom young adults live after leaving the parental home (alone vs. with a partner) bears implications for the need for new social housing, particularly for the types of social housing (e.g., single-family housing vs. apartments). In addition, if access to already existing social housing is difficult, housing policies could counteract a delay in leaving home by facilitating and subsidizing access of young people to rented dwellings.

A basis for implementing various social and housing policies across Europe can only be grounded on scientific knowledge – to provide relevant information to policy-makers and to set the right tone for discussions related to young adults' family living arrangements and the transition to adulthood.

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