

Young adults *doing* family

This issue of the UP2YOUTH newsletter is a monothematic one dealing with young people's *transitions into parenthood*. It presents preliminary findings of the thematic working group concerned with young parenthood within the framework of UP2YOUTH. Correspondingly, the next issues will deal with the other two topics: transitions to work of ethnic minority youth (newsletter 5) and youth participation (newsletter 6). The three topics represent areas of social change with regard to youth and the transition to adulthood. According to the overall objective of UP2YOUTH, they centre around the question to what extent this change results from young people's agency and what young people need to act in ways which contribute both to social integration and subjectively meaningful biographies.

The thematic working group on young parenthood involved teams from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK. The working process consisted in the production of country reports, exchange with practitioners, policy makers and researchers during two thematic workshops and has been backed by a theoretical debate on the meaning and implications of an agency-related perspective on youth and social change (see *interim paper* for download from www.up2youth.org/downloads). This process is documented in a thematic report which synthesises available research findings while also pointing to existing research gaps. It will be available for download by end of the year from www.up2youth.org/downloads)

Theoretical framing: agency in transitions to parenthood

Within UP2YOUTH young people's agency is understood as the dialectic interplay between context conditions and individual strategies. Public discourses most often are dominated by economic perspectives according to which decisions related to family foundation are one-dimensionally explained by opportunity cost models. However, such approaches seem too narrow to encompass the complexity of transitions into parenthood, especially as they neglect some key dimensions:

- a *temporal dimension* of this agentic process across past, present, and future: the *past* intervenes by the grown socio-economic and institutional structures in which family building is embedded but also by existing models, traditions and normalities of family and parental roles; *prospective components* (future) result from the life plans young women and men develop, the gender roles they find in correspondence with their identities, the ways in which they conceptualise intimate relationships, and the pictures they imagine from themselves in the nearer or farer future. Past and future meet in the subjective evaluation of present problems and problem-solving strategies. Structure and agency are interrelated across past, present and future.
- Social change implies that young people's agency with is constantly challenged due to

both changing demands connected to parenthood and increasingly individualised and pluralised trajectories into parenthood. Thereby, *learning* comes into the focus as a demand and a strategy. Learning new practices of family building and parenting is a prerequisite for adapting own agency to new situations. This may imply to abandon (or even to 'unlearn') previously learned roles and practices if specific situations force young mother and fathers to come to new solutions. Such learning processes are necessarily social inasmuch as they result from negotiation between the partners and/or within the social network; and they are creative inasmuch as they coincide with experimental action.

- Agency is framed by *culture* and is 'doing' culture at the same time; culture meant as a non-essentialist concept for the meaning of practice as it evolves both individually and collectively from shared (or contested) values, principles and norms. The latter represent the repertoire from which individuals construct meaning and frame their specific forms of practice. Relating agency to cultural change implies that practices and meanings change and that established forms of family building and parenting coexist and compete with new ones. To put it more concretely: The context of an intimate relationship which allows young parents to opt for a partnership with equal rights and shared responsibilities are often counteracted by unfavourable working place conditions. According to empirical data young people invest a lot of energy into the reconciliation of different contexts and memberships – in presenting a balanced family model to employers or colleagues, to peers within youth cultural scenes etc. Apparently, young parents' agency is torn between old and new gendered imageries of motherhood and fatherhood.

These theoretical approaches help to understand both the dynamics which intervene in decisions and strategies of becoming and the dynamics emerging from young parents' agency. The underlying analytical perspective corresponds to Giddens' concept of structuration: How do young women and men re-structure or change existing

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European policy developments

First EU Roma Summit

The commission has called for joint efforts by the EU and its member countries to bring Roma into mainstream society. It is urging national governments to step up efforts to help Roma access schools, housing, jobs and health services.

EU-Resolution on the participation of young people with fewer opportunities

The permanent representatives committee within the European Council has drafted a resolution inviting the member states to strengthen efforts regarding the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in education, employment and society. Recommendations include tailored support and anti-discrimination measures.
Download from: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st09/st09133.en08.pdf>

Renewed Social Agenda

The Commission has launched a renewed social agenda which is expected to adapt European Social Policy to current changes such as immigration, demographic, technological and climate change. Download from: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=547&langId=en>.

Migrant children and education

The Commission has published a Green Paper on the challenges and opportunities for EU education systems. The aim is to promote equity and to prevent segregation in education. The Green Paper is supported by a background report produced by the European Forum on Migration Studies of the University of Bamberg. Both documents can be downloaded from http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news490_en.htm

patterns of transitions into parenthood and create new social structures? A related policy perspective may ask for public spaces in which life politics can be negotiated and different ways of doing parenthood, of doing family and of doing gender are being acknowledged.

Before the backdrop of such an agentic perspective towards young parenthood, issues to be further explored are decision-making processes (including postponement or renouncing to parenthood) and strategies of coping with the everyday life of young parenthood.

Decision-making-processes

Decision-making regarding family foundation is a multifaceted process, which can not be reduced to individual factors, neither in terms of preferences of individual agents nor in terms of contextual factors. There is no single policy which can be made responsible for higher or lower fertility rates – neither children allowances, nor parental leave options, nor child care facilities alone are decisive. The highest explanatory potential results from clusters of context variables such as the concept of “emancipatory policies” which includes labour market conditions, taxation and child care facilities for children from one year of age.

While decision-making for young parenthood for a long time has been reduced to a female issue, increasing research attention is being paid to family orientations of young men. Only recently research has started to take into account that decision-making for young parenthood is an *interactive negotiation process* between partners. Decision-making includes also the *postponement* of family building – and a growing *mismatch between wanted and born children*: Across Europe family researchers point out that although young people desire to have children in the future, the factual decision to create a family is tied to so many social and personal conditions and barriers that the rift between wishes and reality increases.

Coping with first parenthood

In-depth-research on the diversification of motherhood and fatherhood has analysed young women’s and men’s every day practices in their transitions to parenthood. These practices reflect a variety of disadvantageous conditions, yet varying from country to country. While there are various ways to shape one’s transition into parent-

hood, all these options are full of ambivalences. This requires processes of *negotiation* – not only between partners, but also between generations and between the young parents and their employers. De-gendering efforts and en-gendering effects go hand in hand, especially as far as (un)favourable conditions for the reconciliation of family and work life are concerned. A broad range of literature research witnesses phenomena of re-traditionalization of household and care obligations after the birth of a child. Obviously, different labour market situations play a major role. Cross-national time budget studies show that women – gainfully employed or not – continue to spend (much) more hours in domestic and care work than men. However, decision-making and negotiation processes between partners have to be taken into consideration. Without insight in such processes such constellations of work-share can not simply be referred to as “traditional”. Young parents’ decisions and strategies imply considerable informal learning and informal policy making. Yet, due to the still existing divide between so-called private and so-called public discourses – a divide which is reflected by the solutions young parents find on an informal level – these processes remain hidden.

Findings and further research questions

In the following we will present a selection of preliminary findings of the thematic working group on young parenthood as well as the research gaps which have been identified.

1) School-to-work-transitions:

Young people’s transitions to parenthood are affected by the risks inherent to their transitions from education to the labour market. This does not only account for the low educated but also for the higher educated ones; and not only in Southern and Eastern European countries but in Northern and Western Europe as well. Yet, the flexibilisation of the relation between education and the labour market in knowledge-based societies affects young people in an uneven way. The “yoyo-isation” of young people’s life courses makes planning children a hazardous affair. This has become most visible with regard to higher educated women and couples with careers that imply geographical mobility.

Further research is needed to explore the simultaneity of different transitions and trajectories and the contradictory demands arising from their interrelatedness in a comparative perspective. This has to include qualitative and possibly longitudinal approaches which allow for the reconstruction of decision-making processes of individuals and couples, situated within multifaceted contexts. It also has to include issues such as biographical time management, strategies of coping with the paradox of life planning being necessary but impossible, as well as the conditions and practices of dual-career and highly mobile couples or of young parents in particular conflict situations, e.g. with a disabled child.

What should our schools be like in the 21st Century?

The Commission has published a communication aimed at improving school education by European cooperation in order to reach the aims of the Lisbon Strategy. The communication represents also a proposal to re-balance the relation between European and member state competencies. Download: http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news492_en.htm

Life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors

The Council of Europe has released a recommendation and an explanatory memorandum aimed at improving the capacities of member states to manage migration of unaccompanied migrant children. It underlines the importance of co-operation between all the countries involved and co-ordination by the relevant authorities.

Youth and social research news

New Call in FP 7 for Socio-economic sciences and Humanities

The call invites for proposals for small and medium-size research projects. The closing date is 13 January 2009. Materials and information can be downloaded from http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP7DetailsCallPage&call_id=152

Youth research projects in FP 7

In the first call of the Socio-economic sciences and Humanities 5 projects have been selected:

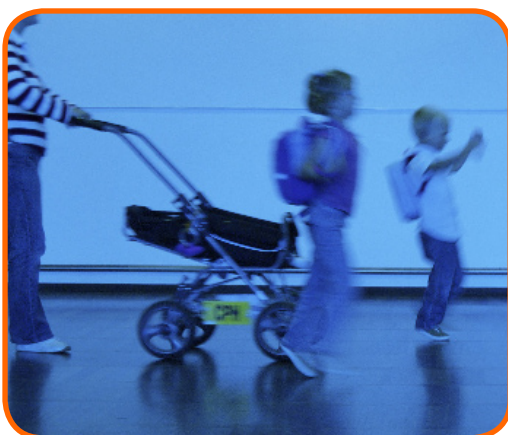
EUMARGINS Social inclusion/exclusion among young adults with immigrant background in urban-metropolitan areas (<http://www.iss.uio.no/forskning/prosjekter/eumargins/index-eng.html>).

YIPPEE - young people from a public care background: pathways to education in Europe (<http://tcr.uio.ac.uk/yippe/>).

CSEYHP - Combating social exclusion among young homeless populations (http://www.movisie.nl/118836/def/home/projecten/homeless_youth/).

YOUNEX - Youth, unemployment, and exclusion in Europe: A multidimensional approach to understanding the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed (<http://www.younex.unige.ch/index.html>).

EDUMIGROM - Ethnic differences in education and diverging prospects for urban youth in an enlarged Europe (<http://www.edumigrom.eu/>).



2) Discrepancy between desired and realised children:

In most of the countries involved and across all educational levels in the recent decades an increasing discrepancy between the number of children young people desire and the number of children they actually get is observed. This discrepancy exists with regard to both under-attainers and over-attainers compared to the size of family held as ideal. Yet, the group of those with less children than desired is much larger. There are many reasons for this discrepancy but three are of special interest: unresponsive labour markets, a lack of child care facilities, a lack of gender equity in general.

More information needs to be gained, especially through in-depth qualitative research, on the dynamics of processes of postponing or renouncing to the wish of family foundation. Such research needs to include the interactive dimension of decision-making among partners. It also has to include the relation between the life (and family) plans and the partner-seeking strategies of young women and men.

3) Problems in reconciling work and family:

Across the different contexts involved in the research, the combination of childcare and family tasks with gainful employment implies severe drawbacks for both partners, but especially for young women. Nevertheless, it can be observed that in all countries gender relations have undergone considerable changes: child care of the children is no longer regarded as the sole responsibility of women; "new fatherhood" has become part of public gender discourses although this is not reflected to the same extent by everyday practices and even less by policies. Here, considerable cross-national differences exist. Men seem to be less prepared and under less "gender pressure" to engage actively in fatherhood in Southern and Eastern than in Northern and Western European countries. *Future studies* may investigate the (de-)gendering strategies of first-time parents in struggling with or adapting to the latent re-traditionalization of gender roles after the birth of their first child. Lack of opportunities and public acknowledgement to live gender equality in the professional sphere as well as family work imply that young men and women are constantly (re-)inventing motherhood(s) and fatherhood(s). Research into such inventions and negotiations needs to take also the individual strategies to reconcile different and conflictuous gendered expectations and demands towards young women and men into account.

4) Intergenerational relationships:

Young people's becoming and being parents is embedded within intergenerational relationships. Instead of getting looser, apparently the generations get bound closer to each other in post-industrial societies; yet not always voluntarily. Especially in countries with little state support, the parent generation must and will help in terms of providing housing, child care for their grandchildren and emotional and financial support in times of stress. The reconciliation of parenthood and employment would be

simply impossible for most young people without the resource of intergenerational support. *More research* is needed to understand the prerequisites and dynamics of new intergenerational agreements such as case studies on "intergenerational solutions" regarding child care, financial support and, above all, housing in the different countries. In this regard, research on young parenthood needs to be linked with research into changed processes of ageing without neglecting the dimension of gender.

5) Risks of disadvantaged young people:

There is a significant similarity across different contexts as regards the groups of young people who do not achieve sufficient qualifications, who find themselves in low-paid jobs or face unemployment whereby family building and parenthood are structured by precarious living conditions: young single mothers (to a lesser degree fathers), young parents from ethnic minorities or with a migrant background (although not all migrant groups to the same extent), young parents without or with only low qualifications, young parents with health problems. In as much as the factors involved accumulate, social vulnerability grows. All these different constellations of disadvantage are underpinned by specific cultural ascriptions which are often disregarded in research and policy intervention but covered under a blanket of prejudices and stereotype images (ascriptions concerning the Roma for getting many children in order to live on benefits are the most drastic example).

Further research is needed on the strategies of young families of coping with poverty, housing problems, and social exclusion across different countries and regions.

6) Migration and transnationalism:

Many young parents from Eastern European countries work in Western countries. Often they have to leave their children in their home country with their kin, seeing them only a couple of times a year. Also many refugees have left their families behind. For many young people globalization and transmigration is rigidly defining their option spaces for their transitions into parenthood.

More information is needed on young men's and women's transitions to family and parenthood



New International Network of Youth Researchers

The International Network of Youth Researchers (INJR) brings together youth researchers from Asia, Australia, Europe, Latin America and North America. Information will be spread through an own platform inside the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Politics (KCYP). INJR is coordinated by UP2YOUTH member Dr. René Bendit (Munich; ReneBendit@aol.com).

Reconciling work and welfare in Europe

The network Reconciling work and welfare in Europe (RECOWOWE) has the aim to overcome the fragmentation of existing research on questions of work and welfare, as well as developing strategies for managing or resolving them. The 4th RECOWOWE newsletter has been issued and can be downloaded from: <http://recwowe.vitamib.com/publication-centre/newsletters/recwowe-newsletters>. Reports and deliverables are available at: <http://recwowe.vitamib.com/papers-deliverables>

Third Congress on Family Science

Powerpoint presentations of most contributions of the conference at the University of Vienna are now available for download from <http://www.family-science.eu>.

Forthcoming events

4th Conference Young People & Societies in Europe and around the Mediterranean

26-28th March 2009 at Forlì (Italy), <http://www.giovaniesocieta.unibo.it>

Generations in flux

23-24th October at Helsinki (Finland). 'Generations in flux' is an International interdisciplinary conference on ethnicity, integration and family ties. More info: http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/sivu.php?artikkeli_id=685

Youth and Youth Sociology in Europe

8-11th January at Tallinn (Estonia). Midterm conference of the Research Network 'Youth and Generation' (RN30). More info: <http://www.youth-handgeneration.org/>

Health and well-being of young people in Europe

8-11 November 2008, Marly-le-Roi
See: http://www.youth-partnership.net/youth-partnership/news/news_52.html

women's transitions to family and parenthood under conditions of migration and belonging to an ethnic minority. This includes issues such as "arranged marriages", transcultural "marriage-markets" as well as processes of "ethnicization" linked to family building, especially in some Eastern European contexts.

7) Imagery of gender and parenthood:

A large and hardly exploited research field is the imagery of gender in relation to parenthood. Media images do certainly impact on the wishes and fears of young men and women on the threshold of becoming parents; national family policies have started promoting progressive images of active fatherhood and women engaging equally in their career as well as in perfect motherhood. *Further research* should explore the effects of media imagery on motherhood and fatherhood, and how it enters their decision-making processes.

8) Learning parenthood:

With changing demands and constellations of parenthood the question of learning parenthood becomes increasingly prominent. Debates are carried out how young parents can be better prepared for parenthood, yet these debates only peripherally are connected to discourses on lifelong learning in knowledge-based societies and the need of new links between formal, non-formal and informal modes of learning. The analysis identified various issues of learning in relation to coping with young parenthood: learning to negotiate new gender relations, semi- and self-professionalization in matters of healthy upbringing of children, learning to fight for one's rights and interests as young parents on the work floor, learning to create and use local networks as a resource.

Future studies may investigate where young people actually learn being a parent: Are public or private courses available and are they used by young parents? To what extent do young parents learn informally - and if so where, how and from whom? What kind of "family" or "parental education" would be appropriate for young mothers and fathers? And: What learning processes do young mothers / fathers identify when reconstructing their transition into first parenthood?

9) Family policies:

It is evident that the European Commission, although formally not entitled to interfere, is pressing the member states towards providing sufficient child care facilities in order to enable women to combine work and family. The aim is to encourage them to become (young) mothers while also young men and fathers get more attention. There are considerable differences between countries as regards family laws, support systems and the realisation of European benchmarks. While there are "good examples" in all countries, a long list of suggestions is still left over to make the transition to and the state of parenthood more amenable for young adults. *More information* is needed on the prerequisites and the effects of new welfare mixes between state, market, and third sector and how especially the economic sector can be encouraged to take a more active role.

The factual scope of action of young parents in contemporary European societies is certainly not in harmony with claims of participation which are so dominant in European as well as national discourses. In no country young parents feel sufficiently supported by the state and the public at large. Most important issues are the quality and affordability of child care, time policies (i.e. the relation between schedules of work, education and child care), financial resources and housing problems. All in all, what is painfully missing is an *integrated transition policy* for young people on their way to become and being parents – a concept developed by the EGRIS-group in previous EU projects (see www.iris-egris.de).

Considering young people as actors of social change represents an important qualitative turning point for policy making. Although a sound basis of social security is indispensable for young people's coping with the new demands of parenthood, it is much more difficult to find the silver bottoms for empowering their agency. In late modern societies, policies risk to fail if they disregard the coping strategies young parents develop themselves. In this regard a capabilities approach (Amartya Sen) is needed which balances access to resources and opportunities with flexible spaces in which individual forms of parenthood can be lived and practised.

Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe

17th October, Brussels. See <http://www.jobmob-and-familives.eu/>

New Publications

Bendit, René & Hahn-Bleibtreu, Marina (2008): Youth Transitions. Processes of social inclusion and patterns of vulnerability in a globalised world. Barbara Budrich publishers. Leverkusen & Farmington Hills

Council of Europe (2008) „Have your say!“ Manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. Strasbourg: Council of Europe (<http://book.coe.int>)

DJI (German Youth Institute) (2008): Youth in Europe. DJI-Bulletin, English Edition (http://www.dji.de/bulletin/e_bull_e/bull2008_e/DJIB_2008.pdf)

Leccardi, Carmen (2008): New biographies in the risk society? About future and planning, in *Twenty-First Century Society: Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, pp. 119-129.

Spannring, Reingard; Ogris, Günther & Gaiser, Wolfgang (eds.) (2008): Youth and Political Participation in Europe. Results of the Comparative Study EUYOPART. Barbara Budrich publishers. Leverkusen & Farmington Hills

Williamson, Howard (2008): Supporting young people in Europe. Strasbourg: Council of Europe (<http://book.coe.int>)

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